Expositions of Holy Scripture Ezekiel Daniel and the Minor Prophets and Matthew chapter 1 to 8

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

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EZEKIEL, DANIEL, AND THE MINOR PROPHETS

ST. MATTHEW

CHAPTERS I to VIII

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EZEKIEL, DANIEL, AND THE MINOR PROPHETS

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THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

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CHAMBERS OF IMAGERY

Then said He unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of

the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his

imagery!'--EZEKIEL viii. 12.

This is part of a vision which came to the prophet in his captivity. He

is carried away in imagination from his home amongst the exiles in the

East to the Temple of Jerusalem. There he sees in one dreadful series

representations of all the forms of idolatry to which the handful that

were left in the land were cleaving. There meets him on the threshold

of the court the image of jealousy,' the generalised expression for the

aggregate of idolatries which had stirred the anger of the divine

husband of the nation. Then he sees within the Temple three groups

representing the idolatries of three different lands. First, those with

whom my text is concerned, who, in some underground room, vaulted and

windowless, were bowing down before painted animal forms upon the

walls. Probably they were the representatives of Egyptian worship, for

the description of their temple might have been taken out of any book

of travels in Egypt in the present day. It is only an ideal picture

that is represented to Ezekiel, and not a real fact. It is not at all

probable that all these various forms of idolatry were found at any

time within the Temple itself. And the whole cast of the vision

suggests that it is an ideal picture, and not reality, with which we

have to do. Hence the number of these idolaters was seventy--the

successors of the seventy whom Moses led up to Sinai to see the God of

Israel! And now here they are grovelling before brute forms painted on

the walls in a hole in the dark. Their leader bears a name which might

have startled them in their apostasy, and choked their prayers in their

throats, for Jaazan-iah means the Lord hears.' Each man has a censer in

his hand--self-consecrated priests of self-chosen deities. Shrouded in

obscurity, they pleased themselves with the ancient lie, The Lord sees

not; He hath forsaken the earth.' And then, into that Sanhedrim of

apostates there comes, all unknown to them, the light of God's

presence; and the eye of the prophet marks their evil.

I have nothing to do here with the other groups which Ezekiel saw in

his vision. The next set were the representatives of the women of

Israel, who, false at once to their womanhood and to their God, were

taking part in the nameless obscenities and abominations of the worship

of the Syrian Adonis. And the next, who from their numbers seem to be

intended to stand for the representatives of the priesthood, as the

former were of the whole people, represent the worshippers who had

fallen under the fascinations of a widespread Eastern idolatry, and

with their backs to the house of the Lord were bowing before the rising

sun.

All these false faiths got on very well together. Their worshippers had

no quarrel with each other. Polytheism, by its very nature and the

necessity of its being, is tolerant. All its rabble of gods have a

mutual understanding, and are banded together against the only One that

says, Thou shalt have none other gods beside Me.'

But now, I take this vision in a meaning which the prophet had no

intention to put on it. I do not often do that with my texts, and when

I do I like to confess frankly that I am doing it. So I take the words

now as a kind of symbol which may help to put into a picturesque and

more striking form some very familiar and homely truths. Look at that

dark-painted chamber that we have all of us got in our hearts; at the

idolatries that go on there, and at the flashing of the sudden light of

God who marks, into the midst of the idolatry, Hast thou seen what the

ancients of the children of Israel do in the dark, each man in the

chambers of his imagery?'

I. Think of the dark and painted chamber which we all of us carry in

our hearts.

Every man is a mystery to himself as to his fellows. With reverence, we

may say of each other as we say of God--Clouds and darkness are round

about Him.' After all the manifestations of a life, we remain enigmas

to one another and mysteries to ourselves. For every man is no fixed

somewhat, but a growing personality, with dormant possibilities of good

and evil lying in him, which up to the very last moment of his life may

flame up into altogether unexpected and astonishing developments.

Therefore we have all to feel that after all self-examination there lie

awful depths within us which we have not fathomed; and after all our

knowledge of one another we yet do see but the surface, and each soul

dwells alone.

There is in every heart a dark chamber. Oh, brethren! there are very,

very few of us that dare tell all our thoughts and show our inmost

selves to our dearest ones. The most silvery lake that lies sleeping

amidst beauty, itself the very fairest spot of all, when drained off

shows ugly ooze and filthy mud, and all manner of creeping abominations

in the slime. I wonder what we should see if our hearts were, so to

speak, drained off, and the very bottom layer of every thing brought

into the light. Do you think you could stand it? Well, then, go to God

and ask Him to keep you from unconscious sins. Go to Him and ask Him to

root out of you the mischiefs that you do not know are there, and live

humbly and self-distrustfuliy, and feel that your only strength is:

Hold Thou me up, and I shall be saved.' Hast thou seen what they do in

the dark?'

Still further, we may take another part of this description with

possibly permissible violence as a symbol of another characteristic of

our inward nature. The walls of that chamber were all painted with

animal forms, to which these men were bowing down. By our memory, and

by that marvellous faculty that people call the imagination, and by our

desires, we are for ever painting the walls of the inmost chambers of

our hearts with such pictures. That is an awful power which we possess,

and, alas! too often use for foul idolatries.

I do not dwell upon that, but I wish to drop one very earnest caution

and beseeching entreaty, especially to the younger members of my

congregation now. You, young men and women, especially you young men,

mind what you paint upon those mystic walls! Foul things, as my text

says, creeping things and abominable beasts,' only too many of you are

tracing there. Take care, for these figures are ineffaceable. No

repentance will obliterate them. I do not know whether even Heaven can

blot them out. What you love, what you desire, what you think about,

you are photographing on the walls of your immortal soul. And just as

to-day, thousands of years after the artists have been gathered to the

dust, we may go into Egyptian temples and see the figures on their

walls, in all the freshness of their first colouring, as if the painter

had but laid down his pencil a moment ago; so, on your hearts, youthful

evils, the sins of your boyhood, the pruriences of your earliest days,

may live in ugly shapes, that no tears and no repentance will ever wipe

out. Nothing can do away with the marks of that which once hath been.'

What are you painting on the chambers of imagery in your hearts?

Obscenity, foul things, mean things, low things? Is that mystic shrine

within you painted with such figures as were laid bare in some chambers

in Pompeii, where the excavators had to cover up the pictures because

they were so foul? Or, is it like the cells in the convent of San Marco

at Florence, where Fra Angelico's holy and sweet genius has left on the

bare walls, to be looked at, as he fancied, only by one devout brother

in each cell, angel imaginings, and noble, pure celestial faces that

calm and hallow those who gaze upon them? What are you doing, my

brother, in the dark, in your chambers of imagery?

II. Now look with me briefly at the second thought that I draw from

this symbol,--the idolatries of the dark chamber.

All these seventy grey-bearded elders that were bowing there before the

bestial gods which they had portrayed, had, no doubt, often stood in

the courts of the Temple and there made prayers to the God of Israel,

with broad phylacteries, to be seen of men. Their true worship was

their worship in the dark. The other was conscious or unconscious

hypocrisy. And the very chamber in which they were gathered, according

to the ideal representation of our text, was a chamber in, and

therefore partaking of the consecration of, the Temple. So their

worship was doubly criminal, in that it was sacrilege as well as

idolatry. Both things are true about us.

A man's true worship is not the worship which he performs in the public

temple, but that which he offers down in that little private chapel,

where nobody goes but himself. Worship is the attribution of supreme

excellence to, and the entire dependence of the heart upon, a certain

person. And the people or the things to which a man attributes the

highest excellence, and on which he hangs his happiness and well-being,

these be his gods, no matter what his outward profession is. You can

find out what these are for you, if you will ask yourself, and honestly

answer, one or two questions. What is that I want most? What is it

which makes my ideal of happiness? What is that which I feel that I

should be desperate without? What do I think about most naturally and

spontaneously, when the spring is taken off, and my thoughts are

allowed to go as they will? And if the answer to none of these

questions is God!' then I do not know why you should call yourself a

worshipper of God. It is of no avail that we pray in the temple, if we

have a dark underground shrine where our true adoration is rendered.

Oh, dear brethren! I am afraid there are a great many of us nominal

Christians, connected with Christian Churches, posing before men as

orthodox religionists, who keep this private chapel where we do our

devotion to an idol and not to God. If our real gods could be made

visible, what a pantheon they would make! All the foul forms painted on

that cell of this vision would be paralleled in the creeping things,

which crawl along the low earth and never soar nor even stand erect,

and in the vile, bestial forms of passion to which some of us really

bow down. Honour, wealth, literary or other distinction, the sweet

sanctities of human love dishonoured and profaned by being exalted to

the place which divine love should hold, ease, family, animal

appetites, lust, drink--these are the gods of some of us. Bear with my

poor words and ask yourselves, not whom do you worship before the eye

of men, but who is the God to whom in your inmost heart you bow down?

What do you do in the dark? That is the question. Whom do you worship

there? Your other worship is not worship at all.

Do not forget that all such diversion of supreme love and dependence

from God alone is like the sin of these men in our text, in that it is

sacrilege. They had taken a chamber in the very Temple, and turned it

into a temple of the false gods. Whom is your heart made to enshrine?

Why! every stone, if I may so say, of the fabric of our being bears

marked upon it that it was laid in order to make a dwelling-place for

God. Whom are you meant to worship, by the witness of the very

constitution of your nature and make of your spirits? Is there anybody

but One who is worthy to receive the priceless gift of human love

absolute and entire? Is there any but One to whom it is aught but

degradation and blasphemy for a man to bow down? Is there any being but

One that can still the tumult of my spirit, and satisfy the immortal

yearnings of my soul? We were made for God, and whensoever we turn the

hopes, the desires, the affections, the obedience, and that which is

the root of them all, the confidence that ought to fix and fasten upon

Him, to other creatures, we are guilty not only of idolatry but of

sacrilege. We commit the sin of which that wild reveller in Babylon was

guilty, when, at his great feast, in the very madness of his

presumption he bade them bring forth the sacred vessels from the Temple

at Jerusalem; and the king and his princes and his concubines drank in

them and praised the gods.' So we take the sacred chalice of the human

heart, on which there is marked the sign manual of Heaven, claiming it

for God's, and fill it with the spiced and drugged draught of our own

sensualities and evils, and pour out libations to vain and false gods.

Brethren! Render unto Him that which is His; and see even upon the

walls scrabbled all over with the deformities that we have painted

there, lingering traces, like those of some dropping fresco in a

roofless Italian church, which suggest the serene and perfect beauty of

the image of the One whose likeness was originally traced there, and

for whose worship it was all built.

III. And now, lastly, look at the sudden crashing in upon the cowering

worshippers of the revealing light.

Apparently the picture of my text suggests that these elders knew not

the eyes that were looking upon them. They were hugging themselves in

the conceit, the Lord seeth not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth.' And

all the while, all unknown, God and His prophet stand in the doorway

and see it all. Not a finger is lifted, not a sign to the foolish

worshippers of His presence and inspection, but in stern silence He

records and remembers.

And does that need much bending to make it an impressive form of

putting a solemn truth? There are plenty of us--alas! alas! that it

should be so--to whom it is the least welcome of all thoughts that

there in the doorway stand God and His Word. Why should it be, my

brother, that the properly blessed thought of a divine eye resting upon

you should be to you like the thought of a policeman's bull's-eye to a

thief? Why should it not be rather the sweetest and the most calming

and strength-giving of all convictions--Thou God seest me'? The little

child runs about the lawn perfectly happy as long as she knows that her

mother is watching her from the window. And it ought to be sweet and

blessed to each of us to know that there is no darkness where a

Father's eye comes not. But oh! to the men that stand before bestial

idols and have turned their backs on the beauty of the one true God,

the only possibility of composure is that they shall hug themselves in

the vain delusion:--The Lord seeth not.'

I beseech you, dear friends, do not think of His eye as the prisoner in

a cell thinks of the pin-hole somewhere in the wall, through which a

jailer's jealous inspection may at any moment be glaring in upon him,

but think of Him your Brother, who knew what was in man,' and who knows

each man, and see in Christ the all-knowing Godhood that loves yet

better than it knows, and beholds the hidden evils of men's hearts, in

order that it may cleanse and forgive all which it beholds.

One day a light will flash in upon all the dark cells. We must all be

manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ. Do you like that thought?

Can you stand it? Are you ready for it? My friend! let Jesus Christ

come to you with His light. Let Him come into the dark corners of your

hearts. Cast all your sinfulness, known and unknown, upon Him that died

on the Cross for every soul of man, and He will come; and His light,

streaming into your hearts, like the sunbeam upon foul garments, will

cleanse and bleach them white by its shining upon them. Let Him come

into your hearts by your lowly penitence, by your humble faith, and all

these vile shapes that you have painted on its walls will, like

phosphorescent pictures in the daytime, pale and disappear when the Sun

of Righteousness, with healing in His beams, floods your soul, leaving

no part dark, and turning all into a temple of the living God.'

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A COMMON MISTAKE AND LAME EXCUSE

. . . He prophesieth of the times that are far off.'--EZEKIEL xii. 27.

Human nature was very much the same in the exiles that listened to

Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar and in Manchester to-day. The same

neglect of God's message was grounded then on the same misapprehension

of its bearings which profoundly operates in the case of many people

now. Ezekiel had been proclaiming the fall of Jerusalem to the exiles

whose captivity preceded it by a few years; and he was confronted by

the incredulity which fancied that it had a great many facts to support

it, and so it generalised God's long-suffering delay in sending the

threatened punishment into a scoffing proverb which said, The days are

prolonged, and every vision faileth.' To translate it into plain

English, the prophets had cried Wolf! wolf!' so long that their alarms

were disbelieved altogether.

Even the people that did not go the length of utter unbelief in the

prophetic threatening took the comfortable conclusion that these

threatenings had reference to a future date, and they need not trouble

themselves about them. And so they said, according to my text, They of

the house of Israel say, The vision that he sees is for many days to

come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off.' It may be all

quite true, but it lies away in the distant future there; and things

will last our time, so we do not need to bother ourselves about what he

says.'

So the imagined distance of fulfilment turned the edge of the plainest

denunciations, and was like wool stuffed in the people's ears to deaden

the reverberations of the thunder.

I wonder if there is anybody here now whom that fits, who meets the

preaching of the gospel with a shrug, and with this saying, He

prophesies of the times that are far off.' I fancy that there are a

few; and I wish to say a word or two about this ground on which the

widespread disregard of the divine message is based.

I. First, then, notice that the saying of my text--in the application

which I now seek to make of it--is a truth, but it is only half a

truth.

Of course, Ezekiel was speaking simply about the destruction of

Jerusalem. If it had been true, as his hearers assumed, that that was

not going to happen for a good many years yet, the chances were that it

had no bearing upon them, and they were right enough in neglecting the

teaching. And, of course, when I apply such a word as this in the

direction in which I wish to do now, we do bring in a different set of

thoughts; but the main idea remains the same. The neglect of God's

solemn message by a great many people is based, more or less

consciously, upon the notion that the message of Christianity--or, if

you like to call it so, of the gospel; or, if you like to call it more

vaguely, religion--has to do mainly with blessings and woes beyond the

grave, and that there is plenty of time to attend to it when we get

nearer the end.

Now is it true that he prophesies of times that are far off'? Yes! and

No! Yes! it is true, and it is the great glory of Christianity that it

shifts the centre of gravity, so to speak, from this poor, transient,

contemptible present, and sets it away out yonder in an august and

infinite future. It brings to us not only knowledge of the future, but

certitude, and takes the conception of another life out of the region

of perhapses, possibilities, dreads, or hopes, as the case may be, and

sets it in the sunlight of certainty. There is no more mist. Other

faiths, even when they have risen to the height of some contemplation

of a future, have always seen it wrapped in nebulous clouds of

possibilities, but Christianity sets it clear, definite, solid, as

certain as yesterday, as certain as to-day.

It not only gives us the knowledge and the certitude of the times that

are afar off, and that are not times but eternities, but it gives us,

as the all-important element in that future, that its ruling

characteristic is retribution. It brings life and immortality to

light,' and just because it does, it brings the dark orb which, like

some of the double stars in the heavens, is knit to the radiant sphere

by a necessary band. It brings to light, with life and immortality,

death and woe. It is true--he prophesies of times that are far off' and

it is the glory of the gospel of Christ's revelation, and of the

religion that is based thereon, that its centre is beyond the grave,

and that its eye is so often turned to the clearly discerned facts that

lie there.

But is that all that we have to say about Christianity? Many

representations of it, I am free to confess, from pulpits and books and

elsewhere, do talk as if that was all, as if it was a magnificent thing

to have when you came to die. As the play has it, I said to him that I

hoped there was no need that he should think about God yet,' because he

was not going to die. But I urge you to remember, dear brethren, that

all that prophesying of times that are far off has the closest bearing

upon this transient, throbbing moment, because, for one thing, one

solemn part of the Christian revelation about the future is that Time

is the parent of Eternity, and that, in like manner as in our earthly

course the child is father of the man,' so the man as he has made

himself is the author of himself as he will be through the infinite

spaces that lie beyond the grave. Therefore, when a Christian preacher

prophesies of times that are afar off, he is prophesying of present

time, between which and the most distant eternity there is an iron

nexus--a band which cannot be broken.

Nor is that all. Not only is the truth in my text but a half truth, if

it is supposed that the main business of the gospel is to talk to us

about heaven and hell, and not about the earth on which we secure and

procure the one or the other; but also it is a half truth because,

large and transcendent, eternal in their duration, and blessed beyond

all thought in their sweetness as are the possibilities, the

certainties that are opened by the risen and ascended Christ, and

tremendous beyond all words that men can speak as are the alternative

possibilities, yet these are not all the contents of the gospel

message; but those blessings and penalties, joys and miseries,

exaltations and degradations, which attend upon righteousness and sin,

godliness and irreligion to-day are a large part of its theme and of

its effects. Therefore, whilst on the one hand it is true, blessed be

Christ's name! that he prophesies of times that are far off'; on the

other hand it is an altogether inadequate description of the gospel

message and of the Christian body of truth to say that the future is

its realm, and not the present.

II. So, then, in the second place, my text gives a very good reason for

prizing and attending to the prophecy.

If it is true that God, speaking through the facts of Christ's death

and Resurrection and Ascension, has given to us the sure and certain

hope of immortality, and has declared to us plainly the conditions upon

which that immortality may be ours, and the woful loss and eclipse into

the shadow of which we shall stumble darkling if it is not ours, then

surely that is a reason for prizing and laying to heart, and living by

the revelation so mercifully made. People do not usually kick over

their telescopes, and neglect to look through them, because they are so

powerful that they show them the craters in the moon and turn faint

specks into blazing suns. People do not usually neglect a word of

warning or guidance in reference to the ordering of their earthly lives

because it is so comprehensive, and covers so large a ground, and is so

certain and absolutely true. Surely there can be no greater sign of

divine loving-kindness, of a Saviour's tenderness and care for us, than

that He should come to each of us, as He does come, and say to each of

us, Thou art to live for ever; and if thou wilt take Me for thy Life,

thou shalt live for ever, blessed, calm, and pure.' And we listen, and

say, He prophesies of times that are far off!' Oh! is that not rather a

reason for coming very close to, and for grappling to our hearts and

living always by the power of, that great revelation? Surely to

announce the consequences of evil, and to announce them so long

beforehand that there is plenty of time to avoid them and to falsify

the prediction, is the token of love.

Now I wish to lay it on the hearts of you people who call yourselves

Christians, and who are so in some imperfect degree, whether we do at

all adequately regard, remember, and live by this great mercy of God,

that He should have prophesied to us of the times that are far off.'

Perhaps I am wrong, but I cannot help feeling that, for this

generation, the glories of the future rest with God have been somewhat

paled, and the terrors of the future unrest away from God have been

somewhat lightened. I hope I am wrong, but I do not think that the

modern average Christian thinks as much about heaven as his father did.

And I believe that his religion has lost something of its buoyancy, of

its power, of its restraining and stimulating energy, because, from a

variety of reasons, the bias of this generation is rather to dwell

upon, and to realise, the present social blessings of Christianity than

to project itself into that august future. The reaction may be good. I

have no doubt it was needed, but I think it has gone rather too far,

and I would beseech Christian men and women to try and deserve more the

sarcasm that is flung at us that we live for another world. Would God

it were true--truer than it is! We should see better work done in this

world if it were. So I say, that he prophesieth of times that are far

off' is a good reason for prizing and obeying the prophet.

III. Lastly, this is a very common and a very bad reason for neglecting

the prophecy.

It does operate as a reason for giving little heed to the prophet, as I

have been saying. In the old men-of-war, when an engagement was

impending, they used to bring up the hammocks from the bunks and pile

them into the nettings at the side of the ship, to defend it from

boarders and bullets. And then, after these had served their purpose of

repelling, they were taken down again and the crew went to sleep upon

them. That is exactly what some of my friends do with that

misconception of the genius of Christianity which supposes that it is

concerned mainly with another world. They put it up as a screen between

them and God, between them and what they know to be their duty--viz.,

the acceptance of Christ as their Saviour. It is their hammock that

they put between the bullets and themselves; and many a good sleep they

get upon it!

Now, that strange capacity that men have of ignoring a certain future

is seen at work all round about us in every region of life. I wonder

how many young men there are in Manchester to-day that have begun to

put their foot upon the wrong road, and who know just as well as I do

that the end of it is disease, blasted reputation, ruined prospects,

perhaps an early death. Why! there is not a drunkard in the city that

does not know that. Every man that takes opium knows it. Every unclean,

unchaste liver knows it; and yet he can hide the thought from himself,

and go straight on as if there was nothing at all of the sort within

the horizon of possibility. It is one of the most marvellous things

that men have that power; only beaten by the marvel that, having it,

they should be such fools as to choose to exercise it. The peasants on

the slopes of Vesuvius live very careless lives, and they have their

little vineyards and their olives. Yes, and every morning when they

come out, they can look up and see the thin wreath of smoke going up in

the dazzling blue, and they know that some time or other there will be

a roar and a rush, and down will come the lava. But a short life and a

merry one' is the creed of a good many of us, though we do not like to

confess it. Some of you will remember the strange way in which ordinary

habits survived in prisons in the dreadful times of the French

Revolution, and how ladies and gentlemen, who were going to have their

heads chopped off next morning, danced and flirted, and sat at

entertainments, just as if there was no such thing in the world as the

public prosecutor and the tumbril, and the gaoler going about with a

bit of chalk to mark each door where were the condemned for next day.

That same strange power of ignoring a known future, which works so

widely and so disastrously round about us, is especially manifested in

regard to religion. The great bulk of English men and women who are not

Christians, and the little sample of such that I have in my audience

now, as a rule believe as fully as we do the truths which they agree to

neglect. Let me speak to them individually. You believe that death will

introduce you into a world of two halves--that if you have been a good,

religious man, you will dwell in blessedness; that if you have not, you

will not--yet you never did a single thing, nor refrained from a single

thing, because of that belief. And when I, and men of my profession,

come and plead with you and try to get through that strange web of

insensibility that you have spun round you, you listen, and then you

say, with a shrug, He prophesies of things that are far off.' and you

turn with relief to the trivialities of the day. Need I ask you whether

that is a wise thing or not?

Surely it is not wise for a man to ignore a future that is certain

simply because it is distant. So long as it is certain, what in the

name of common-sense has the time when it begins to be a present to do

with our wisdom in regard to it? It is the uncertainty in future

anticipations which makes it unwise to regulate life largely by them,

and if you can eliminate that element of uncertainty--which you can do

if you believe in Jesus Christ--then the question is not when is the

prophecy going to be fulfilled, but is it true and trustworthy? The man

is a fool who, because it is far off, thinks he can neglect it.

Surely it is not wise to ignore a future which is so incomparably

greater than this present, and which also is so connected with this

present as that life here is only intelligible as the vestibule and

preparation for that great world beyond.

Surely it is not wise to ignore a future because you fancy it is far

away, when it may burst upon you at any time. These exiles to whom

Ezekiel spoke hugged themselves in the idea that his words were not to

be fulfilled for many days to come; but they were mistaken, and the

crash of the fall of Jerusalem stunned them before many months had

passed by. We have to look forward to a future which must be very near

to some of us, which may be nearer to others than they think, which at

the remotest is but a little way from us, and which must come to us

all. Oh, dear friends, surely it is not wise to ignore as far off that

which for some of us may be here before this day closes, which will

probably be ours in some cases before the fresh young leaves now upon

the trees have dropped yellow in the autumn frosts, which at the most

distant must be very near us, and which waits for us all.

What would you think of the crew and passengers of some ship lying in

harbour, waiting for its sailing orders, who had got leave on shore,

and did not know but that at any moment the blue-peter might be flying

at the fore--the signal to weigh anchor--if they behaved themselves in

the port as if they were never going to embark, and made no

preparations for the voyage? Let me beseech you to rid yourselves of

that most unreasonable of all reasons for neglecting the gospel, that

its most solemn revelations refer to the eternity beyond the grave.

There are many proofs that man on the whole is a very foolish creature,

but there is not one more tragical than the fact that believing, as

many of you do, that the wages of sin is death, and the gift of God is

eternal life through Jesus Christ,' you stand aloof from accepting the

gift, and risk the death.

The times far off' have long since come near enough to those scoffers.

The most distant future will be present to you before you are ready for

it, unless you accept Jesus Christ as your All, for time and for

eternity. If you do, the time that is near will be pure and calm, and

the times that are far off will be radiant with unfading bliss.

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THE HOLY NATION

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from

all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26. A

new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you:

and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give

you an heart of flesh. 27. And I will put My Spirit within you, and

cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and

do them. 28. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your

fathers; and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God. 29. I will

also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the

corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. 30. And I will

multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye

shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. 31. Then

shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not

good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities

and for your abominations. 32. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the

Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own

ways, O house of Israel. 33. Thus saith the Lord God; In the day that I

shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you

to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. 34. And the

desolate land shall be tilled, whereat; it lay desolate in the sight of

all that passed by. 35. And they shall say, This land that was desolate

is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and

ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. 36. Then the

heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build

the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have

spoken it, and I will do it. 37. Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet

for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I

will increase them with men like a flock. 38. As the holy flock, as the

flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be

filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the

Lord.'--EZEKIEL xxxvi. 25-38.

This great prophecy had but a partial fulfilment, though a real one, in

the restored Israel. The land was given back, the nation was

multiplied, fertility again blessed the smiling fields and vineyards,

and, best of all, the people were cleansed from all their idols' by the

furnace of affliction. Nothing is more remarkable than the

transformation effected by the captivity, in regard to the idolatrous

propensities of the people. Whereas before it they were always

hankering after the gods of the nations, they came back from Babylon

the resolute champions of monotheism, and never thereafter showed the

smallest inclination for what had before been so irresistible.

But the fulness of Ezekiel's prophecy is not realised until Jeremiah's

prophecy of the new covenant is brought to pass. Nor does the state of

the militant church on earth exhaust it. Future glories gleam through

the words. They have a springing accomplishment' in the Israel of the

restoration, a fuller in the New Testament church, and their ultimate

realisation in the New Jerusalem, which shall yet descend to be the

bride, the Lamb's wife. The principles involved in the prophecy belong

to the region of purely spiritual religion, and are worth pondering,

apart from any question of the place and manner of fulfilment.

First comes the great truth that the foundation, so far as concerns the

history of a soul or of a community, of all other good is divine

forgiveness (v. 25). Ezekiel, the priest, casts the promise into

ceremonial form, and points to the sprinklings of the polluted under

the law, or to the ritual of consecration to the priesthood. That

cleansing is the removal of already contracted defilement, especially

of the guilt of idolatry. It is clearly distinguished from the

operation on the inward nature which follows; that is to say, it is the

promise of forgiveness, or of justification, not of sanctification.

From what deep fountains in the divine nature that clean water' was to

flow, Ezekiel does not know; but we have learned that a more precious

fluid than water is needed, and have to think of Him who came not by

water only, but by water and blood,' in whom we have redemption through

His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. But the central idea of

this first promise is that it must be God's hand which sprinkles from

an evil conscience. Forgiveness is a divine prerogative. He only can,

and He will, cleanse from all filthiness. His pardon is universal. The

most ingrained sins cannot be too black to melt away from the soul. The

dye-stuffs of sin are very strong, but there is one solvent which they

cannot resist. There are no fast colours' which God's clean water'

cannot move. This cleansing of pardon underlies all the rest of the

blessings. It is ever the first thing needful when a soul returns to

God.

Then follows an equally exclusively divine act, the impartation of a

new nature, which shall secure future obedience (vs. 26, 27). Who can

thrust his hand into the depths of man's being, and withdraw one

life-principle and enshrine another, while yet the individuality of the

man remains untouched? God only. How profound the consciousness of

universal obstinacy and insensibility which regards human nature, apart

from such renewal, as possessing but a heart of stone'! There are no

sentimental illusions about the grim facts of humanity here.

Superficial views of sin and rose-tinted fancies about human nature

will not admit the truth of the Scripture doctrine of sinfulness,

alienation from God. They diagnose the disease superficially, and

therefore do not know how to cure it. The Bible can venture to give

full weight to the gravity of the sickness, because it knows the

remedy. No surgery but God's can perform that operation of extracting

the stony heart and inserting a heart of flesh. No system which cannot

do that can do what men want. The gospel alone deals thoroughly with

man's ills.

And how does it effect that great miracle? I will put My Spirit within

you.' The new life-principle is the effluence of the Spirit of God. The

promise does not merely offer the influence of a divine spirit, working

on men as from without, or coming down upon them as an afflatus, but

the actual planting of God's Spirit in the deep places of theirs. We

fail to apprehend the most characteristic blessing of the gospel if we

do not give full prominence to that great gift of an indwelling Spirit,

the life of our lives. Cleansing is much, but is incomplete without a

new life-principle which shall keep us clean; and that can only be

God's Spirit, enshrined and operative within us; for only thus shall we

walk in His statutes, and keep His judgments.' When the Lawgiver dwells

in our hearts, the law will be our delight; and keeping it will be the

natural outcome and expression of our life, which is His life.

Then follows the picture of the blessed effects of obedience (vs.

28-30). These are cast into the form appropriate to the immediate

purpose of the prophecy, and received fulfilment in the actual

restoration to the land, which fulfilment, however, was imperfect,

inasmuch as the obedience and renewal of the people's hearts were

incomplete. These can only be complete under the gospel, and, in the

fullest sense, only in another order than the present. When men fully

keep God's judgments, they shall dwell permanently in a good land.

Israel's hold on its country was its obedience, not its prowess. Our

real hold on even earthly good is the choosing of God for our supreme

good. In the measure in which we can say Thy law is within my heart,'

all things are ours; and we may possess all things while having nothing

in the vulgar world's sense of having. Similarly that obedience, which

is the fruit of the new life of God's Spirit in our spirits, is the

condition of close mutual possession in the blessed reciprocity of

trust and faithfulness, love bestowing and love receiving, by which the

quiet heart knows that God is its, and it is God's. If stains and

interruptions still sometimes break the perfectness of obedience and

continuity of reciprocal ownership, there will be a further cleansing

for such sins. If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ His

Son cleanseth us from all sin' (v. 29).

The lovely picture of the blessed dwellers in their good land is closed

by the promise of abundant harvests from corn and fruit-tree; that is,

all that nourishes or delights. The deepest truth taught thereby is

that he who lives in God has no unsatisfied desires, but finds in Him

all that can sustain, strengthen, and minister to growth, and all that

can give gladness and delight. If we make God our heritage, we dwell

secure in a good land; and the dust of that land is gold,' and its

harvests ever plenteous.

Very profoundly and beautifully does Ezekiel put as the last trait in

his picture, and as the upshot of all this cornucopia of blessings, the

penitent remembrance of past evils. Undeserved mercies steal into the

heart like the breath of the south wind, and melt the ice. The more we

advance in holiness and consequent blessed communion with God, the more

clearly shall we see the evil of our past. Forgiven sin looks far

blacker because it is forgiven. When we are not afraid of sin's

consequences, we see more plainly its sinfulness. When we have tasted

God's sweetness, we think with more shame of our ingratitude and folly.

If God forgets, the more reason for us to remember our transgressions.

The man who has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins' is in

danger of finding out that he is not purged from them. There is no

gnawing of conscience, nor any fearful looking for of judgment in such

remembrance, but a wholesome humility passing into thankful wonder that

such sin is pardoned, and such a sinner made God's friend.

The deep foundation of all the blessedness is finally laid bare (v. 32)

as being God's undeserved mercy. For Mine holy name' (v. 22) is God's

reason. He is His own motive, and He wills that the world should know

His name,--that is, His manifested character,--and understand how

loving and long-suffering He is. So He wills, not because such

knowledge adds to His glory, but because it satisfies His love, since

it will make the men who know His name blessed. The truth that God's

motive is His own name's sake may be so put as to be hideous and

repellent; but it really proclaims that He is love, and that His motive

is His poor creatures' blessing.

To this great outline of the blessings of the restored nations are

appended two subsidiary prophecies, marked by the recurring Thus saith

the Lord.' The former of these (vs. 33-36) deals principally with the

new beauty that was to clothe the land. The day in which the

inhabitants were cleansed from their sins was to be the day in which

the land was to be raised from its ruin. Cities are to be rebuilt, the

ground that had lain fallow and tangled with briers and thorns is to be

tilled, and to bloom like Eden, a restored paradise. How far the

fulfilment has halted behind the promise, the melancholy condition of

Palestine to-day may remind us. Whether the literal fulfilment is to be

anticipated or no seems less important than to note that the experience

of forgiveness (and of the consequent blessings described above) is the

precursor of this fair picture. Therefore, the Church's condition of

growth and prosperity is its realisation in the persons of its

individual members, of pardon, the renewal of the inner man by the

indwelling Spirit, faithful obedience, communion with God, and lowly

remembrance of past sins. Where churches are marked by such

characteristics, they will grow. If they are not, all their

evangelistic efforts' will be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

The second appended prophecy (vs. 37, 38) is that of increase of

population. The picture of the flocks of sheep for sacrifice, which

thronged Jerusalem at the feasts, is given as a likeness of the swarms

of inhabitants in the waste cities.' The point of comparison is chiefly

the number. One knows how closely a flock huddles and seems to fill the

road in endless procession. But the destination as well as the number

comes into view. All these patient creatures, crowding the ways, are

meant for sacrifices. So the inhabitants of the land then shall all

yield themselves to God, living sacrifices. The first words of our text

point to the priesthood of all believers; the last words point to the

sacrifice of themselves which they have to offer.

For this moreover will I be inquired of by the house of Israel.' The

blessings promised do not depend on our merits, as we have heard, but

yet they will not be given without our co-operation in prayer. God

promises, and that promise is not a reason for our not asking the gifts

from Him, but for our asking. Faith keeps within the lines of God's

promise, and prayers which do not foot themselves on a promise are the

offspring of presumption, not of faith. God lets Himself be inquired

of' for that which is in accordance with His will; and, accordant with

His will though it be, He will not do it for them,' unless His flock

ask of Him the accomplishment of His own word.

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THE DRY BONES AND THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

1. The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit

of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full

of bones, 2. And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold,

there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.

3. And He said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I

answered, O Lord God, Thou knowest. 4. Again He said unto me, Prophesy

upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of

the Lord. 5. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will

cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: 6. And I will lay

sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with

skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that

I am the Lord. 7. So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I

prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came

together, bone to his bone. 8. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and

the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there

was no breath in them. 9. Then said He unto me, Prophesy unto the wind,

prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God;

Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that

they may live. 10. So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath

came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an

exceeding great army. 11. Then He said unto me, Son of man, these bones

are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried,

and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. 12. Therefore

prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O My

people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your

graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13. And ye shall know

that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and

brought you up out of your graves. 14. And shall put My spirit in you,

and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall

ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the

Lord.'--EZEKIEL xxxvii. 1-14.

This great vision apparently took its form from a despairing saying,

which had become a proverb among the exiles, Our bones are dried up,

and our hope is lost: we are clean cut off' (v. 11). Ezekiel lays hold

of the metaphor, which had been taken to express the hopeless

destruction of Israel's national existence, and even from it wrings a

message of hope. Faith has the prerogative of seeing possibilities of

life in what looks to sense hopeless death. We may look at the vision

from three points of view, considering its bearing on Israel, on the

world, and on the resurrection of the body.

I. The saying, already referred to, puts the hopelessness of the mass

of the exiles in a forcible fashion. The only sense in which living men

could say that their bones were dried up, and they cut off, is a

figurative one, and obviously it is the national existence which they

regarded as irretrievably ended. The saying gives us a glimpse into the

despair which had settled down on the exiles, and against which Ezekiel

had to contend, as he had also to contend against its apparently

opposite and yet kindred feeling of presumptuous, misplaced hope. We

observe that he begins by accepting fully the facts which bred despair,

and even accentuating them. The true prophet never makes light of the

miseries of which he knows the cure, and does not try to comfort by

minimising the gravity of the evil. The bones are very many, and they

are very dry. As far as outward resources are concerned, despair was

rational, and hope as absurd as it would have been to expect that men,

dead so long that their bones had been bleached by years of exposure to

the weather, should live again.

But while Ezekiel saw the facts of Israel's powerlessness as plainly as

the most despondent, he did not therefore despair. The question which

rose in his mind was God's question, and the very raising it let a

gleam of hope in. So he answered with that noble utterance of faith and

submission, O Lord God, Thou knowest.' With God all things are

possible.' Presumption would have said Yes'; Unbelief would have said

No'; Faith says, Thou knowest.'

The grand description of the process of resurrection follows the

analogy of the order in the creation of man, giving, first, the shaping

of the body, and afterwards the breathing into it of the breath which

is life. Both stages are wholly God's work. The prophet's part was to

prophesy to the bones first; and his word, in a sense, brought about

the effect which it foretold, since his ministry was the most potent

means of rekindling dying hopes, and bringing the disjecta membra of

the nation together again. The vivid and gigantic imagination of the

prophet gives a picture of the rushing together of the bones, which has

no superior in any literature. He hears a noise, and sees a shaking'

(by which is meant the motion of the bones to each other, rather than

an earthquake,' as the Revised Version has it, which inserts a quite

irrelevant detail), and the result of all is that the skeletons are

complete. Then follows the gradual clothing with flesh. There they lie,

a host of corpses.

The second stage is the quickening of these bodies with life, and here

again Ezekiel, as God's messenger, has power to bring about what he

announces; for, at his command, the breath, or wind, or spirit, comes,

and the stiff corpses spring to their feet, a mighty army. The

explanation in the last verses of the text somewhat departs from the

tenor of the vision by speaking of Israel as buried, but keeps to its

substance, and point the despairing exiles to God as the source of

national resurrection. But we must not force deeper meaning on

Ezekiel's words than they properly bear. The spirit promised in them is

simply the source of life,--literally, of physical life;

metaphorically, of national life. However that national restoration was

connected with holiness, that does not enter into the prophet's vision.

Israel's restoration to its land is all that Ezekiel meant by it. True,

that restoration was to lead to clearer recognition by Israel of the

name of Jehovah, and of all that it implied in him and demanded from

them. But the proper scope of the vision is to assure despairing

Israelites that God would quicken the apparently slain national life,

and replace them in the land.

II. We may extend the application of the vision to the condition of

humanity and the divine intervention which communicates life to a dead

world, but must remember that no such meaning was in Ezekiel's

thoughts. The valley full of dry bones is but too correct a description

of the aspect which a world dead in trespasses and sins' bears, when

seen from the mountain-top by pure and heavenly eyes. The activities of

godless lives mask the real spiritual death, which is the condition of

every soul that is separate from God. Galvanised corpses may have

muscular movements, but they are dead, notwithstanding their twitching.

They that live without God are dead while they live.

Again, we may learn from the vision the preparation needful for the

prophet, who is to be the instrument of imparting divine life to a dead

world. The sorrowful sense of the widespread deadness must enter into a

man's spirit, and be ever present to him, in order to fit him for his

work. A dead world is not to be quickened on easy terms. We must see

mankind in some measure as God sees them if we are to do God's work

among them. So-called Christian teachers, who do not believe that the

race is dead in sin, or who, believing it, do not feel the tragedy of

the fact, and the power lodged in their hands to bring the true life,

may prophesy to the dry bones for ever, and there will be no shaking

among them.

The great work of the gospel is to communicate divine life. The details

of the process in the vision are not applicable in this respect. As we

have pointed out, they are shaped after the pattern of the creation of

Adam, but the essential point is that what the world needs is the

impartation from God of His Spirit. We know more than Ezekiel did as to

the way by which that Spirit is given to men, and as to the kind of

life which it imparts, and as to the connection between that life and

holiness. It is a diviner voice than Ezekiel's which speaks to us in

the name of God, and says to us with deeper meaning than the prophet of

the Exile dreamed of, I will put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live.'

But we may note that it is possible to have the outward form of a

living body, and yet to have no life. Churches and individuals may be

perfectly organised and perfectly dead. Creeds may be articulated most

correctly, every bone in its place, and yet have no vitality in them.

Forms of worship may be punctiliously proper, and have no breath of

life in them. Religion must have a body, but often the body is not so

much the organ as the sepulchre of the spirit. We have to take heed

that the externals do not kill the inward life.

Again, we note that this great act of life-giving is God's revelation

of His name,--that is, of His character so far as men can know it. Ye

shall know that I am the Lord' (vs. 13, 14). God makes Himself known in

His divinest glory when He quickens dead souls. The world may learn

what He is therefrom, but they who have experienced the change, and

have, as it were, been raised from the grave to new life, have personal

experience of His power and faithfulness so sure and sweet that

henceforward they cannot doubt Him nor forget His grace.

III. As to the bearing of the vision on the doctrine of the

resurrection little need be said. It does not necessarily presuppose

the people's acquaintance with that doctrine, for it would be quite

conceivable that the vision had revealed to the prophet the thought of

a resurrection, which had not been in his beliefs before. The vision is

so entirely figurative, that it cannot be employed as evidence that the

idea of the resurrection of the dead was part of the Jewish beliefs at

this date. It does, however, seem most natural to suppose that the

exiles were familiar with the idea, though the vision cannot be taken

as a revelation of a literal resurrection of dead men. For clear

expectations of such a resurrection we must turn to such scriptures as

Daniel xii. 2, 13.

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THE RIVER OF LIFE

Waters issued out from under the threshold of the house . . .'--EZEKIEL

xlvii. 1.

Unlike most great cities, Jerusalem was not situated on a great river.

True, the inconsiderable waters of Siloam--which flow softly' because

they were so inconsiderable--rose from a crevice in the Temple rock,

and beneath that rock stretched the valley of the Kedron, dry and

bleached in the summer, and a rainy torrent during the rainy seasons;

but that was all. So, many of the prophets, who looked forward to the

better times to come, laid their finger upon that one defect, and

prophesied that it should be cured. Thus we read in a psalm: There is a

river, the divisions whereof make glad the City of our God.' Faith saw

what sense saw not. Again, Isaiah says: There'--that is to say, in the

new Jerusalem--the glorious Lord shall be unto us a place of broad

rivers and streams.' And so, this prophet casts his anticipations of

the abundant outpouring of blessing that shall come when God in very

deed dwells among men, into this figure of a river pouring out from

beneath the Temple-door, and spreading life and fertility wherever its

waters come. I need not remind you how our Lord Himself uses the same

figure, and modifies it, by saying that whosoever believeth on Him, out

of him shall flow rivers of living waters'; or how, in the very last

words of the Apocalyptic seer, we hear again the music of the ripples

of the great stream, the river of the water of life proceeding out of

the Throne of God and of the Lamb.' So then, all through Scripture, we

may say that we hear the murmur of the stream, and can catch the line

of verdure upon its banks. My object now is not only to deal with the

words that I have read as a starting-point, but rather to seek to draw

out the wonderful significance of this great prophetic parable.

I. I notice, first, the source from which the river conies.

I have already anticipated that in pointing out that it flows from the

very Temple itself. The Prophet sees it coming out of the house--that

is to say, the Sanctuary. It flows across the outer court of the house,

passes the altar, comes out under the threshold, and then pours itself

down on to the plain beneath. This is the symbolical dress of the

thought that all spiritual blessings, and every conceivable form of

human good, take their rise in the fact of God's dwelling with men.

From beneath the Temple threshold comes the water of life; and wherever

it is true that in any heart--or in any community--God dwells, there

will be heard the tinkling of its ripples, and freshness and fertility

will come from the stream. The dwelling of God with a man, like the

dwelling of God in humanity in the Incarnation of His own dear Son, is,

as it were, the opening of the fountain that it may pour out into the

world. So, if we desire to have the blessings that are possible for us,

we must comply with the conditions, and let God dwell in our hearts,

and make them His temples; and then from beneath the threshold of that

temple, too, will pour out, according to Christ's own promise, rivers

of living water which will be first for ourselves to drink of and be

blessed by, and then will refresh and gladden others.

Another thought connected with this source of the river of life is that

all the blessings which, massed together, are included in that one word

salvation'--which is a kind of nebula made up of many unresolved

stars--take their rise from nothing else than the deep heart of God

Himself. This river rose in the House of the Lord, and amidst the

mysteries of the Divine Presence; it took its rise, one might say, from

beneath the Mercy-seat where the brooding Cherubim sat in silence and

poured itself into a world that had not asked for it, that did not

expect it, that in many of its members did not desire it and would not

have it. The river that rose in the secret place of God symbolises for

us the great thought which is put into plainer words by the last of the

apostles when he says, We love Him because He first loved us.' All the

blessings of salvation rise from the unmotived, self-impelled, self-fed

divine love and purpose. Nothing moves Him to communicate Himself but

His own delight in giving Himself to His poor creatures; and it is all

of grace that it might be all through faith.

Still further, another thought that may be suggested in connection with

the source of this river is, that that which is to bless the world must

necessarily take its rise above the world. Ezekiel has sketched, in the

last portion of his prophecy, an entirely ideal topography of the Holy

Land. He has swept away mountains and valleys, and levelled all out

into a great plain, in the midst of which rises the mountain of the

Lord's House, far higher than the Temple hill. In reality, opposite it

rose the Mount of Olives, and between the two there was the deep gorge

of the Valley of the Kedron. The Prophet smooths it all out into one

great plain, and high above all towers the Temple-mount, and from it

there rushes down on to the low levels the fertilising, life-giving

flood.

That imaginary geography tells us this, that what is to bless the world

must come from above the world. There needs a waterfall to generate

electricity; the power which is to come into humanity and deal with its

miseries must have its source high above the objects of its energy and

its compassion, and in proportion to the height from which it falls

will be the force of its impact and its power to generate the

quickening impulse. All merely human efforts at social reform, rivers

that do not rise in the Temple, are like the rivers in Mongolia, that

run for a few miles and then get sucked up by the hot sands and are

lost and nobody sees them any more. Only the perennial stream, that

comes out from beneath the Temple threshold, can sustain itself in the

desert, to say nothing of transforming the desert into a Garden of

Eden. So moral and social and intellectual and political reformers may

well go to Ezekiel, and learn that the river of the water of life,'

which is to heal the barren and refresh the thirsty land, must come

from below the Temple threshold.

II. Note the rapid increase of the stream.

The Prophet describes how his companion, the interpreter, measured down

the stream a thousand cubits--about a quarter of a mile--and the waters

were ankle-deep another thousand, making half a mile from the start,

and the water was knee-deep. Another thousand--or three-quarters of a

mile--and the water was waist-deep; another thousand--about a mile in

all--and the water was unfordable, waters to swim in, a river that

could not be passed over.' Where did the increase come from? There were

no tributaries. We do not hear of any side-stream flowing into the main

body. Where did the increase come from? It came from the abundant

welling-up in the sanctuary. The fountain was the mother of the

river--that is to say, God's ideal for the world, for the Church, for

the individual Christian, is rapid increase in their experience of the

depth and the force of the stream of blessings which together make up

salvation. So we come to a very sharp testing question. Will anybody

tell me that the rate at which Christianity has grown for these

nineteen centuries corresponds with Ezekiel's vision--which is God's

ideal? Will any Christian man say, My own growth in grace, and increase

in the depth and fulness of the flow of the river through my spirit and

my life correspond to that ideal'? A mile from the source the river is

unfordable. How many miles from the source of our first experience do

we stand? How many of us, instead of having a river that could not be

passed over, waters to swim in,' have but a poor and all but stagnant

feeble trickle, as shallow as or shallower than it was at first?

I was speaking a minute ago about Mongolian rivers. Australian rivers

are more like some men's lives. A chain of ponds in the dry

season--nay! not even a chain, but a series, with no connecting channel

of water between them. That is like a great many Christian people; they

have isolated times when they feel the voice of Christ's love, and

yield themselves to the powers of the world to come, and then there are

long intervals, when they feel neither the one nor the other. But the

picture that ought to be realised by each of us is God's ideal, which

there is power in the gospel to make real in the case of every one of

us, the rapid and continuous increase in the depth and in the scour of

the river of the water of life,' that flows through our lives. Luther

used to say, If you want to clean out a dunghill, turn the Elbe into

it.' If you desire to have your hearts cleansed of all their foulness,

turn the river into it. But it needs to be a progressively deepening

river, or there will be no scour in the feeble trickle, and we shall

not be a bit the holier or the purer for our potential and imperfect

Christianity.

III. Lastly, note the effects of the stream.

These are threefold: fertility, healing, life. Fertility. In the East

one condition of fertility is water. Irrigate the desert, and you make

it a garden. Break down the aqueduct, and you make the granary of the

world into a waste. The traveller as he goes along can tell where there

is a stream of water, by the verdure along its banks. You travel along

a plateau, and it is all baked and barren. You plunge into a w⤹, and

immediately the ground is clothed with under-growth and shrubs, and the

birds of the air sing among the branches. And so, says Ezekiel,

wherever the river comes there springs up, as if by magic, fair trees

on the banks thereof, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the

fruit thereof be consumed.'

Fertility comes second, the reception of the fertilising agent comes

first. It is wasted time to tinker at our characters unless we have

begun with getting into our hearts the grace of God, and the new spirit

that will be wrought out by diligent effort into all beauty of life and

character. Ezekiel seems to be copying the first psalm, or vice versa,

the Psalmist is copying Ezekiel. At any rate, there is a verbal

similarity between them, in that both dwell upon the unfading leaf of

the tree that grows planted by rivers of water. And our text goes

further, and speaks about perennial fruitfulness month by month, all

the year round. In some tropical countries you will find blossoms, buds

in their earliest stage, and ripened fruit all hanging upon one laden

branch. Such ought to be the Christian life--continuously fruitful

because dependent upon continual drawing into itself, by means of its

roots and suckers, of the water of life by which we are fructified.

There is yet another effect of the waters--healing. As we said, Ezekiel

takes great liberties with the geography of the Holy Land, levelling it

all, so his stream makes nothing of the Mount of Olives, but flows due

east until it comes to the smitten gorge of the Jordan, and then turns

south, down into the dull, leaden waters of the Dead Sea, which it

heals. We all know how these are charged with poison. Dip up a glassful

anywhere, and you find it full of deleterious matter. They are the

symbol of humanity, with the sin that is in solution all through it. No

chemist can eliminate it, but there is One who can. He hath made Him to

be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness

of God in Him.' The pure river of the water of life will cast out from

humanity the malignant components that are there, and will sweeten it

all. Ay, all, and yet not all, for very solemnly the Prophet's optimism

pauses, and he says that the salt marshes by the side of the sea are

not healed. They are by the side of it. The healing is perfectly

available for them, but they are not healed. It is possible for men to

reject the influences that make for the destruction of sin and the

establishment of righteousness. And although the waters are healed,

there still remain the obstinate marshes with the white crystals

efflorescing on their surface, and bringing salt and barrenness. You

can put away the healing and remain tainted with the poison.

And then the last thought is the life-giving influence of the river.

Everything lived whithersoever it went. Contrast Christendom with

heathendom. Admit all the hollowness and mere nominal Christianity of

large tracts of life in so-called Christian countries, and yet why is

it that on the one side you find stagnation and death, and on the other

side mental and manifold activity and progressiveness? I believe that

the difference between the people that sit in darkness' and the people

that walk in the light is that one has the light and the other has not,

and activity befits the light as torpor befits the darkness.

But there is a far deeper truth than that in the figure, a truth that I

would fain lay upon the hearts of all my hearers, that unless we our

own selves have this water of life which comes from the Sanctuary and

is brought to us by Jesus Christ, we are dead in trespasses and sins.'

The only true life is in Christ. If any man thirst, let him come unto

Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out

of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'

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THE BOOK OF DANIEL

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YOUTHFUL CONFESSORS

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with

the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank;

therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not

defile himself. 9. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender

love with the prince of the eunuchs. 10. And the prince of the eunuchs

said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat

and your drink; for why should he see your faces worse liking than the

children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head

to the king. 11. Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the

eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12. Prove

thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to

eat, and water to drink. 13. Then let our countenances be looked upon

before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the

portion of the king's meat; and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

14. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

15. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and

fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the

king's meat. 16. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and

the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse. 17. As for these

four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and

wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18. Now

at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in,

then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none

like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore stood they

before the king. 20. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding,

that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all

the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. 21. And

Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.'--DANIEL i.

8-21.

Daniel was but a boy at the date of the Captivity, and little more at

the time of the attempt to make a Chaldean of him. The last verse says

that he continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus,' the date

given elsewhere as the close of the Captivity (2 Chron. xxxvi. 22; Ezra

i. 1; vi. 3). From Daniel x. 1 we learn that he lived on till Cyrus's

third year, if not later; but the date in i. 21 is probably given in

order to suggest that Daniel's career covered the whole period of the

Captivity, and burned like a star of hope for the exiles. The incident

in our passage is a noble example of religious principle applied to

small details of daily life, and shows how God crowns such

conscientious self-restraint with success. The lessons which it

contains are best gathered by following the narrative.

I. The heroic determination of the boyish confessor is first set forth.

The plan of taking leading young men from the newly captured nation and

turning them into Babylonians was a stroke of policy as heartless and

high-handed as might be expected from a great conqueror. In some

measure, the same thing has been done by all nations who have built up

a world-wide dominion. The new names given to the youths, the attaching

of them to the court, their education in Babylonish fashion, all were

meant for the same purpose,--to denationalise them, and strip them of

their religion, and thus to make them tools for more easily governing

their countrymen.

Most men would yield to the influences, and be so lapped in the

comforts of their new position as to become pliable as wax in the

conqueror's hands; but here and there he would come across a bit of

stiffer stuff, which would break rather than bend. Such an obstinate

piece of humanity was found in the Hebrew youth, of some fifteen years,

whose Hebrew name (God is my judge') expressed a truth that ruled him,

when the name was exchanged for one that invoked Bel. It took some

firmness for a captive lad, without friends or influence, to take

Daniel's stand; for the motive of his desire to be excused from taking

the fare provided can only have been religious. He was determined, in

his brave young heart, not to defile' himself with the king's meat. The

phrase points to the pollution incurred by eating things offered to

idols, and does not imply scrupulousness like that of Pharisaic times,

nor necessarily suggest a late date for the book. Probably there had

been some kind of religious consecration of the food to Babylonian

gods, and Daniel, in his solitary faithfulness, was carrying out the

same principles which Paul afterwards laid down for Corinthian

Christians as to partaking of things offered to idols. Similar

difficulties are sure to emerge in analogous cases, and do so, on many

mission fields.

The motive here, then, is distinctly religious. Common life was so

woven in with idolatrous worship that every meal was in some sense a

sacrifice. Therefore Touch not, taste not, handle not,' was the

inevitable dictate for a devout heart. Daniel seems to have been the

moving spirit; but as is generally the case, he was able to infuse his

own strong convictions into his companions, and the four of them held

together in their protest. The great lesson from the incident is that

religion should regulate the smallest details of life, and that it is

not narrow over-scrupulousness, but fidelity to the highest duty, when

a man sets his foot down about any small matter, and says, No, I dare

not do it, little as it is, and pleasant as it might be to sense,

because I should thereby be mixed up in a practical denial of my God.'

So did not I, because of the fear of God' (Neh. v. 15), is a motto

which will require from many a young man abstinence from many things

which it would be much easier to accept.

II. This young confessor was as prudent as he was brave; and the story

goes on to show how wisely he played his part, and how willing he was

to accept all working compromises which might smooth his way. He did

not at all want to pose as a martyr, and had no pleasure in making a

noise. The favour which he had won with the high officer who looked

after the lads before their formal examination (graduation we might

call it), is set down in the narrative to the divine favour; but that

favour worked by means, and no doubt the lad had done his part to win

the important good opinion of his superior. The more firm is our

determination to take no step beyond the line of duty, the more

conciliatory we should be. But many people seem to think that heroism

is shown by rudeness, and that if we are afraid that we shall some time

have to say No' very emphatically, we should prepare for it by a great

many preliminary and unnecessary negatives. The very stern need for

parting company, when conscience points one way and companions another,

is a reason for keeping cordially together whenever we can.

The prince of the eunuchs' made a very reasonable objection. He had

been appointed to see after the health of the lads, and had ample means

at his disposal; and if they lost their health in this chase after what

he could only think a superstitious fad, the despot whom he served

would think nothing of making him answer with his head. His fear gives

a striking side-light as to the conditions of service in such a court,

where no man's head was firm between his shoulders. Why should the

prince of the eunuchs have supposed that the diet asked for would not

nourish the lads? It was that of the bulk of men everywhere, and he had

only to go out into the streets or the nearest barrack in Babylon to

see what thews and muscles could be nurtured on vegetable diet and

water. But whatever the want of ground in his objection, it was enough

that he made it. Note that he puts it entirely on possible harmful

results to himself, and that silences Daniel, who had no right to ask

another to run his head into the noose, into which he was ready to put

his own, if necessary. Martyrs by proxy, who have such strong

convictions that they think it somebody else's duty to run risk for

them, are by no means unknown.

This boy was made of other metal. So, apparently he gives up the prince

of the eunuchs, and turns to another of the friends whom he had made in

his short captivity--the person in whose more immediate charge he and

his three friends were. He is named Melzar in the Authorised Version;

but the Revised Version more accurately takes that to be a name of

office, and translates it as steward.' He did the catering for them,

and was sufficiently friendly to listen to Daniel's reasonable proposal

to try the vegetable diet for ten days'--probably meaning an indefinite

period, sufficiently long to test results, which a literal ten days

would perhaps scarcely be. So the good-natured steward let the lads

have their way, much wondering in his soul, no doubt, why they should

take as much trouble to avoid good living as most youths would have

taken to get it.

III. The success of the experiment comes next. We do not need to

suppose a miracle as either wrought or suggested by the narrative. The

issue might have taught the steward a wholesome lesson in dietetics,

which he and a great many of us much need. A man's life consisteth not

in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,' and his bodily

life consisteth not in the abundance and variety of the things that he

eateth. The teaching of this lesson is, not that vegetarianism or total

abstinence is obligatory, for diet is here regarded only as part of

idolatrous worship; but certainly a secondary conclusion, fairly drawn

from the story, is that vigorous health is best kept up on very simple

fare. Many dinner-tables, over which God's blessing is formally asked,

are spread in such a fashion as it is hard to suppose deserves His

blessing. The simpler the fare, the fewer the wants: the fewer the

wants, the greater the riches; the freer the life, the more leisure for

higher pursuits, and the more sound the bodily health.

But the rosy faces and vigorous health of Daniel and his friends may

illustrate, by a picturesque example, a large truth--that God suffers

no man to be a loser by faithfulness, and more than makes up all that

is surrendered for His sake. The blessing of God on small means makes

them fountains of truer joy than large ones unblessed. No man hath left

anything for Christ's sake but he receives a hundred-fold in this life,

if not in the actual blessings surrendered, at all events in the peace

and joy of heart of which they were supposed to be bearers. God fills

places emptied by Himself, and those emptied by us for His sake.

IV. The conscientious abstinence of Daniel had limits. The learning of

the Chaldeans' was largely ritualistic, and magic, incantations,

divination, and mythology constituted a most important part of it. Did

not the conscience, which could not swallow idolatrous food, resent

being forced to assimilate idolatrous learning? No; for all that

learning could be acquired by a faithful monotheist, and could be used

against the system which gave it birth. Like Moses, or like the young

Pharisee Saul, these Jewish boys nurtured their faith by knowledge of

their enemies' belief, and used their childhood's lessons as weapons in

fighting for God's truth. It is not every man's duty to become familiar

with error, or to master anti-Christian systems. But if it become ours,

we are not to turn away from the task, nor to doubt that God will keep

His own truth alight in our minds, if we realise the danger of the

position, and seek to cling to Him.

V. So we have the last scene in the youths' appearance before

Nebuchadnezzar. A three years' curriculum was considered necessary to

turn a Jewish boy into a Chaldean expert, fit to be a traitor to his

nation, an apostate from his God, and a tool of the tyrant. So far as

knowledge of the priestly and astronomical science went, the four

Hebrews came out at the top of the lists. The great king himself, with

that personal interference in all departments which makes a despot's

life so burdensome, put them through their paces, and was satisfied.

His object had been to get instruments with which he could work on the

Captivity, and, no doubt, also to secure servants who had no links with

anybody in Babylon. Foreigners, kinless loons,' are favourites with

despots, for plain reasons. But Nebuchadnezzar could not fathom the

hearts of the lads. An incarnation of unbridled will would find it

difficult to understand a life guided by conscience, and religious

scruples would have sounded as an unknown tongue to him. But yet, as he

and they stood face to face, who was stronger, the conqueror or the

youths who feared God, and none besides? They were in their right place

at the head of the examination lists. They had not said, We do not

believe in all this rubbish, and we are not going to trouble ourselves

to master it,' but they had set themselves determinedly to work, and

been all the more persevering because of their objection to the diet.

If a young man has to be singular by reason of his religion, let him be

singularly diligent in his work, and seek to be first, not merely for

his own glory, but for the sake of the religion which he professes.

Plain living and high thinking' ought to go together. England and

America have many names carved high on their annals, and written deep

on their citizens' hearts, who have nourished a sublime, studious youth

in poverty, cultivating literature on a little oatmeal,' and who all

their lives have scorned delights and lived laborious days.' It is the

temper which is most likely to succeed, but which, whether it succeeds

or not, brings the best blessings to those who cultivate it. Such a

youth will generally be followed by an honoured manhood like Daniel's,

but will, at all events, be its own reward, and have God's blessing.

Daniel continued unto the first year of king Cyrus.' These simple words

contain volumes. During all the troubles of the nation, from the king's

insanity, and the murders of his successors, amidst whirling intrigues,

envies, plots, and persecutions, this one man stood firm, like a pillar

amid blowing sands. So God keeps the steadfast soul which is fixed on

Him; and while the world passeth away, and the fashion thereof, he that

doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

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THE IMAGE AND THE STONE

This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before

the king. 37. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven

hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. 38. And

wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the

fowls of the heaven hath He given into thine hand, and hath made thee

ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold. 39. And after thee

shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom

of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. 40. And the fourth

kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces

and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it

break in pieces and bruise. 41. And whereas thou sawest the feet and

toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be

divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron,

forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. 42. And as the

toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom

shall be partly strong, and partly broken. 43. And whereas thou sawest

iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed

of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not

mixed with clay. 44. And in the days of these kings shall the God of

heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the

kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces

and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. 45.

Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain

without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the

clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the

king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and

the interpretation thereof sure. 46. Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell

upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should

offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. 47. The king answered unto

Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and

a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal

this secret. 48. Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him

many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of

Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

49. Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach,

and Abed-nego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel

sat in the gate of the king.'--DANIEL ii. 36-49.

The colossal image, seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, was a

reproduction of those which met his waking eyes, and still remain for

our wonder in our museums. The mingled materials are paralleled in

ancient art. The substance of the dream is no less natural than its

form. The one is suggested by familiar sights; the other, by pressing

anxieties. What more likely than that, in the second year of his reign'

(v. 1), waking thoughts of the future of his monarchy should trouble

the warrior-king, scarcely yet firm on his throne, and should repeat

themselves in nightly visions? God spoke through the dream, and He is

not wont to answer questions before they are asked, nor to give

revelations to men on points which they have not sought to solve. We

may be sure that Nebuchadnezzar's dream met his need.

The unreasonable demand that the Chaldeans' should show the dream as

well as interpret it, fits the character of the king, as an imperious

despot, intolerant of obstacles to his will, and holding human life

very cheap. Daniel's knowledge of the dream and of its meaning is given

to him in a vision by night, which is the method of divine illumination

throughout the book, and may be regarded as a lower stage thereof than

the communications to prophets of the word of the Lord.'

The passage falls into two parts: the image and the stone.

I. The Image.

It was a human form of strangely mingled materials, of giant size no

doubt, and of majestic aspect. Barbarous enough it would have looked

beside the marble lovelinesses of Greece, but it was quite like the

coarser art which sought for impressiveness through size and

costliness. Other people than Babylonian sculptors think that bigness

is greatness, and dearness preciousness.

This image embodied what is now called a philosophy of history. It set

forth the fruitful idea of a succession and unity in the rise and fall

of conquerors and kingdoms. The four empires represented by it are

diverse, and yet parts of a whole, and each following on the other. So

the truth is taught that history is an organic whole, however unrelated

its events may appear to a superficial eye. The writer of this book had

learned lessons far in advance of his age, and not yet fully grasped by

many so-called historians.

But, further, the human figure of the image sets forth all these

kingdoms as being purely the work of men. Not that the overruling

divine providence is ignored, but that the play of human passions, the

lust of conquest and the like, and the use of human means, such as

armies, are emphasised.

Again, the kingdoms are seen in their brilliancy, as they would

naturally appear to the thoughts of a conqueror, whose highest notion

of glory was earthly dominion, and who was indifferent to the suffering

and blood through which he waded to a throne. When the same kingdoms

are shown to Daniel in chapter vii. they are represented by beasts.

Their cruelty and the destruction of life which they caused were

uppermost in a prophet's view; their vulgar splendour dazzled a king's

sleeping eyes, because it had intoxicated his waking thoughts. Much

worldly glory and many of its aims appear as precious metal to

dreamers, but are seen by an illuminated sight to be bestial and

destructive.

Once more there is a steady process of deterioration in the four

kingdoms. Gold is followed by silver, and that by brass, and that by

the strange combination of iron and clay. This may simply refer to the

diminution of worldly glory, but it may also mean deterioration,

morally and otherwise. Is it not the teaching of Scripture that, unless

God interpose, society will steadily slide downwards? And has not the

fact been so, wherever the brake and lever of revelation have not

arrested the decline and effected elevation? We are told nowadays of

evolution, as if the progress of humanity were upwards; but if you

withdraw the influence of supernatural revelation, the evidence of

power in manhood to work itself clear of limitations and lower forms is

very ambiguous at the best--in reference to morals, at all events. Evil

is capable of development, as well as good; and perhaps

Nebuchadnezzar's colossus is a truer representation of the course of

humanity than the dreams of modern thinkers who see manhood becoming

steadily better by its own effort, and think that the clay and iron

have inherent power to pass into fine gold.

The question of the identification of these successive monarchies does

not fall to be discussed here. But I may observe that the definite

statement of verse 44 (in the days of these kings') seems to date the

rise of the everlasting kingdom of God in the period of the last of the

four, and therefore that the old interpretation of the fourth kingdom

as the Roman seems the most natural. The force of that remark may, no

doubt, be weakened by the consideration that the Old Testament

prophets' perspective of the future brought the coming of Messiah into

immediate juxtaposition with the limits of their own vision; but still

it has force.

The allocation of each part of the symbol is of less importance for us

than the lessons to be drawn from it as a whole. But the singular

amalgam of iron and clay in the fourth kingdom is worth notice. No

sculptor or metallurgist could make a strong unity out of such

materials, of which the combination could only be apparent and

superficial. The fact to which it points is the artificial unity into

which the great conquering empires of old crushed their unfortunate

subject peoples, who were hammered, not fused, together. They shall

mingle themselves with the seed of men' (ver. 43), may either refer to

the attempts to bring about unity by marriages among different races,

or to other vain efforts to the same end. To obliterate nationalities

has always been the conquering despot's effort, from Nebuchadnezzar to

the Czar of Russia, and it always fails. This is the weakness of these

huge empires of antiquity, which have no internal cohesion, and tumble

to pieces as soon as some external bond is loosened. There is only one

kingdom which has no disintegrating forces lodged in it, because it

unites men individually to its king, and so binds them to one another;

and that is the kingdom which Nebuchadnezzar saw in its destructive

aspect.

II. So we have now to think of the stone cut out without hands.

Three things are specified with regard to it: its origin, its duration,

and its destructive energy. The origin is heavenly, in sharp contrast

to the human origin of the kingdoms symbolised in the colossal man.

That idea is twice expressed: once in plain words, the God of heaven

shall set up a kingdom'; and once figuratively as being cut out of the

mountain without hands. By the mountain we are probably to understand

Zion, from which, according to many a prophecy, the Messiah King was to

rule the earth (Ps. ii.; Isa. ii. 3).

The fulfilment of this prediction is found, not only in the

supernatural birth of Jesus Christ, but in the spread of the gospel

without any of the weapons and aids of human power. Twelve poor men

spoke, and the world was shaken and the kingdoms remoulded. The seer

had learned the omnipotence of ideas and the weakness of outward force.

A thought from God is stronger than all armies, and outconquers

conquerors. By the mystery of Christ's Incarnation, by the power of

weakness in the preachers of the Cross, by the energies of the

transforming Spirit, the God of heaven has set up the kingdom. It shall

never be destroyed.' Its divine origin guarantees its perpetual

duration. The kingdoms of man's founding, whether they be in the realm

of thought or of outward dominion, have their day, and cease to be,'

but the kingdom of Christ lasts as long as the eternal life of its

King. He cannot die any more, and He cannot live discrowned. Other

forms of human association perish, as new conditions come into play

which antiquate them; but the kingdom of Jesus is as flexible as it is

firm, and has power to adapt to itself all conditions in which men can

live. It will outlast earth, it will fill eternity; for when He shall

have delivered up the kingdom to His Father,' the kingdom, which the

God of heaven set up, will still continue.

It shall not be left to other people.' By that, seems to be meant that

this kingdom will not be like those of human origin, in which dominion

passes from one race to another, but that Israel shall ever be the

happy subjects and the dominant race. We must interpret the words of

the spiritual Israel, and remember how to be Christ's subject is to

belong to a nation who are kings and priests.

The destructive power is graphically represented. The stone, detached

from the mountain, and apparently self-moved, dashes against the

heterogeneous mass of iron and clay on which the colossus insecurely

stands, and down it comes with a crash, breaking into a thousand

fragments as it falls. Like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors'

(Daniel ii. 35) is the d�bris, which is whirled out of sight by the

wind. Christ and His kingdom have reshaped the world. These ancient,

hideous kingdoms of blood and misery are impossible now. Christ and His

gospel shattered the Roman empire, and cast Europe into another mould.

They have destructive work to do yet, and as surely as the sun rises

daily, will do it. The things that can be shaken will be shaken till

they fall, and human society will never obtain its stable form till it

is moulded throughout after the pattern of the kingdom of Christ.

The vision of our passage has no reference to the quickening power of

the kingdom; but the best way in which it destroys is by

transformation. It slays the old and lower forms of society by

substituting the purer which flow from possession of the one Spirit.

That highest glory of the work of Christ is but partially represented

here, but there is a hint in Daniel ii. 35, which tells that the stone

has a strange vitality, and can grow, and does grow, till it becomes an

earth-filling mountain.

That issue is not reached yet; but the dream is certain.' The kingdom

is concentrated in its King, and the life of Jesus, diffused through

His servants, works to the increase of the empire, and will not cease

till the kingdoms of the world are the kingdoms of our God and of His

Christ. That stone has vital power, and if we build on it we receive,

by wonderful impartation, a kindred derived life, and become living

stones.' It is laid for a sure foundation. If a man stumble over it

while it lies there to be built upon, he will lame and maim himself.

But it will one day have motion given to it, and, falling from the

height of heaven, when He comes to judge the world which He rules and

has redeemed, it will grind to powder all who reject the rule of the

everlasting King of men.

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HARMLESS FIRES

Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king.

14. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden

image which I have set up? 15. Now if ye be ready that at what time ye

hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and

dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image

which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the

same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that

God that shall deliver you out of my hands? 16. Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not

careful to answer thee in this matter. 17. If it be so, our God whom we

serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will

deliver us out of thine hand, O king. 18. But if not, be it known unto

thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden

image which thou hast set up. 19. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury,

and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abed-nego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the

furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. 20. And he

commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to cast them into the burning fiery

furnace. 21. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and

their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of

the burning fiery furnace. 22. Therefore because the king's commandment

was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew

those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. 23. And these

three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the

midst of the burning fiery furnace. 24. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king

was astonied, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his

counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the

fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. 25. He

answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of

the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the

Son of God.'--DANIEL iii. 13-25.

The way in which the Chaldeans' describe the three recusants, betrays

their motive in accusing them. Certain Jews whom thou hast set over the

affairs of the province of Babylon' could not but be envied and hated,

since their promotion wounded both national pride and professional

jealousy. The form of the accusation was skilfully calculated to rouse

a despot's rage. They have not regarded thee' is the head and front of

their offending. The inflammable temper of the king blazed up according

to expectation, as is the way with tyrants. His passion of rage is

twice mentioned (vs. 13, 19), and in one of the instances, is noted as

distorting his features. What a picture of ungoverned fury as of one

who had never been thwarted! It is the true portrait of an Eastern

despot.

Where was Daniel in this hour of danger? His absence is not accounted

for, and conjecture is useless; but the fact that he has no share in

the incident seems to raise a presumption in favour of the disputed

historical character of the Book, which, if it had been fiction, could

scarcely have left its hero out of so brilliant an instance of

faithfulness to Jehovah.

Nebuchadnezzar's vehement address to the three culprits is very

characteristic and instructive. Fixed determination to enforce his

mandate, anger which breaks into threats that were by no means idle,

and a certain wish to build a bridge for the escape of servants who had

done their work well, are curiously mingled in it. His question, best

rendered as in the Revised Version, Is it of purpose . . . that ye' do

so and so? seems meant to suggest that they may repair their fault by

pleading inadvertence, accident, or the like, and that He will accept

the transparent excuse. The renewed offer of an opportunity of worship

does not say what will happen should they obey; and the omission makes

the clause more emphatic, as insisting on the act, and slurring over

the self-evident result.

On the other hand, in the next clause the act is slightly touched (if

ye worship not'); and all the stress comes on the grim description of

the consequence. This monarch, who has been accustomed to bend men's

wills like reeds, tries to shake these three obstinate rebels by

terror, and opens the door of the furnace, as it were, to let them hear

it roar. He finishes with a flash of insolence which, if not blasphemy,

at least betrays his belief that he was stronger than any god of his

conquered subject peoples.

But the main point to notice in this speech is the unconscious

revelation of his real motive in demanding the act of worship. The

crime of the three was not that they worshipped wrongly, but that they

disobeyed Nebuchadnezzar. He speaks of my gods', and of the image which

I have set up.' Probably it was an image of the god of the Babylonian

pantheon whom he took for his special patron, and was erected in

commemoration of some victorious campaign.

At all events, the worship required was an act of obedience to him, and

to refuse it was rebellion. Idolatry is tolerant of any private

opinions about gods, and intolerant of any refusal to obey authority in

worship. So the early Christians were thrown to the lions, not because

they worshipped Jesus, but because they would not sacrifice at the

Emperor's command. It is not only heathen rulers who have confounded

the spheres of civil and religious obedience. Nonconformity in England

was long identified with disloyalty; and in many so-called Christian

countries to-day a man may think what he likes, and worship as he

pleases in his chamber, if only he will decently comply with authority

and pretend to unite in religious ceremonies, which those who appoint

and practise them observe with tongue in cheek.

But we may draw another lesson from this truculent apostle of his god.

He is not the only instance of apparent religious zeal which is at

bottom nothing but masterfulness. You shall worship my god, not because

he is God, but because he is mine.' That is the real meaning of a great

deal which calls itself zeal for the Lord.' The zealot's own will,

opinions, fancies, are crammed down other people's throats, and the

insult in not thinking or worshipping as he does, is worse in his eyes

than the offence against God.

The kind of furnace in which recusants are roasted has changed since

Nebuchadnezzar's time, and what is called persecution for religion is

out of fashion now. But every advance in the application of Christian

principle to social and civil life brings a real martyrdom on its

advocates. Every audacious refusal to bow to the habits or opinions of

the majority, is visited by consequences which only the martyr spirit

will endure. Despots have no monopoly of imperious intolerance. A

democracy is more cruel and more impatient of singularity, and

especially of religious singularity, than any despot.

England and America have no need to fear the old forms of religious

persecution. In both, a man may profess and proclaim any kind of

religion or of no religion. But in both, the advance guard of the

Christian Church, which seeks to apply Christ's teachings more rigidly

to individual and social life, has to face obloquy, ostracism,

misrepresentation, from the world and the fossil church, for not

serving their gods, nor worshipping the golden image which they have

set up. Martyrs will be needed and persecutors will exist till the

world is Christian.

How did the three confessors meet this rumble of thunder about their

ears? The quiet determination of their reply is very striking and

beautiful. It is perfectly loyal, and perfectly unshaken. We have no

need to answer thee' (Revised Version). It is ill sitting at Rome and

striving with the Pope.' Nebuchadnezzar's palace was not precisely the

place to dispute with Nebuchadnezzar; and as his logic was only Do as I

bid you, or burn,' the sole reply possible was, We will not do as you

bid, and we will burn.' The If' which is immediately spoken is already

in the minds of the speakers, when they say that they do not need to

answer. They think that God will take up the taunt which ended the

king's tirade. Beautifully they are silent, and refer the blusterer to

God, whose voice they believe that He will hear in His deed. But Thou

shalt answer, Lord, for me,' is the true temper of humble faith, dumb

before power as a sheep before her shearers, and yet confident that the

meek will not be left unvindicated. Let us leave ourselves in God's

hands; and when conscience accuses, or the world maligns or threatens,

let us be still, and feel that we have One to speak for us, and so we

may hold our peace.

The rendering of verse 17 is doubtful, but the general meaning is

clear. The brave speakers have hope that God will rebuke the king's

taunt, and will prove Himself to be able to deliver out of his hand. So

they repeat his very words with singular boldness, and contradict him

to his face. They have no absolute certainty of deliverance, but

whether it comes or not will make no manner of difference to them. They

have absolute certainty as to duty; and so they look the furious tyrant

right in the eyes, and quietly say, We will not serve thy gods.'

Nothing like that had ever been heard in those halls.

Duty is sovereign. The obligation to resist all temptations to go

against conscience is unaffected by consequences. There may be hope

that God will not suffer us to be harmed, but whether He does or not

should make no difference to our fixed resolve. That temper of lowly

faith and inflexible faithfulness which these Hebrews showed in the

supreme moment, when they took their lives in their hands, may be as

nobly illustrated in the small difficulties of our peaceful lives. The

same laws shape the curves of the tiny ripples in a basin and of the

Atlantic rollers. No man who cannot say I will not' in the face of

frowns and dangers, be they what they may, and stick to it, will do his

part, He who has conquered regard for personal consequences, and does

not let them deflect his course a hairsbreadth, is lord of the world.

How small Nebuchadnezzar was by the side of his three victims! How

empty his threats to men who cared nothing whether they burned or not,

so long as they did not apostatise! What can the world do against a man

who says, It is all one to me whether I live or die; I will not worship

at your shrines?' The fire of the furnace is but painted flames to such

an one.

The savage punishment intended for the audacious rebels is abundantly

confirmed as common in Babylon by the inscriptions, which may be seen

quoted by many commentators. The narrative is exceedingly graphic. We

see the furious king, with features inflamed with passion. We hear his

hoarse, angry orders to heat the furnace seven times hotter, which he

forgot would be a mercy, as shortening the victims' agonies. We see the

swift execution of the commands, and the unresisting martyrs bound as

they stood, and dragged away by the soldiers to the near furnace, the

king following. Its shape is a matter of doubt. Probably the three were

thrown in from above, and so the soldiers were caught by the flames.

And these three men . . . fell down bound into the midst of the burning

fiery furnace' Their helplessness and desperate condition are

pathetically suggested by that picture, which might well be supposed to

be the last of them that mortal eyes would see. Down into the glowing

mass, like chips of wood into Vesuvius, they sank. The king sitting

watching, to glut his fury by the sight of their end, had some way of

looking into the core of the flames.

The story shifts its point of view with very picturesque abruptness

after verse 23. The vaunting king shall tell what he saw, and thereby

convict himself of insolent folly in challenging any god' to deliver

out of his hand. He alone seems to have seen the sight, which he tells

to his courtiers. The bonds were gone, and the men walking free in the

fire, as if it had been their element. Three went in bound, four walk

there at large; and the fourth is like a son of the gods,' by which

expression Nebuchadnezzar can have meant nothing more than he had

learned from his religion; namely, that the gods had offspring of

superhuman dignity. He calls the same person an angel in Daniel iii.

28. He speaks there as the three would have spoken, and here as

Babylonian mythology spoke.

But the great lesson to be gathered from this miracle of deliverance is

simply that men who sacrifice themselves for God find in the sacrifice

abundant blessing. They may, or may not, be delivered from the external

danger. Peter was brought out of prison the night before his intended

martyrdom; James, the brother of John, was slain with the sword, but

God was equally near to both, and both were equally delivered from

Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.' The

disposal of the outward event is in His hands, and is a comparatively

small matter. But no furnace into which a man goes because he will be

true to God, and will not yield up his conscience, is a tenth part so

hot as it seems, and it will do no real harm. The fire burns bonds, but

not Christ's servants, consuming many things that entangled, and

setting them free. I will walk at liberty: for I seek Thy

precepts'--even if we have to walk in the furnace. No trials faced in

obedience to God will be borne alone. When thou passest through the

waters, I will be with thee; . . . when thou walkest through the fire,

thou shalt not be burned.'

The form which Nebuchadnezzar saw amid the flame, as invested with more

than human majesty, may have been but one of the ministering spirits

sent forth to minister to the martyrs--the embodiment of the divine

power which kept the flames from kindling upon them. But we have Jesus

for our Companion in all trials, and His presence makes it possible for

us to pass over hot ploughshares with unblistered feet; to bathe our

hands in fire and not feel the pain; to accept the sorest consequences

of fidelity to Him, and count them as not worthy to be compared with

the glory which shall be revealed,' and is made more glorious through

these light afflictions. A present Christ will never fail His servants,

and will make the furnace cool even when its fire is fiercest.

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MENE, TEKEL, PERES

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to

thyself, and give thy rewards to another: yet I will read the writing

unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. 18. O thou

king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and

majesty, and glory, and honour: 19. And for the majesty that he gave

him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before

him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom

he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. 20. But when his

heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed

from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: 21. And he

was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the

beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with

grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he

knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he

appointeth over it whomsoever he will. 22. And thou his son, O

Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this:

23. But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven: and they

have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy

lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou

hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and

stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy

breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: 24.

Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was

written. 25. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE,

TEKEL, UPHARSIN.' 26. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE;

God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. 27. TEKEL; Thou art

weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. 28. PERES; Thy kingdom

is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. 29. Then commanded

Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of

gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he

should be the third ruler in the kingdom. 30. In that night was

Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. 31. And Darius the Median

took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.'--DANIEL v.

17-31.

Belshazzar is now conceded to have been a historical personage, the son

of the last monarch of Babylon, and the other name in the narrative

which has been treated as erroneous--namely, Darius--has not been found

to be mentioned elsewhere, but is not thereby proved to be a blunder.

For why should it not be possible for Scripture to preserve a name that

secular history has not yet been ascertained to record, and why must it

always be assumed that, if Scripture and cuneiform or other documents

differ, it is Scripture that must go to the wall?

We do not deal with the grim picture of the drunken orgy, turned into

abject terror as the fingers of a man's hand' came forth out of empty

air, and in the full blaze of the candlestick' wrote the illegible

signs. There is something blood-curdling in the visibility of but a

part of the hand and its busy writing. Whose was the body, and where

was it? No wonder if the riotous mirth was frozen into awe, and the

wine lost flavour. Nor need we do more than note the craven-hearted

flattery addressed to Daniel by the king, who apparently had never

heard of him till the queen spoke of him just before. We have to deal

with the indictment, the sentence, and the execution.

I. The indictment. Daniel's tone is noticeably stern. He has no

reverential preface, no softening of his message. His words are as if

cut with steel on the rock. He brushes aside the promises of vulgar

decorations and honours with undisguised contempt, and goes straight to

his work of rousing a torpid conscience.

Babylon was the embodiment and type of the godless world-power, and

Belshazzar was the incarnation of the spirit which made Babylon. So

Daniel's indictment gathers together the main forms of sin, which

cleave to every godless national or individual life. And he begins with

that feather-brained frivolity which will learn nothing by example.

Nebuchadnezzar's fate might have taught his successors what came of

God-forgetting arrogance, and attributing success to oneself; and his

restoration might have been an object-lesson to teach that devout

recognition of the Most High as sovereign was the beginning of a king's

prosperity and sanity. But Belshazzar knew all this, and ignored it

all. Was he singular in that? Is not the world full of instances of the

ruin that attends godlessness, which yet do not check one godless man

in his career? The wrecks lie thick on the shore, but their broken

sides and gaunt skeletons are not warnings sufficient to keep a

thousand other ships from steering right on to the shoals. Of these

godless lives it is true, This their way is their folly; yet their

posterity approve their sayings,' and their doings, and say and do them

over again. Incapacity to learn by example is a mark of godless lives.

Further, Belshazzar lifted up' himself against the Lord of heaven,' and

glorified not Him in whose hand was his breath and whose were all his

ways.' The very essence of all sin is that assertion of self as Lord,

as sufficient, as the director of one's path. To make myself my centre,

to depend on myself, to enthrone my own will as sovereign, is to fly in

the face of nature and fact, and is the mother of all sin. To live to

self is to die while we live; to live to God is to live even while we

die. Nations and individuals are ever tempted thus to ignore God, and

rebelliously to say, Who is Lord over us?' or presumptuously to think

themselves architects of their own fortunes, and sufficient for their

own defence. Whoever yields to that temptation has let the prince of

the devils' in, and the inferior evil spirits will follow. Positive

acts are not needed; the negative omission to glorify' the God of our

life binds sin on us.

Further, Belshazzar, the type of godlessness, had desecrated the

sacrificial vessels by using them for his drunken carouse, and therein

had done just what we do when we take the powers of heart and mind and

will, which are meant to be filled with affections, thoughts, and

purposes, that are an odour of a sweet smell, well-pleasing to God,'

and desecrate them by pouring from them libations before creatures. Is

not love profaned when it is lavished on men or women without one

reference to God? Is not the intellect desecrated when its force is

spent on finite objects of thought, and never a glance towards God? Is

not the will prostituted from its high vocation when it is used to

drive the wheels of a God-ignoring life?

The coin bears the image and superscription of the true king. It is

treason to God to render it to any paltry C泡r' of our own coronation.

Belshazzar was an avowed idolater, but many of us are worshipping gods

which see not, nor hear, nor know' as really as he did. We cannot but

do so, if we are not worshipping God; for men must have some person or

thing which they regard as their supreme good, to which the current of

their being sets, which, possessed, makes them blessed; and that is our

god, whether we call it so or not.

Further, Belshazzar was carousing while the Medes and Persians were

ringing Babylon round, and his hand should have been grasping a sword,

not a wine-cup. Drunkenness and lust, which sap manhood, are

notoriously stimulated by peril, as many a shipwreck tells when

desperate men break open the spirit casks, and go down to their death

intoxicated, and as many an epidemic shows when morality is flung

aside, and mad vice rules and reels in the streets before it sinks down

to die. A nation or a man that has shaken off God will not long keep

sobriety or purity.

II. After the stern catalogue of sins comes the tremendous sentence.

Daniel speaks like an embodied conscience, or like an avenging angel,

with no word of pity, and no effort to soften or dilute the awful

truth. The day for wrapping up grim facts in muffled words was past.

Now the only thing to be done was to bare the sword, and let its sharp

edge cut. The inscription, as given in verse 25, is simply Numbered,

numbered, weighed and breakings.' The variation in verse 28 (Peres) is

the singular of the noun used in the plural in verse 25, with the

omission of U,' which is merely the copulative and.' The disjointed

brevity adds to the force of the words. Apparently, they were not

written in a character which the king's wise men' could read, and

probably were in Aramaic letters as well as language, which would be

familiar to Daniel. Of course, a play on the word Peres' suggests the

Persian as the agent of the breaking. Daniel simply supplied the

personal application of the oracular writing. He fits the cap on the

king's head. God hath numbered thy kingdom . . . thou art weighed . . .

thy kingdom is divided' (broken).

These three fatal words carry in them the summing up of all divine

judgment, and will be rung in the ears of all who bring it on

themselves. Belshazzar is a type of the end of every godless

world-power and of every such individual life. Numbered'--for God

allows to each his definite time, and when its sum is complete, down

falls the knife that cuts the threads. Weighed'--for after death the

judgment,' and a godless life, when laid in the balance which His hand

holds, is altogether lighter than vanity.' Breakings'--for not only

will the godless life be torn away from its possessions with much

laceration of heart and spirit, but the man himself will be broken like

some earthen vessel coming into sharp collision with an express engine.

Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the same night in which it was

carried out in act; we see it long before, and we can read it. But some

of us are mad enough to sit unconcerned at the table, and go on with

the orgy, though the legible letters are gleaming plain on the wall.

III. The execution of the sentence need not occupy us long. Belshazzar

so little realised the facts, that he issued his order to deck out

Daniel in the tawdry pomp he had promised him, as if a man with such a

message would be delighted with purple robes and gold chains, and made

him third ruler of the kingdom which he had just declared was numbered

and ended by God. The force of folly could no further go. No wonder

that the hardy invaders swept such an Imbecile from his throne without

a struggle! His blood was red among the lees of the wine-cups, and the

ominous writing could scarcely have faded from the wall when the shouts

of the assailants were heard, the palace gates forced, and the

half-drunken king, alarmed too late, put to the sword. He that, being

often reproved, hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and

that without remedy.'

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A TRIBUTE FROM ENEMIES

Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this

Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his

God.'--DANIEL vi. 5.

Daniel was somewhere about ninety years old when he was cast to the

lions. He had been for many years the real governor of the whole

empire; and, of course, in such a position had incurred much hatred and

jealousy. He was a foreigner and a worshipper of another God, and

therefore was all the more unpopular, as a Brahmin would be in England

if he were a Cabinet Minister. He was capable and honest, and therefore

all the incompetent and all the knavish officials would recognise in

him their natural enemy. So, hostile intrigues, which grow quickly in

courts, especially in Eastern courts, sprung up round him, and his

subordinates laid their heads together in order to ruin him. They say,

in the words of my text, We cannot find any holes to pick. There is

only one way to put him into antagonism to the law, and that is by

making a law which shall be in antagonism to God's law.' And so they

scheme to have the mad regulation enacted, which, in the sequel of the

story, we find was enforced.

These intriguers say, We shall not find any occasion against this

Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.'

Now, then, if we look at that confession, wrung from the lips of

malicious observers, we may, I think, get two or three lessons.

I. First, note the very unfavourable soil in which a character of

singular beauty and devout consecration may be rooted and grow.

What sort of a place was that court where Daniel was? Half shambles and

half pigsty. Luxury, sensuality, lust, self-seeking, idolatry, ruthless

cruelty, and the like were the environment of this man. And in the

middle of these there grew up that fair flower of a character, pure and

stainless, by the acknowledgment of enemies, and in which not even

accusers could find a speck or a spot. There are no circumstances in

which a man must have his garments spotted by the world. However deep

the filth through which he has to wade, if God sent him there, and if

he keeps hold of God's hand, his purity will be more stainless by

reason of the impurity round him. There were saints in C泡r's

household, and depend upon it, they were more saintly saints just

because they were in C泡r's household. You will always find that

people who have any goodness in them, and who live in conditions

unusually opposed to goodness, have a clearer faith, and a firmer grasp

of their Master, and a higher ideal of Christian life, just because of

the foulness in which they have to live. It may sound a paradox, but it

is a deep truth that unfavourable circumstances are the most favourable

for the development of Christian character. For that development comes,

not by what we draw from the things around, but by what we draw from

the soil in which we are rooted, even God Himself, in whom the roots

find both anchorage and nutriment. And the more we are thrown back upon

Him, and the less we find food for our best selves in the things about

us, the more likely is our religion to be robust and thorough-going,

and conscious ever of His presence. Resistance strengthens muscles, and

the more there is need for that in our Christian lives, the manlier and

the stronger and the better shall we probably be. Let no man or woman

say, If only circumstances were more favourable, oh, what a saint I

could be; but how can I be one, with all these unfavourable conditions?

How can a man keep the purity of his Christian life and the fervour of

his Christian communion amidst the tricks and chicanery and small

things of Manchester business? How can a woman find time to hold

fellowship with God, when all day long she is distracted in her nursery

with all these children hanging on her to look after? How can we, in

our actual circumstances, reach the ideal of Christian character?'

Ah, brother, if the ideal's being realised depends on circumstances, it

is a poor affair. It depends on you, and he that has vitality enough

within him to keep hold of Jesus Christ, has thereby power enough

within him to turn enemies into friends, and unfavourable circumstances

into helps instead of hindrances. Your ship can sail wonderfully near

to the wind if you trim the sails rightly, and keep a good, strong grip

on the helm, and the blasts that blow all but in your face, may be made

to carry you triumphantly into the haven of your desire. Remember

Daniel, in that godless court reeking with lust and cruelty, and learn

that purity and holiness and communion with God do not depend on

environment, but upon the inmost will of the man.

II. Notice the keen critics that all good men have to face.

In this man's case, of course, their eyesight was mended by the

microscope of envy and malice. That is no doubt the case with some of

us too. But whether that be so or no, however unobtrusive and quiet a

Christian person's life may be, there will be some people standing

close by who, if not actually watching for his fall, are at least by no

means indisposed to make the worst of a slip, and to rejoice over an

inconsistency.

We do not need to complain of that. It is perfectly reasonable and

perfectly right. There will always be a tendency to judge men, who by

any means profess that they are living by the highest law, with a

judgment that has very little charity in it. And it is perfectly right

that it should be so. Christian people need to be trained to be

indifferent to men's opinions, but they also need to be reminded that

they are bound, as the Apostle says, to provide things honest in the

sight of all men.' It is a reasonable and right requirement that they

should have a good report of them that are without.' Be content to be

tried by a high standard, and do not wonder, and do not forget that

there are keen eyes watching your conduct, in your home, in your

relations to your friends, in your business, in your public life, which

would weep no tears, but might gleam with malicious satisfaction, if

they saw inconsistencies in you. Remember it, and shape your lives so

that they may be disappointed.

If a minister falls into any kind of inconsistency or sin, if a

professing Christian makes a bad failure in Manchester, what a talk

there is, and what a pointing of fingers! We sometimes think it is

hard; it is all right. It is just what should be meted out to us. Let

us remember that unslumbering tribunal which sits in judgment upon all

our professions, and is very ready to condemn, and very slow to acquit.

III. Notice, again, the unblemished record.

These men could find no fault, forasmuch as Daniel was faithful.'

Neither was there any error'--of judgment, that is,--or

fault'--dereliction of duty, that is,--found in him.' They were very

poor judges of his religion, and they did not try to judge that; but

they were very good judges of his conduct as prime minister, and they

did judge that. The world is a very poor critic of my Christianity, but

it is a very sufficient one of my conduct. It may not know much about

the inward emotions of the Christian life, and the experiences in which

the Christian heart expatiates and loves to dwell, but it knows what

short lengths, and light weights, and bad tempers, and dishonesty, and

selfishness are. And it is by our conduct, in the things that they and

we do together, that worldly men judge what we are in the solitary

depths where we dwell in communion with God. It is useless for

Christians to be talking, as so many of them are fond of doing, about

their spiritual experiences and their religious joy, and all the other

sweet and sacred things which belong to the silent life of the spirit

in God, unless, side by side with these, there is the doing of the

common deeds which the world is actually able to appraise in such a

fashion as to extort, even from them, the confession, We find no

occasion against this man.'

You remember the pregnant, quaint old saying, If a Christian man is a

shoeblack, he ought to be the best shoeblack in the parish.' If we call

ourselves Christians, we are bound, by the very name, to live in such a

fashion as that men shall have no doubt of the reality of our

profession and of the depth of our fellowship with Christ. It is by our

common conduct that they judge us. And the Christian Endeavourer' needs

to remember, whether he or she be old or young, that the best sign of

the reality of the endeavour is the doing of common things with

absolute rightness, because they are done wholly for Christ's sake.

It is a sharp test, and I wonder how many of us would like to go out

into the world, and say to all the irreligious people who know us, Now

come and tell me what the faults are that you have seen in me.' There

would be a considerable response to the invitation, and perhaps some of

us would learn to know ourselves rather better than we have been able

to do. We shall not find any occasion in this Daniel'--I wonder if they

would find it in that Daniel--except we find it concerning the law of

his God.' There is a record for a man!

IV. Lastly, note obedient disobedience.

The plot goes on the calculation that, whatever happens, this man may

be trusted to do what his God tells him, no matter who tells him not to

do it. And so on that calculation the law, surely as mad a one as any

Eastern despot ever hatched, is passed that, for a given space of time,

nobody within the dominions of this king, Darius, is to make any

petition or request of any man or god, save of the king only. It was

one of the long series of laws that have been passed in order to be

broken, and being broken, might be an instrument to destroy the men

that broke it. It was passed with no intention of getting obedience,

but only with the intention of slaying one faithful man, and the plot

worked according to calculation.

What did it matter to Daniel what was forbidden or commanded? He needed

to pray to God, and nothing shall hinder him from doing that. And so,

obediently disobedient, he brushes the preposterous law of the poor,

shadowy Darius on one side, in order that he may keep the law of his

God.

Now I do not need to remind you how obedience to God has in the past

often had to be maintained by disobedience to law. I need not speak of

martyrs, nor of the great principle laid down so clearly by the apostle

Peter, We ought to obey God rather than man.' Nor need I remind you

that if a man, for conscience sake, refuses to render active obedience

to an unrighteous law, and unresistingly accepts the appointed penalty,

he is not properly regarded as a law-breaker.

If earthly authorities command what is clearly contrary to God's law, a

Christian is absolved from obedience, and cannot be loyal unless he is

a rebel. That is how our forefathers read constitutional obligations.

That is how the noble men on the other side of the Atlantic, fifty

years ago, read their constitutional obligations in reference to that

devilish institution of slavery. And in the last resort--God forbid

that we should need to act on the principle--Christian men are set free

from allegiance when the authority over them commands what is contrary

to the will and the law of God.

But all that does not touch us. But I will tell you what does touch us.

Obedience to God needs always to be sustained--in some cases more

markedly, in some cases less so--but always in some measure, by

disobedience to the maxims and habits of most men round about us. If

they say Do this,' and Jesus Christ says Don't,' then they may talk as

much as they like, but we are bound to turn a deaf ear to their

exhortations and threats.

He is a slave that dare not be In the right with two or three,'

as that peaceful Quaker poet of America sings.

And for us, in our little lives, the motto, This did not I, because of

the fear of the Lord,' is absolutely essential to all noble Christian

conduct. Unless you are prepared to be in the minority, and now and

then to be called narrow,' fanatic,' and to be laughed at by men

because you will not do what they do, but abstain and resist, then

there is little chance of your ever making much of your Christian

profession.

These people calculated upon Daniel, and they had a right to calculate

upon him. Could the world calculate upon us, that we would rather go to

the lions' den than conform to what God and our consciences told us to

be a sin? If not, we have not yet learned what it means to be a

disciple. The commandment comes to us absolutely, as it came to the

servants in the first miracle, Whatsoever He saith unto you'--that, and

that only--whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.'

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FAITH STOPPING THE MOUTHS OF LIONS

Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the

den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom

thou servest continually, He will deliver thee. 17. And a stone was

brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it

with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose

might not be changed concerning Daniel. 18. Then the king went to his

palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of

musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. 19. Then the

king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of

lions. 20. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable

voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel,

servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually,

able to deliver thee from the lions? 21. Then said Daniel unto the

king, O king, live for ever. 22. My God hath sent His angel, and hath

shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before

Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I

done no hurt, 23. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and

commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was

taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him,

because he believed in his God. 24. And the king commanded, and they

brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the

den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had

the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they

came at the bottom of the den. 25. Then king Darius wrote unto all

people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be

multiplied unto you. 26. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my

kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the

living God, and stedfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not

be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end. 27. He

delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and

in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. 28. So

this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus

the Persian.'--DANIEL vi. 16-28.

Daniel was verging on ninety when this great test of his faithfulness

was presented to him. He had been honoured and trusted through all the

changes in the kingdom, and, when the Medo-Persian conquest came, the

new monarch naturally found in him, as a foreigner, a more reliable

minister than in native officials. Envy doth merit as its shade

pursue,' and the crafty trick by which his subordinates tried to

procure his fall, was their answer to Darius's scheme of making him

prime minister. Our passage begins in the middle of the story, but the

earlier part will come into consideration in the course of our remarks.

I. We note, first, the steadfast, silent confessor and the weak king.

Darius is a great deal more conspicuous in the narrative than Daniel.

The victim of injustice is silent. He does not seem to have been called

on to deny or defend the indictment. His deed was patent, and the

breach of the law flagrant. He, too, was like a sheep before the

shearers,' dumb. His silence meant, among other things, a quiet,

patient, fixed resolve to bear all, and not to deny his God. Weak men

bluster. Heroic endurance has generally little to say. Without

resistance, or a word, the old man, an hour ago the foremost in the

realm, is hauled off and flung into the pit or den. It is useless and

needless to ask its form. The entrance was sealed with two seals, one

the king's, one the conspirators', that neither party might steal a

march on the other. Fellows in iniquity do not trust each other. So,

down in the dark there, with the glittering eyeballs of the brutes

round him, and their growls in his ears, the old man sits all night

long, with peace in his heart, and looking up trustfully, through the

hole in the roof, to his Protector's stars, shining their silent

message of cheer.

The passage dwells on the pitiable weakness and consequent unrest of

the king. He had not yielded Daniel to his fate without a struggle,

which the previous narrative describes in strong language. Sore

displeased,' he set his heart' on delivering him, and laboured' to do

so. The curious obstacle, limiting even his power, is a rare specimen

of conservatism in its purest form. So wise were our ancestors, that

nothing of theirs shall ever be touched. Infallible legislators can

make immutable laws; the rest of us must be content to learn by

blundering, and to grow by changing. The man who says, I never alter my

opinions,' condemns himself as either too foolish or too proud to

learn.

But probably, if the question had been about a law that was

inconvenient to Darius himself, or to these advocates of the

constitution as it has always been, some way of getting round it would

have been found out. If the king had been bold enough to assert

himself, he could have walked through the cobweb. But this is one of

the miseries of yielding to evil counsels, that one step taken calls

for another. In for a penny, in for a pound.' Therefore let us all take

heed of small compliances, and be sure that we can never say about any

doubtful course, Thus far will I go, and no farther.' Darius was his

servants' servant when once he had put his name to the arrogant decree.

He did not know the incidence of his act, and we do not know that of

ours; therefore let us take heed of the quality of actions and motives,

since we are wholly incapable of estimating the sweep of their

consequences.

Darius's conduct to Daniel was like Herod's to John the Baptist and

Pilate's to Jesus. In all the cases the judges were convinced of the

victim's innocence, and would have saved him; but fear of others

biassed justice, and from selfish motives, they let fierce hatred have

its way. Such judges are murderers. From all come the old lessons,

never too threadbare to be dinned into the ears, especially of the

young, that to be weak is, in a world so full of temptation, the same

as to be wicked, and that he who has a sidelong eye to his supposed

interest, will never see the path of duty plainly.

What a feeble excuse to his own conscience was Darius's parting word to

Daniel! Thy God, whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee!'

And was flinging him to the lions the right way to treat a man who

served God continually? Or, what right had Darius to expect that any

god would interfere to stop the consequences of his act, which he thus

himself condemned? We are often tempted to think, as he did, that a

divine intervention will come in between our evil deeds and their

natural results. We should be wiser if we did not do the things that,

by our own confession, need God to avert their issues.

But that weak parting word witnessed to the impression made by the

lifelong consistency of Daniel. He must be a good man who gets such a

testimony from those who are harming him. The busy minister of state

had done his political work so as to extort that tribute from one who

had no sympathy with his religion. Do we do ours in that fashion? How

many of our statesmen serve God continually' and obviously in their

public life?

What a contrast between the night passed in the lions' den and the

palace! Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage,' and

soft beds and luxurious delights of sense bring no ease to troubled

consciences. Daniel is more at rest, though his soul is among lions,'

than Darius in his palace. Peter sleeps soundly, though the coming

morning is to be his last. Better to be the victim than the doer of

injustice!

The verdict of nightly thoughts on daily acts is usually true, and if

our deeds do not bear thinking of on our beds,' the sooner we cancel

them by penitence and reversed conduct, the better. But weak men are

often prone to swift and shallow regrets, which do not influence their

future any more than a stone thrown into the sea makes a permanent gap.

Why should Darius have waited for morning, if his penitence had moved

him to a firm resolution to undo the evil done? He had better have

sprung from his bed, and gone with his guards to open the den in the

dark. Feeble lamentations are out of place when it is still time to

act.

The hurried rush to the den in the morning twilight, and the lamentable

voice,' so unlike royal impassiveness, indicate the agitation of an

impulsive nature, accustomed to let the feeling of the moment sway it

unchecked. Absolute power tends to make that type of man. The question

thrown into the den seems to imply that its interior was not seen. If

so, the half-belief in Daniel's survival is remarkable. It indicates,

as before, the impression of steadfast devoutness made by the old man's

life, and also a belief that his God was possibly a true and potent

divinity.

Such a belief was quite natural, but it does not mean that Darius was

prepared to accept Daniel's God as his god. His religion was probably

elastic and hospitable enough to admit that other nations might have

other gods. But his thoughts about this living God' are a strange

medley. He is not sure whether He is stronger than the royal lions, and

he does not seem to feel that if a god delivers, his own act in

surrendering a favoured servant of such a god looks very black. A

half-belief blinds men to the opposition between their ways and God's,

and to the certain issue of their going in one direction and God in

another. If Daniel be delivered, what will become of Darius? But, like

most men, he is illogical, and that question does not seem to have

occurred to him. Surely this man may sit for a portrait of a weak,

passionate nature, in the feebleness of his resistance to evil, the

half hopes that wrong would be kept from turning out so badly as it

promised, the childish moanings over wickedness that might still have

been mended, and the incapacity to take in the grave, personal

consequences of his crime.

II. We next note the great deliverance. The king does not see Daniel,

and waits in sickening doubt whether any sound but the brutes' snarl at

the disturber of their feast will be heard. There must have been a sigh

of relief when the calm accents were audible from the unseen depth. And

what dignity, respect, faith, and innocence are in them! Even in such

circumstances the usual form of reverential salutation to the king is

remembered. That night's work might have made a sullen rebel of Daniel,

and small blame to him if he had had no very amiable feelings to

Darius; but he had learned faithfulness in a good school, and no trace

of returning evil for evil was in his words or tones.

The formal greeting was much more than a form, when it came up from

among the lions. It heaped coals of fire on the king's head, let us

hope, and taught him, if he needed the lesson, that Daniel's

disobedience had not been disloyalty. The more religion compels us to

disregard the authority and practices of others, the more scrupulously

attentive should we be to demonstrate that we cherish all due regard to

them, and wish them well. How simply, and as if he saw nothing in it to

wonder at, he tells the fact of his deliverance! My God has sent His

angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths.' He had not been able to say,

as the king did before the den was opened, Thy God will deliver thee';

but he had gone down into it, knowing that He was able, and leaving

himself in God's care. So it was no surprise to him that he was safe.

Thankfulness, but not astonishment, filled his heart. So faith takes

God's gifts, however great and beyond natural possibility they may be;

for the greatest of them are less than the Love which faith knows to

move all things, and whatsoever faith receives is just like Him.

Daniel did not say, as Darius did, that he served God continually, but

he did declare his own innocency in God's sight and unimpeachable

fidelity to the king. His reference is probably mainly to his official

conduct; but the characteristic tone of the Old Testament saint is

audible, which ventured on professions of uprightness, accordant with

an earlier stage of revelation and religious consciousness, but

scarcely congruous with the deeper and more inward sense of sin

produced by the full revelation in Christ. But if the tone of the

latter part of verse 22 is somewhat strange to us, the historian's

summary in verse 23 gives the eternal truth of the matter: No manner of

hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God.' That is

the basis of the reference in Hebrews xi. 33: Through faith . . .

stopped the mouths of lions.'

Simple trust in God brings His angel to our help, and the deliverance,

which is ultimately to be ascribed to His hand muzzling the gaping

beasts of prey, may also be ascribed to the faith which sets His hand

in motion. The true cause is God, but the indispensable condition

without which God will not act, and with which He cannot but act, is

our trust. Therefore all the great things which it is said to do are

due, not to anything in it, but wholly to that of which it lays hold. A

foot or two of lead pipe is worth little, but if it is the channel

through which water flows into a city, it is priceless.

Faith may or may not bring external deliverances, such as it brought to

Daniel; but the good cheer which this story brings us does not depend

on these. When Paul lay in Rome, shortly before his martyrdom, the

experience of Daniel was in his mind, as he thankfully wrote to

Timothy, I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.' He adds a hope

which contrasts strangely, at first sight, with the clear expectation

of a speedy and violent death, expressed a moment or two before (I am

already being offered, and the time of my departure is come') when he

says, The Lord will deliver me from every evil work'; but he had

learned that it was possible to pass through the evil and yet to be

delivered from it, and that a man might be thrown to the lions and

devoured by them, and yet be truly shielded from all harm from them. So

he adds, And will save me unto His heavenly kingdom,' thereby teaching

us that the true deliverance is that which carries us into, or

something nearer towards, the eternal home. Thus understood, the

miracle of Daniel's deliverance is continually repeated to all who

partake of Daniel's faith, Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation

. . . thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder.'

The savage vengeance on the conspirators and the proclamation of Darius

must be left untouched. The one is a ghastly example of retributive

judgment, in which, as sometimes is the case even now, men fall into

the pit they have digged for others, and it shows the barbarous cruelty

of that gorgeous civilisation. The other is an example of how far a man

may go in perceiving and acknowledging the truth without its

influencing his heart. The decree enforces recognition of Daniel's God,

in language which even prophets do not surpass; but it is all

lip-reverence, as evanescent as superficial. It takes more than a

fright caused by a miracle to make a man a true servant of the living

God.

The final verse of the passage implies Daniel's restoration to rank,

and gives a beautiful, simple picture of the old man's closing days,

which had begun so long before, in such a different world as

Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and closed in Cyrus's, enriched with all that

should accompany old age--honour, obedience, troops of friends. When a

man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace

with him.'

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A NEW YEARS MESSAGE

But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in

thy lot at the end of the days.'--DANIEL xii. 13.

Daniel had been receiving partial insight into the future by the

visions recorded in previous chapters. He sought for clearer knowledge,

and was told that the book of the future was sealed and closed, so that

no further enlightenment was possible for him. But duty was clear,

whatever might be dark; and there were some things in the future

certain, whatever might be problematic. So he is bidden back to the

common paths of life, and is enjoined to pursue his patient course with

an eye on the end to which it conducts, and to leave the unknown future

to unfold itself as it may.

I do not need, I suppose, to point the application. Anticipations of

what may be before us have, no doubt, been more or less in the minds of

all of us in the last few days. The cast of them will have been very

different, according to age and present circumstances. But bright or

dark, hopes or dreads, they reveal nothing. Sometimes we think we see a

little way ahead, and then swirling mists hide all.

So I think that the words of my text may help us not only to apprehend

the true task of the moment, but to discriminate between the things in

the unknown future that are hidden and those that stand clear. There

are three points, then, in this message--the journey, the pilgrim's

resting-place, and the final home. Go thou thy way till the end be: for

thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.' Let us,

then, look at these three points briefly.

I. The journey.

That is a threadbare metaphor for life. But threadbare as it is, its

significance is inexhaustible. But before I deal with it, note that

very significant but' with which my text begins. The Prophet has been

asking for a little more light to shine on the dark unknown that

stretches before him. And his request is negatived--But go thou thy

way.' In the connection that means, Do not waste your time in dreaming

about, or peering into, what you can never see, but fill the present

with strenuous service.' Go thou thy way.' Never mind the far-off

issues; the step before you is clear, and that is all that concerns

you. Plod along the path, and leave to-morrow to take care of itself.

There is a piece of plain practical wisdom, none the less necessary for

us to lay to heart because it is so obvious and commonplace.

And then, if we turn to the emblem with which the continuity of daily

life and daily work is set forth here, as the path along which we

travel, how much wells up in the shape of suggestion, familiar, it may

be, but very needful and wholesome for us all to lay to heart!

The figure implies perpetual change. The landscape glides past us, and

we travel on through it. How impossible it would be for us older people

to go back to the feelings, to the beliefs, to the tone and the temper

with which we used to look at life thirty or forty years ago! Strangely

and solemnly, like the silent motion of some gliding scene in a

theatre, bit by bit, inch by inch, change comes over all surroundings,

and, saddest of all, in some aspects, over ourselves.

We all are changed, by still degrees,

All but the basis of the soul.'

And it is foolish for us ever to forget that we live in a state of

things in which constant alteration is the law, as surely as, when the

train whizzes through the country, the same landscape never meets the

eye twice, as the traveller looks through the windows. Let us, then,

accept the fact that nothing abides with us, and so not be bewildered

nor swept away from our moorings, nor led to vain regrets and

paralysing retrospects when the changes that must come do come,

sometimes slowly and imperceptibly, sometimes with stunning suddenness,

like a bolt out of the blue. If life is truly represented under the

figure of a journey, nothing is more certain than that we sleep in a

fresh hospice every night, and leave behind us every day scenes that we

shall never traverse again. What madness, then, to be putting out eager

and desperate hands to clutch what must be left, and so to contradict

the very law under which we live!

Then another of the well-worn commonplaces which are so believed by us

all that we never think about them, and therefore need to be urged, as

I am trying, poorly enough, to do now--another of the commonplaces that

spring from this image is that life is continuous. Geologists used to

be divided into two schools, one of whom explained everything by

invoking great convulsions, the other by appealing to the uniform

action of laws. There are no convulsions in life. To-morrow is the

child of to-day, and yesterday was the father of this day. What we are,

springs from what we have been, and settles what we shall be. The road

leads somewhither, and we follow it step by step. As the old nursery

rhyme has it--

One foot up and one foot down,

That's the way to London town.'

We make our characters by the continual repetition of small actions.

Let no man think of his life as if it were a heap of unconnected

points. It is a chain of links that are forged together inseparably.

Let no man say, I do this thing, and there shall be no evil

consequences impressed upon my life as results of it.' It cannot be.

To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' We shall

to-morrow be more of everything that we are to-day, unless by some

strong effort of repentance and change we break the fatal continuity,

and make a new beginning by God's grace. But let us lay to heart this,

as a very solemn truth which lifts up into mystical and unspeakable

importance the things that men idly call trifles, that life is one

continuous whole, a march towards a definite end.

And therefore we ought to see to it that the direction in which our

life runs is one that conscience and God can approve. And, since the

rapidity with which a body falls increases as it falls, the more

needful that we give the right direction and impulses to the life. It

will be a dreadful thing if our downward course acquires strength as it

travels, and being slow at first, gains in celerity, and accrues to

itself mass and weight, like an avalanche started from an Alpine

summit, which is but one or two bits of snow and ice at first, and

falls at last into the ravine, tons of white destruction. The lives of

many of us are like it.

Further, the metaphor suggests that no life takes its fitting course

unless there is continuous effort. There will be crises when we have to

run with panting breath and strained muscles. There will be long

stretches of level commonplace where speed is not needed, but pegging

away' is, and the one duty is persistent continuousness in a course.

But whether the task of the moment is to run and not be weary,' or to

walk and not faint,' crises and commonplace stretches of land alike

require continuous effort, if we are to run with patience the race that

is set before us.'

Mark the emphasis of my text, Go thy way till the end.' You, my

contemporaries, you older men! do not fancy that in the deepest aspect

any life has ever a period in it in which a man may take it easy.' You

may do that in regard to outward things, and it is the hope and the

reward of faithfulness in youth and middle age that, when the grey

hairs come to be upon us, we may slack off a little in regard to

outward activity. But in regard to all the deepest things of life, no

man may ever lessen his diligence until he has attained the goal.

Some of you will remember how, in a stormy October night, many years

ago, the Royal Charter went down when three hours from Liverpool, and

the passengers had met in the saloon and voted a testimonial to the

captain because he had brought them across the ocean in safety. Until

the anchor is down and we are inside the harbour, we may be

shipwrecked, if we are careless in our navigation. Go thou thy way

until the end.' And remember, you older people, that until that end is

reached you have to use all your power, and to labour as earnestly, and

guard yourself as carefully, as at any period before.

And not only till the end,' but go thou thy way to the end.' That is to

say, let the thought that the road has a termination be ever present

with us all. Now, there is a great deal of the so-called devout

contemplation of death which is anything but wholesome. People were

never meant to be always looking forward to that close. Men may think

of the end' in a hundred different connections. One man may say, Let us

eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' Another man may say, I have only

a little while to master this science, to make a name for myself, to

win wealth. Let me bend all my efforts in a fierce determination--made

the fiercer because of the thought of the brevity of life--to win the

end.' The mere contemplation of the shortness of our days may be an

ally of immorality, of selfishness, of meanness, of earthly ambitions,

or it may lay a cooling hand on fevered brows, and lessen the

pulsations of hearts that throb for earth.

But whilst it is not wholesome to be always thinking of death, it is

more unwholesome still never to let the contemplation of that end come

into our calculations of the future, and to shape our lives in an

obstinate blindness to what is the one certain fact which rises up

through the whirling mists of the unknown future, like some black cliff

from the clouds that wreath around it. Is it not strange that the

surest thing is the thing that we forget most of all? It sometimes

seems to me as if the sky rained down opiates upon people, as if all

mankind were in a conspiracy of lunacy, because they, with one accord,

ignore the most prominent and forget the only certain fact about their

future; and in all their calculations do not' so number their days' as

to apply' their hearts unto wisdom.' Go thou thy way until the end,'

and let thy way be marked out with a constant eye towards the end.

II. Note, again, the resting-place.

Go thou thy way, for thou shalt rest.' Now, I suppose, to most careful

readers that clearly is intended as a gracious, and what they call a

euphemistic way of speaking about death. Thou shalt rest'; well, that

is a thought that takes away a great deal of the grimness and the

terror with which men generally invest the close. It is a thought, of

course, the force of which is very different in different stages and

conditions of life. To you young people, eager, perhaps ambitious, full

of the consciousness of inward power, happy, and, in all human

probability, with the greater portion of your lives before you in which

to do what you desire, the thought of rest' comes with a very faint

appeal. And yet I do not suppose that there is any one of us who has

not some burden that is hard to carry, or who has not learned what

weariness means.

But to us older people, who have tasted disappointments, who have known

the pressure of grinding toil for a great many years, whose hearts have

been gnawed by harassments and anxieties of different kinds, whose

lives are apparently drawing nearer their end than the present moment

is to their beginning, the thought, Thou shalt rest,' comes with a very

different appeal from that which it makes to these others.

There remaineth a rest for the people of God,

And I have had trouble enough for one,'

says our great modern poet; and therein he echoes the deepest thoughts

of most of this congregation. That rest is the cessation of toil, but

the continuance of activity--the cessation of toil, and anxiety, and

harassment, and care, and so the darkness is made beautiful when we

think that God draws the curtain, as a careful mother does in her

child's chamber, that the light may not disturb the slumberer.

But, dear friends, that final cessation of earthly work has a double

character. Thou shalt rest' was said to this man of God. But what of

people whom death takes away from the only sort of work that they are

fit to do? It will be no rest to long for the occupations which you

never can have any more. And if you have been living for this wretched

present, to be condemned to have nothing to do any more in it and with

it will be torture, and not repose. Ask yourselves how you would like

to be taken out of your shop, or your mill, or your study, or your

laboratory, or your counting-house, and never be allowed to go into it

again. Some of you know how wearisome a holiday is when you cannot get

to your daily work. You will get a very long holiday after you are

dead. And if the hungering after the withdrawn occupation persists,

there will be very little pleasure in rest. There is only one way by

which we can make that inevitable end a blessing, and turn death into

the opening of the gate of our resting-place; and that is by setting

our heart's desires and our spirit's trust on Jesus Christ, who is the

Lord both of the dead and of the living.' If we do that, even that last

enemy will come to us as Christ's representative, with Christ's own

word upon his lip, Come unto Me, ye that are weary and are heavy laden,

and I'--because He has given Me the power--I will give you rest.'

Sleep, full of rest, from head to foot;

Lie still, dry dust, secure of change.'

III. That leads me to the last thought, the home.

Thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days.' Stand'--that is

Daniel's way of preaching, what he has been preaching in several other

parts of his book, the doctrine of the resurrection. Thou shalt stand

in thy lot.' That is a reference to the ancient partition of the land

of Canaan amongst the tribes, where each man got his own portion, and

sat under his own vine and fig-tree. And so there emerge from these

symbolical words thoughts upon which, at this stage of my sermon, I can

barely touch. First comes the thought that, however sweet and blessed

that reposeful state may be, humanity has not attained its perfection

until once again the perfected spirit is mated with, and enclosed

within, its congenial servant, a perfect body. Corporeity is the end of

man.' Body, soul, and spirit partake of the redemption of God.

But then, apart from that, on which I must not dwell, my text suggests

one or two thoughts. God is the true inheritance. Each man has his own

portion of the common possession, or, to put it into plainer words, in

that perfect land each individual has precisely so much of God as he is

capable of possessing. Thou shalt stand in thy lot,' and what

determines the lot is how we wend our way till that other end, the end

of life. The end of the days' is a period far beyond the end of the

life of Daniel. And as the course that terminated in repose has been,

so the possession of the portion of the inheritance of the saints in

light' shall be, for which that course has made men meet. Destiny is

character worked out. A man will be where he is fit for, and have what

he is fit for. Time is the lackey of eternity. His life here settles

how much of God a man shall be able to hold, when he stands in his lot

at the end of the days,' and his allotted portion, as it stretches

around him, will be but the issue and the outcome of his life here on

earth.

Therefore, dear brethren, tremendous importance attaches to each

fugitive moment. Therefore each act that we do is weighted with eternal

consequences. If we will put our trust in Him, in whom also we obtain

the inheritance,' and will travel on life's common way in cheerful

godliness, we may front all the uncertainties of the unknown future,

sure of two things--that we shall rest, and that we shall stand in our

lot. We shall all go where we have fitted ourselves, by God's grace, to

go; get what we have fitted ourselves to possess; and be what we have

made ourselves. To the Christian man the word comes, Thou shalt stand

in thy lot.' And the other word that was spoken about one sinner, will

be fulfilled in all whose lives have been unfitting them for heaven:

Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.' He,

too, stands in his lot. Now settle which lot is yours.

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HOSEA

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THE VALLEY OF ACHOR

I will give her . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope.'--HOSEA

ii. 15.

The Prophet Hosea is remarkable for the frequent use which he makes of

events in the former history of his people. Their past seems to him a

mirror in which they may read their future. He believes that which is

to be hath already been,' the great principles of the divine government

living on through all the ages, and issuing in similar acts when the

circumstances are similar. So he foretells that there will yet be once

more a captivity and a bondage, that the old story of the wilderness

will be repeated once more. In that wilderness God will speak to the

heart of Israel. Its barrenness shall be changed into the fruitfulness

of vineyards, where the purpling clusters hang ripe for the thirsty

travellers. And not only will the sorrows that He sends thus become

sources of refreshment, but the gloomy gorge through which they

journey--the valley of Achor--will be a door of hope.

One word is enough to explain the allusion. You remember that after the

capture of Jericho by Joshua, the people were baffled in their first

attempt to press up through the narrow defile that led from the plain

of Jordan to the highlands of Canaan. Their defeat was caused by the

covetousness of Achan, who for the sake of some miserable spoil which

he found in a tent, broke God's laws, and drew down shame on Israel's

ranks When the swift, terrible punishment on him had purged the camp,

victory again followed their assault, and Achan lying stiff and stark

below his cairn, they pressed on up the glen to their task of conquest.

The rugged valley, where that defeat and that sharp act of justice took

place, was named in memory thereof, the valley of Achor, that is,

trouble; and our Prophet's promise is that as then, so for all future

ages, the complicity of God's people with an evil world will work

weakness and defeat, but that, if they will be taught by their trouble

and will purge themselves of the accursed thing, then the disasters

will make a way for hope to come to them again. The figure which

conveys this is very expressive. The narrow gorge stretches before us,

with its dark overhanging cliffs that almost shut out the sky; the path

is rough and set with sharp pebbles; it is narrow, winding, steep;

often it seems to be barred by some huge rock that juts across it, and

there is barely room for the broken ledge yielding slippery footing

between the beetling crag above and the steep slope beneath that dips

so quickly to the black torrent below. All is gloomy, damp, hard; and

if we look upwards the glen becomes more savage as it rises, and armed

foes hold the very throat of the pass. But, however long, however

barren, however rugged, however black, however trackless, we may see if

we will, a bright form descending the rocky way with radiant eyes and

calm lips, God's messenger, Hope; and the rough rocks are like the

doorway through which she comes near to us in our weary struggle. For

us all, dear friends, it is true. In all our difficulties and sorrows,

be they great or small; in our business perplexities; in the losses

that rob our homes of their light; in the petty annoyances that diffuse

their irritation through so much of our days; it is within our power to

turn them all into occasions for a firmer grasp of God, and so to make

them openings by which a happier hope may flow into our souls.

But the promise, like all God's promises, has its well-defined

conditions. Achan has to be killed and put safe out of the way first,

or no shining Hope will stand out against the black walls of the

defile. The tastes which knit us to the perishable world, the yearnings

for Babylonish garments and wedges of gold, must be coerced and

subdued. Swift, sharp, unrelenting justice must be done on the lust of

the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, if our

trials are ever to become doors of hope. There is no natural tendency

in the mere fact of sorrow and pain to make God's love more

discernible, or to make our hope any firmer. All depends on how we use

the trial, or as I say--first stone Achan, and then hope!

So, the trouble which detaches us from earth gives us new hope.

Sometimes the effect of our sorrows and annoyances and difficulties is

to rivet us more firmly to earth. The eye has a curious power, which

they call persistence of vision, of retaining the impression made upon

it, and therefore of seeming to see the object for a definite time

after it has really been withdrawn. If you whirl a bit of blazing stick

round, you will see a circle of fire though there is only a point

moving rapidly in the circle. The eye has its memory like the soul. And

the soul has its power of persistence like the eye, and that power is

sometimes kindled into activity by the fact of loss. We often see our

departed joys, and gaze upon them all the more eagerly for their

departure. The loss of dear ones should stamp their image on our

hearts, and set it as in a golden glory. But it sometimes does more

than that; it sometimes makes us put the present with its duties

impatiently away from us. Vain regret, absorbed brooding over what is

gone, a sorrow kept gaping long after it should have been healed, like

a grave-mound off which desperate love has pulled turf and flowers, in

the vain attempt to clasp the cold hand below--in a word, the trouble

that does not withdraw us from the present will never be a door of

hope, but rather a grim gate for despair to come in at.

The trouble which knits us to God gives us new hope. That bright form

which comes down the narrow valley is His messenger and herald--sent

before His face. All the light of hope is the reflection on our hearts

of the light of God. Her silver beams, which shed quietness over the

darkness of earth, come only from that great Sun. If our hope is to

grow out of our sorrow, it must be because our sorrow drives us to God.

It is only when we by faith stand in His grace, and live in the

conscious fellowship of peace with Him, that we rejoice in hope. If we

would see Hope drawing near to us, we must fix our eyes not on Jericho

that lies behind among its palm-trees, though it has memories of

conquests, and attractions of fertility and repose, nor on the corpse

that lies below that pile of stones, nor on the narrow way and the

strong enemy in front there; but higher up, on the blue sky that

spreads peaceful above the highest summits of the pass, and from the

heavens we shall see the angel coming to us. Sorrow forsakes its own

nature, and leads in its own opposite, when sorrow helps us to see God.

It clears away the thick trees, and lets the sunlight into the forest

shades, and then in time corn will grow. Hope is but the brightness

that goes before God's face, and if we would see it we must look at

Him.

The trouble which we bear rightly with God's help, gives new hope. If

we have made our sorrow an occasion for learning, by living experience,

somewhat more of His exquisitely varied and ever ready power to aid and

bless, then it will teach us firmer confidence in these inexhaustible

resources which we have thus once more proved, Tribulation worketh

patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.' That is the

order. You cannot put patience and experience into a parenthesis, and

omitting them, bring hope out of tribulation. But if, in my sorrow, I

have been able to keep quiet because I have had hold of God's hand, and

if in that unstruggling submission I have found that from His hand I

have been upheld, and had strength above mine own infused into me, then

my memory will give the threads with which Hope weaves her bright web.

I build upon two things--God's unchangeableness, and His help already

received; and upon these strong foundations I may wisely and safely

rear a palace of Hope, which shall never prove a castle in the air. The

past, when it is God's past, is the surest pledge for the future.

Because He has been with us in six troubles, therefore we may be sure

that in seven He will not forsake us. I said that the light of hope was

the brightness from the face of God. I may say again, that the light of

hope which fills our sky is like that which, on happy summer nights,

lives till morning in the calm west, and with its colourless, tranquil

beauty, tells of a yesterday of unclouded splendour, and prophesies a

to-morrow yet more abundant. The glow from a sun that is set, the

experience of past deliverances, is the truest light of hope to light

our way through the night of life.

One of the psalms gives us, in different form, a metaphor and a promise

substantially the same as that of this text. Blessed are the men who,

passing through the valley of weeping, make it a well.' They gather

their tears, as it were, into the cisterns by the wayside, and draw

refreshment and strength from their very sorrows, and then, when thus

we in our wise husbandry have irrigated the soil with the gathered

results of our sorrows, the heavens bend over us, and weep their

gracious tears, and the rain also covereth it with blessings.' No

chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous;

nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of

righteousness.'

Then, dear friends, let us set ourselves with our loins girt to the

road. Never mind how hard it may be to climb. The slope of the valley

of trouble is ever upwards. Never mind how dark is the shadow of death

which stretches athwart it. If there were no sun there would be no

shadow; presently the sun will be right overhead, and there will be no

shadow then. Never mind how black it may look ahead, or how frowning

the rocks. From between their narrowest gorge you may see, if you will,

the guide whom God has sent you, and that Angel of Hope will light up

all the darkness, and will only fade away when she is lost in the

sevenfold brightness of that upper land, whereof our God Himself is Sun

and Moon'--the true Canaan, to whose everlasting mountains the steep

way of life has climbed at last through valleys of trouble, and of

weeping, and of the shadow of death.

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LET HIM ALONE'

Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.'--HOSEA iv. 17.

The tribe of Ephraim was the most important member of the kingdom of

Israel; consequently its name was not unnaturally sometimes used in a

wider application for the whole of the kingdom, of which it was the

principal part. Being the predominant partner,' its name was used alone

for that of the whole firm, just as in our own empire, we often say

England,' meaning thereby the three kingdoms: England, Scotland, and

Ireland. So Ephraim' here does not mean the single tribe, but the whole

kingdom of Israel.

Now Hosea himself was a Northerner, a subject of that kingdom; and its

iniquities and idolatries weighed heavily on his heart, and were ripped

up and brought to light with burning eloquence in his prophecies. The

words of my text have often, and terribly, been misunderstood. And I

wish now to try to bring out their true meaning and bearing. They have

a message for us quite as much as they had for the people who

originally received them.

I. I must begin by explaining what, in my judgment, this text does not

mean.

First, it is not what it is often taken to be, a threatening of God's

abandoning of the idolatrous nation. I dare say we have all heard grim

sermons from this text, which have taken that view of it, and have

tried to frighten men into believing now, by telling them that,

perhaps, if they do not, God will never move on their hearts, or deal

with them any more, but withdraw His grace, and leave them to

insensibility. There is not a word of that sort in the text. Plainly

enough it is not so, for this vehement utterance of the Prophet is not

a declaration as to God, and what He is going to do, but it is a

commandment to some men, telling them what they are to do. Let him

alone' does not mean the same thing as I will let him alone'; and if

people had only read with a little more care, they would have been

delivered from perpetrating a libel on the divine loving-kindness and

forbearance.

It is clear enough, too, that such a meaning as that which has been

forced upon the words of my text, and is the common use of it, I

believe, in many evangelical circles, cannot be its real meaning,

because the very fact that Hosea was prophesying to call Ephraim from

his sin showed that God had not let Ephraim alone, but was wooing him

by His prophet, and seeking to win him back by the words of his mouth.

God was doing all that He could do, rising early and sending His

messenger and calling to Ephraim: Turn ye! Turn ye! why will ye die?'

For Hosea, in the very act of pleading with Israel on God's behalf, to

have declared that God had abandoned it, and ceased to plead, would

have been a palpable absurdity and contradiction.

But beyond considerations of the context, other reasons conclusively

negative such an interpretation of this text. I, for my part, do not

believe that there are any bounds or end to God's forbearing pleading

with men in this life. I take, as true, the great words of the old

Psalm, in their simplest sense--His mercy endureth for ever'; and I

fall back upon the other words which a penitent had learned to be true

by reflecting on the greatness of his own sin: With Him are multitudes

of redemptions'; and I turn from psalmists and prophets to the Master

who showed us God's heart, and knew what He spake when He laid it down

as the law and the measure of human forgiveness which was moulded upon

the pattern of the divine, that it should be seventy times seven'--the

multiplication of both the perfect numbers into themselves--than which

there can be no grander expression for absolute innumerableness and

unfailing continuance.

No, no! men may say to God, Speak no more to us'; or they may get so

far away from Him, as that they only hear God's pleading voice, dim and

faint, like a voice in a dream. But surely the history of His

progressive revelation shows us that, rather than such abandonment of

the worst, the law of the divine dealing is that the deafer the man,

the more piercing the voice beseeching and warning. The attraction of

gravitation decreases as distance increases, but the further away we

are from Him, the stronger is the attraction which issues from Him, and

would draw us to Himself.

Clear away, then, altogether out of your minds any notion that there is

here declared what, in my judgment, is not declared anywhere in the

Bible, and never occurs in the divine dealings with men. Be sure that

He never ceases to seek to draw the most obstinate, idolatrous, and

rebellious heart to Himself. That divine charity suffereth long, and is

kind' . . . hopeth all things, and beareth all things.'

Again, let me point out that the words of my text do not enjoin the

cessation of the efforts of Christian people for the recovery of the

most deeply sunken in sin. Let him alone' is a commandment, and it is a

commandment to God's Church, but it is not a commandment to despair of

any that they may be brought into the fold, or to give up efforts to

that end. If our Father in heaven never ceases to bear in His heart His

prodigal children, it does not become those prodigals, who have come

back, to think that any of their brethren are too far away to be drawn

by their loving proclamation of the Father's heart of love.

There is the glory of our Gospel, that, taking far sadder, graver views

of what sin and alienation from God are, than the world's philosophers

and philanthropists do, it surpasses them just as much as in the superb

confidence with which it sets itself to the cure of the disease as in

the unflinching clearness with which it diagnoses the disease as fatal,

if it be not dealt with by the all-healing Gospel. All other methods

for the restoration and elevation of mankind are compelled to recognise

that there is an obstinate residuum that will not and cannot be reached

by their efforts. It used to be said that some old cannon-balls, that

had been brought from some of the battlefields of the Peninsula,

resisted all attempts to melt them down; so there are cannon-balls,' as

it were, amongst the obstinate evil-doers, and the degraded and

dangerous' classes, which mark the despair of our modern reformers and

civilisers and elevators, for no fire in their furnaces can melt down

their hardness. No; but there is the furnace of the Lord in Jerusalem,

and the fire of God in Zion, which can melt them down, and has done so

a hundred and a thousand times, and is as able to do it again to-day as

it ever was. Despair of no human soul. That boundless confidence in the

power of the Gospel is the duty of the Christian Church. The damsel is

not dead, but sleepeth!' They laughed Him to scorn, knowing that she

was dead. But He put out His hand, and said unto her Talitha cumi, I

say unto thee, Arise!' When we stand on one side of the bed with your

social reformers on the other, and say The damsel is not dead, but

sleepeth,' they laugh us to scorn, and bid us try our Gospel upon these

people in our slums, or on those heathens in the New Hebrides. We have

the right to answer, We have tried it, and man after man, and woman

after woman have risen from the sick-bed, like Peter's wife's mother;

and the fever has left them, and they have ministered unto Him. There

are no people in the world about whom Christians need despair, none

that Christ's Gospel cannot redeem. Whatever my text means, it does not

mean cowardly and unbelieving doubt as to the power of the Gospel on

the most degraded and sinful.

II. So, the text enjoins on the Christian Church separation from an

idolatrous world.

Ephraim is joined to idols.' Do you let him alone.' Now, there has been

much harm done by misreading the force of the injunction of separation

from the world. There is a great deal of union and association with the

most godless people in our circle, which is inevitable. Family bonds,

business connections, civic obligations--all these require that the

Church shall not withdraw from the world. There is the wide common

ground of Politics and Art and Literature, and a hundred other

interests, on which it does Christian men no good, and the world much

harm, if the former withdraw to themselves, and on the plea of superior

sanctity, leave these great departments of interest and influence to be

occupied only by non-Christians.

Then, besides these thoughts of necessary union and association upon

common ground, there is the other consideration that absolute

separation would defeat the very purpose for which Christian people are

here. Ye are the salt of the earth,' said Christ. Yes, and if you keep

the meat on one plate and the salt on another, what good will the salt

be? It has to be rubbed in particle by particle, and brought into

contact over all the surface, and down into the depths of the meat that

it is to preserve from putrefaction. And no Christian churches or

individuals do their duty, and fulfil their function on earth, unless

they are thus closely associated and intermingled with the world that

they should be trying to leaven and save. A cloistered solitude, or a

proud standing apart from the ordinary movements of the community, or a

neglect, on the plea of our higher duties, of the duties of the citizen

of a free country--these are not the ways to fulfil the exhortation of

my text. Let the dead bury their dead,' said Christ; but He did not

mean that His Church was to stand apart from the world, and let it go

its own way. It is a bad thing for both when little Christian c?ies

gather themselves together, and talk about their own goodness and

religion, and leave the world to perish. Clotted blood is death;

circulated, it is life.

But, whilst all this is perfectly true--and there are associations that

we must not break if we are to do our work as Christian people--it is

also true that it is possible, in the closest unions with men who do

not share our faith, to do the same thing that they are doing, with a

difference which separates us from them, even whilst we are united with

them. They tell us that, however dense any material substance may seem

to be, there is always a film of air between contiguous particles. And

there should be a film between us and our Christless friends and

companions and partners, not perceptible perhaps to a superficial

observer, but most real. If we do our common work as a religious duty,

and in the exercise of all our daily occupations set the Lord always

before' us, however closely we may be associated with people who do not

so live, they will know the difference; never fear! And you will know

the difference, and will not be identified with them, but separate in a

wholesome fashion from them.

And, dear brethren, if I may go a step further, I would venture to say

that it seems to me that our Christian communities want few things more

in this day than the reiteration of the old saying, Have no fellowship

with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.' There

is so much in this time to break down the separation between him that

believeth in Christ and him that doth not; narrowness has come to be

thought such an enormous wickedness, and liberality is so lauded by all

sorts of superficial people, that Christian men need to be summoned

back to their standard. Being let go, they went to their own

company'--there is a natural affinity which should, and will, if our

faith is vital, draw us to those who, on the gravest and solemnest

things, have the same thoughts, the same hopes, the same faith. I do

not urge you, God knows, to be bigoted and narrow, and shut yourselves

up in your faith, and leave the world to go to the devil; but I do not

wish, either, that Christian people should fling themselves into the

arms and nestle in the hearts of persons who do not share with them

like precious faith.'

I am sure that there are many Christian people, old and young, who are

suffering in their religious life because they are neglecting this

commandment of my text. Let him alone.' There can be no deep affection,

and, most of all--if I may venture on such ground--no wedded love worth

the name, where there is not unanimity in regard to the deepest

matters. It does not say much for the religion of a professing

Christian who finds his heart's friends and his chosen companions in

people that have no sympathy with the religion which he professes. It

does not say much for you if it is so with you, for the Christian, whom

you like least, is nearer you in the depths of your true self than is

the non-Christian whom you love most.

Be sure, too, that if we mix ourselves up with Ephraim, we shall find

ourselves grovelling beside him before his idols ere long. Godlessness

is infectious. Many a young woman, a professing Christian, has married

a godless man in the fond hope that she might win him. It is a great

deal more frequently the case that he perverts her than that she

converts him. Do not let us knit ourselves in these close bonds with

the worshippers of idols, lest we learn their ways, and get a snare

into our souls.' Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers. What

fellowship hath light with darkness? Wherefore, come out from among

them and be ye separate, saith the Lord. Touch not the unclean thing,

and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and My

daughters.'

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PHYSICIANS OF NO VALUE'

When Ephralm saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went

Ephraim to Assyria, and sent to king Jareb: but he is not able to heal

you, neither shall he cure you of your wound.!'--HOSEA v. 13 (R.V.).

The long tragedy which ended in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom

by Assyrian invasion was already beginning to develop in Hosea's time.

The mistaken politics of the kings of Israel led them to seek an ally

where they should have dreaded an enemy. As Hosea puts it in figurative

fashion, Ephraim's discovery of his sickness' sent him in the vain

quest for help to the apparent source of the sickness,' that is to

Assyria, whose king in the text is described by a name which is not his

real name, but is a significant epithet, as the margin puts it, a king

that should contend'; and who, of course, was not able to heal nor to

cure the wounds which he had inflicted. Ephraim's suicidal folly is but

one illustration of a universal madness which drives men to seek for

the healing of their misery, and the alleviation of their discomfort,

in the repetition of the very acts which brought these about. The

attempt to get relief in such a fashion, of course, fails; for as the

verse before our text emphatically proclaims, it is God who has been as

a moth unto Ephraim,' gnawing away his strength: and it is only He who

can heal, since in reality it is He, and not the quarrelsome king of

Assyria, who has inflicted the sickness.

Thus understood, the text carries wide lessons, and may serve us as a

starting-point for considering man's discovery of his sickness,' man's

mad way of seeking healing, God's way of giving it.

I. First, then, man's discovery of his sickness.

The greater part of most lives is spent in mechanical, unreflecting

repetition of daily duties and pleasures. We are all apt to live on the

surface, and it requires an effort, which we are too indolent to make

except under the impulse of some arresting motive, to descend into the

depths of our own souls, and there to face the solemn facts of our own

personality. The last place with which most of us are familiar, is our

innermost self. Men are dimly conscious that things within are not well

with them; but it is only one here and there that says so distinctly to

himself, and takes the further step of thoroughly investigating the

cause. But that superficial life is at the mercy of a thousand

accidents, each one of which may break through the thin film, and lay

bare the black depths.

But there is another aspect of this discovery of sickness, far graver

than the mere consciousness of unrest. Ephraim does not see his

sickness unless he sees his sin. The greater part of every life is

spent without that deep, all-pervading sense of discord between itself

and God. Small and recurrent faults may evoke recurring remonstrances

of conscience, but that is a very different thing from the deep tones

and the clear voice of condemnation in respect to one's whole life and

character which sounds in a heart that has learned how deceitful and

desperately wicked' it is. Such a conviction may flash upon a man at

any moment, and from a hundred causes. A sorrow, a sunset-sky, a grave,

a sermon, may produce it.

But even when we have come to recognise clearly our unrest, we have

gone but part of the way, we have become conscious of a symptom, not of

the disease. Why is it that man is alone among the creatures in that

discontent with externals, and that dissatisfaction with himself? Foxes

have holes, and the birds of the air have roosting-places': why is it

that amongst all God's happy creatures, and God's shining stars, men

stand strangers in a strange land,' and are cursed with a restlessness

which has not where to lay its head'? The consciousness of unrest is

but the agitation of the limbs which indicates disease. That disease is

the twitching paralysis of sin. Like the pestilence that walketh in

darkness,' it has a fell power of concealing itself, and the man whose

sins are the greatest is always the least conscious of them. He dwells

in a region where the malaria is so all-pervading that the inhabitants

do not know what the sweetness of an unpoisoned atmosphere is. If there

is a worst man' in the world, we may be very sure that no conscience is

less troubled than his is.

So the question may well be urged on those so terribly numerous amongst

us, whose very unconsciousness of their true condition is the most

fatal symptom of their fatal disease. What is the worth of a peace

which is only secured by ignoring realities, and which can be shattered

into fragments by anything that compels a man to see himself as he is?

In such a fool's paradise thousands of us live. Use and wont,' the

continual occupation with the trifles of our daily lives, the fleeting

satisfactions of our animal nature, the shallow wisdom which bids us

let sleeping dogs lie,' all conspire to mask, to many consciences,

their unrest and their sin. We abstain from lifting the curtain behind

which the serpent lies coiled in our hearts, because we dread to see

its loathly length, and to rouse it to lift its malignant head, and to

strike with its forked tongue. But sooner or later--may it not be too

late--we shall be set face to face with the dark recess, and discover

the foul reptile that has all the while been coiled there.

II. Man's mad way of seeking healing.

Can there be a more absurd course of action than that recorded in our

text? When Ephraim saw his sickness, then went Ephraim to Assyria.' The

Northern Kingdom sought for the healing of their national calamities

from the very cause of their national calamities, and in repetition of

their national sin. A hopeful policy, and one which speedily ended in

the only possible result! But that insanity was but a sample of the

infatuation which besets us all. When we are conscious of our unrest,

are we not all tempted to seek to conceal it with what has made it?

Take examples from the grosser forms of animal indulgence. The

drunkard's vulgar proverb recommending a hair of the dog that bit you,'

is but a coarse expression of a common fault. He is wretched until

another glass' steadies, for a moment, his trembling hand, and gives a

brief stimulus to his nerves. They say that the Styrian peasants, who

habitually eat large quantities of arsenic, show symptoms of poison if

they leave it off suddenly. These are but samples, in the physical

region, of a tendency which runs through all lire, and leads men to

drown thought by plunging into the thick of the worldly absorptions

that really cause their unrest. The least persistent of men is

strangely obstinate in his adherence to old ways, in spite of all

experience of their crooked slipperiness. We wonder at the peasants who

have their cottages and vineyards on the slopes of Vesuvius, and who

build them, and plant them, over and over again after each destructive

eruption. The tragedy of Israel is repeated in many of our lives; and

the summing up of the abortive efforts of one of its kings to recover

power by following the gods that had betrayed him, might be the epitaph

of the infatuated men who see their sickness and seek to heal it by

renewed devotion to the idols who occasioned it: They were the ruin of

him and of all Israel.' The experience of the woman who had spent all

her living on physicians, and was nothing the better, but rather the

worse,' sums up the sad story of many a life.

But again the sense of sin sometimes seeks to conceal itself by

repetition of sin. When the dormant snake begins to stir, it is lulled

to sleep again by absorption of occupations, or by an obstinate refusal

to look inwards, and often by plunging once more into the sin which has

brought about the sickness. To seek thus for ease from the stings of

conscience, is like trying to silence a buzzing in the head by standing

beside Niagara thundering in our ears. They used to beat the drums when

a martyr died, in order to drown his testimony; and so foolish men seek

to silence the voice of conscience by letting passions shout their

loudest. It needs no words to demonstrate the incurable folly of such

conduct; but alas, it takes many words far stronger than mine to press

home the folly upon men. The condition of such a half-awakened

conscience is very critical if it is soothed by any means by which it

is weakened and its possessor worsened. In the sickness of the soul

homoeopathic treatment is a delusion. Ephraim may go to Assyria, but

there is no healing of him there.

III. God's way of giving true healing.

Ephraim thought that, because the wounds were inflicted by Assyria, it

was the source to which to apply for bandages and balm. If it had

realised that Assyria was but the battle-axe wherewith the hand of God

struck it, it would have learned that from God alone could come healing

and health. The unrest which betrays the presence in our souls of a

deep-seated sin, is a divine messenger. We terribly misinterpret the

true source of all that disturbs us when we attribute it only to the

occasions which bring it about; for the one purpose of all our

restlessness is to drive us nearer to God, and to wrench us away from

our Assyria. The true issue of Ephraim's sickness would have been the

penitent cry, Come, let us return to the Lord our God, for He hath

smitten, and He will bind us up.' It is in the consciousness of loving

nearness to Him that all our unrest is soothed, and the heaving ocean

in our hearts becomes as a summer's sea and birds of peace sit brooding

on the charmed waves.' It is in that same consciousness that conscience

ceases to condemn, and loses its sting. The prophet from whom our text

is taken ends his wonderful ministry, that had been full of fiery

denunciations and dark prophecies, with words that are only surpassed

in their tenderness and the outpouring of the heart of God, by the

fuller revelation in Jesus Christ: O Israel, return unto the Lord thy

God. Take with you words, and return unto the Lord, and say unto Him:

Assyria shall not save us, for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy.'

The divine answer which he was commissioned to bring to the penitent

Israel--I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely; if

Mine anger is turned away from Me'--is, in all its wealth of forgiving

love but an imperfect prophecy of the great Physician, from the hem of

whose garment flowed out power to one who had spent all her living on

physicians and could not be healed of any,' and who confirmed to her

the power which she had thought to steal from Him unawares by the

gracious words which bound her to Him for ever--Daughter, thy faith

hath made thee whole; go in peace.'

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FRUIT WHICH IS DEATH'

Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself:

according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars;

according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images. 2.

Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: He shall break

down their altars, He shall spoil their images. 3. For now they shall

say, We have no king, because we feared not the Lord; what then should

a king do to us? 4. They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making

a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the

field. 5. The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves

of Beth-aven: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the

priests thereof that rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it

is departed from it. 6. It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a

present to king Jareb: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be

ashamed of his own counsel. 7. As for Samaria, her king is cut off as

the foam upon the water. 8. The high places also of Aven, the sin of

Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on

their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the

hills, Fall on us. 9. O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of

Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of

iniquity did not overtake them. 10. It is in my desire that I should

chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they

shall bind themselves in their two furrows. 11. And Ephraim is as an

heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn; but I passed

over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow,

and Jacob shall break his clods. 12. Sow to yourselves in

righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is

time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.

13. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten

the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the

multitude of thy mighty men. 14. Therefore shall a tumult arise among

thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled

Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon

her children. 15. So shall Beth-el do unto you because of your great

wickedness: in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut

off.'--HOSEA x. 1-15.

The prophecy of this chapter has two themes--Israel's sin, and its

punishment. These recur again and again. Reiteration, not progress of

thought, characterises Hosea's fiery stream of inspired eloquence.

Conviction of sin and prediction of judgment are his message. We trace

a fourfold repetition of it here, and further note that in each case

there is a double reference to Israel's sin as consisting in the

rebellion which set up a king and in the schism which established the

calf worship; while there is also a double phase of the punishment

corresponding to these, in the annihilation of the kingdom and the

destruction of the idols.

The first section may be taken to be verses 1-3. The image of a

luxuriant vine laden with fruit is as old as Jacob's blessing of the

tribes (Gen. xlix. 22), where it is applied to Joseph, whose

descendants were the strength of the Northern Kingdom. Hosea has

already used it, and here it is employed to set forth picturesquely the

material prosperity of Israel. Probably the period referred to is the

successful reign of Jeroboam II. But prosperity increased sin. The more

fruit or material wealth, the more altars; the better the harvests, the

more the obelisks or pillars to gods, falsely supposed to be the

authors of the blessings. The words are as condensed as a proverb, and

are as true to-day as ever. Israel had attributed its prosperity to

Baal (Hosea ii. 8). The misuse of worldly wealth and the tendency of

success to draw us away from God, and to blind to the true source of

all blessing, are as rife now as then.

The root of the evil was, as always, a heart divided--that is, between

God and Baal--or, perhaps, smooth'; that is, dissimulating and

insincere. In reality, Baal alone possesses the heart which its owner

would share between him and Jehovah. All in all, or not at all,' is the

law. Whether Baals or calves were set beside God, He was equally

deposed.

Then, with a swift turn, Hosea proclaims the impending judgment,

setting himself and the people as if already in the future. He hears

the first peal of the storm, and echoes it in that abrupt now.' The

first burst of the judgment shatters dreams of innocence, and the

cowering wretches see their sin by the lurid light. That discovery

awaits every man whose heart has been divided.' To the gazers and to

himself masks drop, and the true character stands out with appalling

clearness. What will that light show us to be? An unnamed hand

overthrows altars and pillars. No need to say whose it is. One half of

Israel's sin is crushed at a blow, and the destruction of the other

follows immediately.

They themselves abjure their allegiance; for they have found out that

their king is a king Log, and can do them no good. A king, set up in

opposition to God's will, cannot save. The ruin of their projects

teaches godless men at last that they have been fools to take their own

way; for all defences, recourses, and protectors, chosen in defiance of

God, prove powerless when the strain comes. The annihilation of one

half of their sin sickens them of the other. The calves and the

monarchy stood or fell together. It is a dismal thing to have to bear

the brunt of chastisement for what we see to have been a blunder as

well as a crime. But such is the fate of those who seek other gods and

another king.

In verse 4 Hosea recurs to Israel's crime, and appends a description of

the chastisement, substantially the same as before, but more detailed,

which continues till verse 8. The sin now is contemplated in its

effects on human relations. Before, it was regarded in relation to God.

But men who are wrong with Him cannot be right with one another.

Morality is rooted in religion, and if we lie to God, we shall not be

true to our brother. Hence, passing over all other sins for the

present, Hosea fixes upon one, the prevalence of which strikes at the

very foundation of society. What can be done with a community in which

lying has become a national characteristic, and that even in formal

agreements? Honey-combed with falsehood, it is only fit for burning.

Sin is bound by an iron link to penalty. Therefore, says Hosea, God's

judgment springs up, like a bitter plant (the precise name of which is

unknown) in the furrows, where the farmer did not know that its seeds

lay. They little dreamed what they were sowing when they scattered

abroad their lies, but this is the fruit of these. Whatsoever a man

soweth, that shall he also reap'; and whatever other crop we may hope

to gather from our sins, we shall gather that bitter one which we did

not expect. The inevitable connection of sin and judgment, the

bitterness of its results, the unexpectedness of them, are all here,

and to be laid to heart by us.

Then verses 5 and 6 dilate with keen irony on the fate of the first

half of Israel's sin--the calf. It was thought a god, but its

worshippers shall be in a fright for it. Calves,' says Hosea, though

there was but one at Beth-el; and he uses the feminine, as some think,

depreciatingly. Beth-aven' or the house of vanity,' he says, instead of

Beth-el, the house of God.' A fine god whose worshippers had to be

alarmed for its safety! Its people'--what a contrast to the name they

might have borne, My people'! God disowns them, and says, They belong

to it, not to Me.' The idolatrous priests of the calf worship will

tremble when that image, which had been shamefully their glory,' is

carried off to Assyria, and given as a present to king Jareb'--a name

for the king of Assyria meaning the fighting or quarrelsome king. The

captivity of the god is the shame of the worshippers. To be ashamed of

their own counsel' is the certain fate of all who depart from God; for,

sooner or later, experience will demonstrate to the blindest that their

refuges of lies can neither save themselves nor those who trust in

them. But shame is one thing and repentance another; and many a man

will say, I have been a great fool, and my clever policy has all

crumbled to pieces,' who will only therefore change his idols, and not

return to God.

Verse 7 recurs to the political punishment of the civil rebellion. The

image for the disappearance of the king is striking, whether we render

foam' or chip,' but the former has special beauty. In the one case we

see the unsubstantial bubble,

A moment white, then melts for ever';

and in the other, the helpless twig swept down by the stream. Either

brings vividly before us the powerlessness of Israel against the

roaring torrent of Assyrian power; and the figure may be widened out to

teach what is sure to become of all man-made and self-chosen refuges

when the floods of God's judgments sweep over the world. The captivity

of the idol and the burst bubble of the monarchy bid us all make

Jehovah our God and King. The vacant shrine and empty throne are

followed by utter and long-continued desolation. Thorns and thistles

have time to grow on the altars, and no hand cuts them down. What of

the men thus stripped of all in which they had trusted? Desperate, they

implore the mountains to fall on them, as preferring to die, and the

hills to cover them, as willing to be crushed, if only they may be

hidden. That awful cry is heard again in our Lord's predictions of

judgment, and in the Apocalypse. Therefore this prophecy foreshadows,

in the destruction of Israel's confidences and in their shame and

despair, a more dreadful coming day, in which we shall be concerned.

Verses 9 to 11 again give the sin and its punishment. The days of

Gibeah' recall the hideous story of lust and crime which was the

low-water mark of the lawless days of old. That crime had been avenged

by merciless war. But its taint had lived on, and the Israel of Hosea's

day stood,' obstinately persistent, just where the Benjamites had been

then, and set themselves in dogged resistance, as these had done, that

the battle against the children of unrighteousness might not touch

them.'

Stiff-necked setting oneself against God's merciful fighting with evil

lasts for a little while, but verse 10 tells how soon and easily it is

annihilated. God's desire' brushes away all defences, and the obstinate

sinners are like children, who are whipped when their father wills, let

them struggle as they may. The instruments of chastisement are foreign

armies, and the chastisement itself is described with a striking figure

as binding them to their two transgressions'; that is, the double sin

which is the keynote of the chapter. Punishment is yoking men to their

sins, and making them drag the burden like bullocks in harness. What

sort of load are we getting together for ourselves? When we have to

drag the consequences of our doings behind us, how shall we feel?

The figure sets the Prophet's imagination going, and he turns it

another way, comparing Israel to a heifer, broken in, and liking the

easy work of threshing, in which the unmuzzled ox could eat its fill,

but now set to harder tasks in the fields. Judah, too, is to share in

the punishment. If men will not serve God in and because of prosperous

ease, He will try what toil and privation will do. Abused blessings are

withdrawn, and the abundance of the threshing-floor is changed for

dragging a heavy plough or harrow.

Verse 12 still deals with the figure suggested in the close of the

previous verse. It is the only break in the clouds in this chapter. It

is a call to amendment, accompanied by a promise of acceptance. If we

sow for righteousness'--that is, if our efforts are directed to

embodying it in our lives--we shall reap according to mercy.' That is

true universally, whether it is taken to mean God's mercy to us, or

ours to others. The aim after righteousness ever secures the divine

favour, and usually ensures the measure which we mete being measured to

us again.

But sowing is not all; thorns must be grubbed up. We must not only turn

over a new leaf, but tear out the old one. The old man must be slain if

the new man is to live. The call to amend finds its warrant in the

assurance that there is still time to seek the Lord, and that, for all

His threatenings, He is ready to rain blessings upon the seekers. The

unwearying patience of God, the possibility of the worst sinner's

repentance, the conditional nature of the threatenings, the possibility

of breaking the bond between sin and sorrow, the yet deeper thought

that righteousness must come from above, are all condensed in this

brief gospel before the Gospel.

But that bright gleam passes, and the old theme recurs. Once more we

have sin and punishment exhibited in their organic connection in verses

13 and 14. Israel's past had been just the opposite of sowing

righteousness and reaping mercy. Wickedness ploughed in, iniquity will

surely be its fruit. Sin begets sin, and is its own punishment. What

fruit have we of doing wrong? Lies'; that is, unfulfilled expectations

of unrealised satisfaction. No man gets the good that he aimed at in

sinning, or he gets something more that spoils it. At last the

deceitfulness of sin will be found out, but we may be sure of it now.

The root of all Israel's sin was the root of ours; namely, trust in

self, and consequent neglect of God. The first half of verse 13 is an

exhaustive analysis of the experience of every sinful life; the second,

a penetrating disclosure of the foundation of it.

Then the whole closes with the repeated threatening, dual as before,

and illustrated by the forgotten horrors of some dreadful siege, one of

the unhappy, far-off things,' fallen silent now. A significant

variation occurs in the final threatening, in which Beth-el is set

forth as the cause, rather than as the object, of the destruction. They

were the ruin of him and of all Israel.' Our vices are made the whips

to scourge us. Our idols bring us no help, but are the causes of our

misery.

The Prophet ends with the same double reference which prevails

throughout, when he once more declares the annihilation of the

monarchy, which, rather than a particular person, is meant by the

king.' In the morning' is enigmatical. It may mean prematurely,' or

suddenly,' or in a time of apparent prosperity,' or, more probably, the

Prophet stands in vision in that future day of the Lord, and points to

the king' as the first victim. The force of the prophecy does not

depend on the meaning of this detail. The teaching of the whole is the

certainty that suffering dogs sin, but yet does so by no iron,

impersonal law, but according to the will of God, who will rain

righteousness even on the sinner, being penitent, and will endow with

righteousness from above every lowly soul that seeks for it.

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DESTRUCTION AND HELP

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help.'--HOSEA

xiii. 9 (A.V.).

It is thy destruction, O Israel, that thou art against Me, against thy

Help' (R.V.).

These words are obscure by reason of their brevity. Literally they

might be rendered, Thy destruction for, in, or against Me; in, or

against thy Help.' Obviously, some words must be supplied to bring out

any sense. Our Authorised Version has chosen the supplement is,' which

fails to observe the second occurrence with thy Help' of the

preposition, and is somewhat lax in rendering the for' of the second

clause by the neutral but.' It is probably better to read, as the

Revised Version, with most modern interpreters, Thou art against Me,

against thy Help,' and to find in the second clause the explanation, or

analysis, of the destruction announced in the first. So we have here

the wail of the parental love of God over the ruin which Israel has

brought on itself, and that parental love is setting forth Israel's

true condition, in the hope that they may discern it. Thus, even the

rebuke holds enclosed a promise and a hope. Since God is their help, to

depart from Him has been ruin, and the return to Him will be life.

Hosea, or rather the Spirit that spake through Hosea, blended wonderful

tenderness with unflinching decision in rebuke, and unwavering

certainty in foretelling evil with unfaltering hope in the promise of

possible blessing. His words are set in the same key as the still more

wonderfully tender ones that Jesus uttered as He looked across the

valley from Olivet to the gleaming city on the other side, and wailed,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children

together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would

not! Therefore your house is left unto you desolate.'

We may note here

I. The loving discovery of ruin.

It is strange that men should need to be told, and that with all

emphasis, the evil case in which they are; and stranger still that they

should resent the discovery and reject it. This pathetic pleading is

the voice of a divine Father trying to convince His son of misery and

danger; and the obscurity of the text is as if that voice was choked

with sobs, and could only speak in broken syllables the tragical word

in which all the evil of Israel's sin is gathered up--his destruction,'

or corruption.' It gathers up in one terrible picture the essential

nature of sin and the death of the soul, which is its wages--inward

misery and unrest, outward sorrows, the decay of mental and moral

powers, the spreading taint which eats its way through the whole

personality of a man who has sinned, and pauses not till it has reduced

his corpse to putrefaction. All these, and a hundred more effects of

sin, are crowded together in that one word thy destruction.'

It is strange that it needs God's voice, and that in its most piercing

tones, to convince men of ruin brought by sin. A mortifying limb is

painless. There is no consciousness in the drugged sleep which becomes

heavier and heavier till it ends in death. There is no surer sign of

the reality and extent of the corruption brought about by sin, than

man's ignorance of it. There is no more tragical proof that a man is

wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked' than his vehement

affirmation, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of

nothing,' and his self-complacent rejection of the counsel to buy

refined gold, and white garments, and eye-salve to anoint his eyes.' So

obstinately unconscious are we of our ruin that even God's voice,

whether uttered in definite words, or speaking in sharp sorrows and

punitive acts, but too often fails to pierce the thick layer of self

complacency in which we wrap ourselves, and to pierce the heart with

the arrow of conviction. Indeed we may say that the whole process of

divine education of a soul, conducted through many channels of

providences, has for its end mainly this--to convince His wandering

children that to be against Him, against their Help, is their

destruction.

But, perhaps, the strangest of all is the attitude which we often take

up of resenting the love that would reveal our ruin. It is stupid of

the ox to kick against its driver's goad; but that is wise in

comparison with the action of the man who is angry with God because He

warns that departure from Him is ruin. Many of us treat Christianity as

if it had made the mischief which it reveals, and would fain mend; and

we all need to be reminded that it is cruel kindness to conceal

unpleasant truths, and that the Gospel is no more to be blamed for the

destruction which it declares than is the signalman with his red flag

responsible for the broken-down viaduct to which the train is rushing

that he tries to save.

II. The loving appeal to conscience as to the cause.

Israel's destruction arose from the fact of Israel having turned

against God, its Help. Sin is suicide. God is our Help, and only Help.

His will is love and blessing. His only relation to our sin is to hate

it, and fight against it. In conflict of love with lovelessness one of

His chiefest weapons is to drive home to our consciousness the

conviction of our sin. When He is driven to punish, it is our

wrongdoing that forces Him to what Isaiah calls, His strange act.' The

Heavenly Father is impelled by His love not to spare the rod, lest the

sparing spoil the child. An earthly father suffers more punishment than

he inflicts upon the little rebel whom, unwillingly and with tears, he

may chastise; and God's love is more tender, as it is more wise, than

that of the fathers of our flesh who corrected us. He doth not

willingly afflict nor is soon angry'; and of all the mercies which He

bestows upon us, none is more laden with His love than the discipline

by which He would make us know, through our painful experience, that it

is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord, and that His fear is

not in us.' In its essence and depth, separation from God is death to

the creature that wrenches itself away from the source of life; and all

the weariness and pains of a godless life are, if we take them as He

meant them, the very angels of His presence.

Just as the sole reason for our sorrows lies in our wrongdoing, the

sole cause of our wrongdoing is in ourselves. It is because Israel is

against Me' that Israel's destruction rushes down upon it. It could

have defended its hankering after Assyria and idols, by wise talk about

political exigencies and the wisdom of trying to turn possibly powerful

enemies into powerful allies, and the folly of a little nation, on a

narrow strip of territory between the desert and the sea, fancying

itself able to sustain itself uncrushed between the upper millstone of

Assyria on the north, and the under one, Egypt, on the south. But

circumstances are never the cause, though they may afford the excuse of

rebellion against our Helper, God; and all the modern talk about

environments and the like, is merely a cloak cast round, but too scanty

to conceal the ugly fact of the alienated will. All the excuses for

sin, which either modern scientific jargon about laws,' or

hyper-Calvinistic talk about divine decrees,' alleges, are alike

shattered against the plain fact of conscience, which proclaims to

every evil-doer, Thou art the man!' We shall get no further and no

deeper than the truth of our text: It is thy destruction that thou art

against Me.'

The pleading God has from the beginning spoken words as tender as they

are stern, and as stern as they are tender. His voice to the sons of

men has from of old asked the unanswerable question, Why should ye be

stricken any more?' and has answered it, so far as answer is possible,

by the fact, which is as mysterious as it is undeniable, Ye will revolt

more and more.' God calls upon man to judge between Him and His

vineyard, and asks, What could have been done more to My vineyard that

I have not done unto it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring

forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?' The fault lay not in the

vine-dresser, but in some evil influence that had found its way into

the life and sap of the vine, and bore fruits in an unnatural product,

which could not have been traced to the vine-dresser's action. So God

stands, as with clean hands, declaring that He is pure from the blood

of all men; that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked'; and

His word to the men on whom falls the whole weight of His destroying

power is, Thou hast procured this unto thyself.'

III. The loving forbearance which still offers restoration.

He still claims to be Israel's Help. Separation from Him has all but

destroyed the rebellious; but it has not in the smallest degree

affected the fulness of His power, nor the fervency of His desire to

help. However earth may be shaken by storms, or swathed in mist that

darkens all things and shuts out heaven, the sun is still in its

tabernacle and pouring down its rays through the cloudless blue that is

above the enfolding cloud. Our text has wrapped up in it the broad

gospel that all our self-inflicted destruction may be arrested, and all

the evil which brought it about swept away. God is ready to prove

Himself our true and only Helper in that, as our prophet says, He will

ransom us from the power of the grave'; and, even when death has laid

its cold hand upon us, will redeem us from it, and destroy the

destruction which had fixed its talons in us. All the guilt is ours;

all the help is His; His work is to conquer and cast out our sins, to

heal our sicknesses, to soothe our sorrows. And He has Himself

vindicated His great name of our Help when He has revealed Himself as

the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'

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ISRAEL RETURNING

O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine

iniquity. 2. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him,

Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render

the calves of our lips. 3. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride

upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye

are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. 4. I will heal

their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned

away from Him. 5. I will be as the dew unto Israel: He shall grow as

the lily, and cast forth His roots as Lebanon. 6. His branches shall

spread, and His beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and His smell as

Lebanon. 7. They that dwell under His shadow shall return; they shall

revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as

the wine of Lebanon. 8. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more

with idols? I have heard Him, and observed Him: I am like a green

fir-tree. From me is thy fruit found. 9. Who is wise, and He shall

understand these things? prudent, and He shall know them? for the ways

of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the

transgressors shall fall therein.'--HOSEA xiv. 1-9.

Hosea is eminently the prophet of divine love and of human repentance.

Both streams of thought are at their fullest in this great chapter. In

verses 1 to 3 the very essence of true return to God is set forth in

the prayer which Israel is exhorted to offer, while in verses 4 to 8

the forgiving love of God and its blessed results are portrayed with

equal poetical beauty and spiritual force. Verse 9 closes the chapter

and the book with a kind of epilogue.

I. The summons to repentance.

Israel,' of course, here means the Northern Kingdom, with which Hosea's

prophecies are chiefly occupied. Thou hast fallen by thine

iniquity'--that is the lesson taught by all its history, and in a

deeper sense it is the lesson of all experience. Sin brings ruin for

nations and individuals, and the plain teachings of each man's own life

exhort each to return unto the Lord.' We have all proved the vanity and

misery of departing from Him; surely, if we are not drawn by His love,

we might be driven by our own unrest, to go back to God.

The Prophet anticipates the clear accents of the New Testament call to

repentance in his expansion of what he meant by returning. He has

nothing to say about sacrifices, nor about self-reliant efforts at

moral improvement. Take with you words,' not the blood of bulls and

goats.' Confession is better than sacrifice. What words are they which

will avail? Hosea teaches the penitent's prayer. It must begin with the

petition for forgiveness, which implies recognition of the petitioner's

sin. The cry, Take away all iniquity,' does not specify sins, but

masses the whole black catalogue into one word. However varied the

forms of our transgressions, they are in principle one, and it is best

to bind them all into one ugly heap, and lay it at God's feet. We have

to confess not only sins, but sin, and the taking away of it includes

divine cleansing from its power, as well as divine forgiveness of its

guilt. Hosea bids Israel ask that God would take away all iniquity;

John pointed to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the

world.' But beyond forgiveness and cleansing, the penitent heart will

seek that God would accept the good' in it, which springs up by His

grace, when the evil has been washed from it, like flowers that burst

from soil off which the matted under-growth of poisonous jungle has

been cleared. Mere negative absence of evil' is not all that we should

desire or exhibit; there must be positive good; and however sinful may

have been the past, we are not too bold when we ask and expect that we

may be made able to produce good,' which shall be fragrant as sweet

incense to God.

Petitions are followed by vows. On the one hand, the experience of

forgiveness and cleansing will put a new song in our mouths, and

instead of animal sacrifices, we shall render the praise which is

better than calves' laid on the altar. Perhaps the Septuagint rendering

of that difficult phrase the calves of our lips,' which is given in

Hebrews xiii. 15, the fruit of our lips,' is preferable. In either

case, the same thought appears--that the penitent's experience of

forgiving and restoring love makes the tongue of the dumb sing,' and it

will bind men's hearts more closely to God than anything besides can

do, so that their old inclinations to false reliances and idolatries

drop away from them. The old fable tells us that the storm made the

traveller wrap his cloak closer round him, but the sunshine made him

throw it off. Judgments often make men cling more closely to their

sins, but forgiving mercy makes them cast off the works of darkness.'

The men who had experienced that in God, the Israel, which by its sins

had brought down the punishment of His repudiation of being its father

(i. 9), had found mercy, would no longer feel temptation to turn to

Assyria for help, nor to seek protection from Egypt's cavalry, nor to

debase their manhood by calling stocks and stones, the work of their

own hands, their gods. What earthly sweetness will tempt, or what

earthly danger will affright, the heart that is feeling the bliss of

union with God? Would Judas's thirty pieces of silver attract the

disciple reclining on Jesus' bosom? We are most firmly bound to God,

not by our resolves, but by our experience of His all-sufficient mercy.

Fill the heart with that wine of the kingdom, and bitter or poisonous

draughts will find no entrance into the cup.

II. God's welcoming answer.

The very abruptness of its introduction, without any explanation as to

the speaker, suggests how swiftly and joyfully the Father hastens to

meet the returning prodigal while he is yet afar off. Like pent-up

waters rushing forth as soon as a barrier is taken away, God's love

pours itself out immediately. His answer ever gives more than the

penitent asks--robe and ring and shoes, and a feast to him who dared

not expect more than a place among the hired servants. He gives not by

drops, but in floods, answering the prayer for the taking away of

iniquity by the promise to heal backsliding, going beyond desires and

hopes in the gift of love which asks for no recompense, is drawn forth

by no desert, but wells up from the depths of God's heart, and

strengthens the new, tremulous trust of the penitent by the assurance

that every trace of anger is effaced from God's heart.

The blessings consequent on the gift of God's love are described in

lovely imagery, drawn, like Hosea's other abundant similes, from

nature, and especially from trees and flowers. The source of all

fruitfulness is a divine influence, which comes silently and refreshing

as the dew,' or, rather, as the night mist,' a phenomenon occurring in

Palestine in summer, and being, accurately, rolling masses of vapour

brought from the Mediterranean, which counteract the dry heat and keep

vegetation alive. The influences which refresh and fructify our souls

must fall in many a silent hour of meditation and communion. They will

effloresce into manifold shapes of beauty and fruitfulness, of which

the Prophet signalises three. The lily may stand for beauty of purity,

though botanists differ as to the particular flower meant. Christians

should present to the world whatsoever things are lovely,' and see to

it that their goodness is attractive. But the fragrant, pure lily has

but shallow roots, and beauty is not all that a character needs in this

world of struggle and effort. So there are to be both the lily's

blossom and roots like Lebanon. The image may refer to the firm

buttresses of the widespread foot-hills, from which the sovereign

summits of the great mountain range rise, or, as is rather suggested by

the accompanying similes from the vegetable world, it may refer to the

cedars growing there. Their roots are anchored deep and stretch far

underground; therefore they rear towering heads, and spread broad

shelves of dark foliage, safe from any blast. Our lives must be deep

rooted in God if they are to be strong. Boots generally spread beneath

the soil about as far as branches extend above it. There should be at

least as much underground, hid with Christ in God,' as is visible to

the world.

But beauty and strength are not all. So Hosea thinks of yet another of

the characteristic growths of Palestine, the olive, which is not

strikingly beautiful in form, with its strangely gnarled, contorted

stem, its feeble branches, and its small, pointed, pale leaves, but has

the beauty of fruitfulriess, and is green when other trees are bare.

Such beauty' should be ours, and will be if the dew' falls on us.

In verse 7 there are difficulties, both as to the application of the

his,' and as to the reading and rendering of some of the words. But the

general drift is clear. It prolongs the tones of the foregoing verses,

keeping to the same class of images, and expressing fruitfulness,

abundant as the corn and precious as the grape, and fragrance like the

bouquet' of the choicest wine.

Verse 8 offers great difficulties on any interpretation. The supplement

shall say' is questionable, and it is doubtful whether Ephraim is the

speaker at all, and whether, if so, he speaks all the four clauses, and

who speaks any or all of them, if not he. To the present writer, it

seems best to take the supplement as right, and possible to regard the

whole verse as spoken by Ephraim, though perhaps the last clause is

meant to be God's utterance. The meaning will then come out as follows.

The penitent Israel again speaks, after the gracious promises

preceding. The tribal name is, as usual in Hosea, equivalent to Israel,

whose penitent cry we heard at the beginning of the passage. Now we

hear his glad response to God's abundant answer. What have I to do any

more with idols?' He had vowed (verse 3) to have no more to do with

them, and the resolve is deepened by the rich grace held forth to him.

Hosea had lamented Ephraim's mad adherence to his idols' (iv. 17), but

now the union is dissolved, and by penitence and reception of God's

grace, he is joined to the Lord, and parted from them. His renunciation

of idolatry is based, in the second clause, on his experience of what

God can do, and on his having heard God's gracious voice of pardon and

promise. If a man hears God, he will not be drawn to worship at any

idol's shrine.

Further, in the third clause, Ephraim is joyfully conscious of the

change that has passed on him, in accordance with the great promises

just spoken, and with grateful astonishment that such verdure should

have burst out from the dry and rotten stump of his own sinful nature,

exclaims, I am like a green fir-tree.' That is another reason why he

will have no more to do with idols. They could never have made his

sapless nature break into leafage. But what of the fourth clause--From

Me is thy fruit found'? Can we understand that to mean that Ephraim

still speaks, keeping up the image of the previous clause, and

declaring that all the new fruitfulness which he finds in himself he

recognises to be God's, both in the sense that, in reality, it is

produced by Him, and that it belongs to Him? He comes seeking fruit,

and He finds it. All our good is His, and we shall be happy,

productive, and wise, in proportion as we offer all our works to Him,

and feel that, after all, they are not ours, but the works of that

Spirit which dwells in penitent and believing hearts. Some have thought

that this last clause must be taken as spoken by God; but, even if so

taken, it conveys substantially the same thought as to the divine

origin of man's fruitfulness.

The last verse is rather a general reflection summing up the whole than

an integral part of this wonderful representation of penitence, pardon,

and fruitfulness. It declares the great truth that the knowledge of the

pardoning mercy of God, and of the ways by which He weans men from sin

and makes them fruitful of good, makes us truly wise. That knowledge is

more than intellectual apprehension; it is experience. Providence has

its mysteries, but they who keep near to God, and are just' because

they do, will find the opportunity of free, unfettered activity in

God's ways, and transgressors will stumble therein. Therefore wisdom

and safety lie in penitence and confession, which will ever be met by

gracious pardon and showers of blessing that will cause our hearts,

which sin has made desert, to rejoice and blossom like the rose.

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THE DEW AND THE PLANTS

I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast

forth his roots as Lebanon. 6. His branches shall spread, and his

beauty shall be as the olive-tree . . .'--HOSEA xiv. 5, 6.

Like his brethren, Hosea was a poet as well as a prophet. His little

prophecy is full of similes and illustrations drawn from natural

objects; scarcely any of them from cities or from the ways of men;

almost all of them from Nature, as seen in the open country, which he

evidently loved, and where he had looked upon things with a clear and

meditative eye. This whole chapter is full of emblems drawn from the

vegetable world. The lily, the cedar, the olive, are in my text. And

there follow, in the subsequent verses, the corn, and the vine, and the

green fir-tree.

The words which I have read, no doubt originally had simply a reference

to the numerical increase of the people and their restoration to their

land, but they may be taken by us quite fairly as having a very much

deeper and more blessed reference than that. For they describe the

uniform condition of all spiritual life and growth,' I will be as the

dew unto Israel'; and then they set forth some of the manifold aspects

of that growth, and the consequences of receiving that heavenly dew,

under the various metaphors to which I have referred. It is in that

higher signification that I wish to look at them now.

I. The first thought that comes out of the words is that for all life

and growth of the spirit there must be a bedewing from God.

I will be as the dew unto Israel.' Now, scholars tell us that the kind

of moisture that is meant in these words is not what we call dew, of

which, as a matter of fact, there falls, in Palestine, little or none

at the season of the year referred to in my text, but that the word

really means the heavy night-clouds that come upon the wings of the

south-west wind, to diffuse moisture and freshness over the parched

plains, in the very height and fierceness of summer. The metaphor of my

text becomes more beautiful and striking, if we note that, in the

previous chapter, where the Prophet was in his threatening mood, he

predicts that an east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come

up from the wilderness'--the burning sirocco, with death upon its

wings--and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried

up.' We have then to imagine the land gaping and parched, the hot air

having, as with invisible tongue of flame, licked streams and pools

dry, and having shrunken fountains and springs. Then, all at once there

comes down upon the baking ground and on the faded, drooping flowers

that lie languid and prostrate on the ground in the darkness, borne on

the wings of the wind, from the depths of the great unfathomed sea, an

unseen moisture. You cannot call it rain, so gently does it diffuse

itself; it is liker a mist, but it brings life and freshness, and

everything is changed. The dew, or the night mist, as it might more

properly be rendered, was evidently a good deal in Hosea's mind; you

may remember that he uses the image again in a remarkably different

aspect, where he speaks of men's goodness as being like a morning

cloud, and the early dew that passes away.'

The natural object which yields the emblem was all inadequate to set

forth the divine gift which is compared to it, because as soon as the

sun has risen, with burning heat, it scatters the beneficent clouds,

and the sunbeams like swords' threaten to slay the tender green shoots.

But this mist from God that comes down to water the earth is never

dried up. It is not transient. It may be ours, and live in our hearts.

Dear brethren, the prose of this sweet old promise is If I depart, I

will send Him unto you.' If we are Christian people, we have the

perpetual dew of that divine Spirit, which falls on our leaves and

penetrates to our roots, and communicates life, freshness, and power,

and makes growth possible--more than possible, certain--for us.

I'--Myself through My Son, and in My Spirit--I will be'--an

unconditional assurance--as the dew unto Israel.'

Yes! That promise is in its depth and fulness applicable only to the

Christian Israel, and it remains true to-day and for ever. Do we see it

fulfilled? One looks round upon our congregations, and into one's own

heart, and we behold the parable of Gideon's fleece acted over

again--some places soaked with the refreshing moisture, and some as

hard as a rock and as dry as tinder and ready to catch fire from any

spark from the devil's forge and be consumed in the everlasting

burnings some day. It will do us good to ask ourselves why it is that,

with a promise like this for every Christian soul to build upon, there

are so few Christian souls that have anything like realised its fulness

and its depth. Let us be quite sure of this--God has nothing to do with

the failure of His promise, and let us take all the blame to ourselves.

I will be as the dew unto Israel.' Who was Israel? The man that

wrestled all night in prayer with God, and took hold of the angel and

prevailed and wept and made supplication to Him. So Hosea tells us; and

as he says in the passage where he describes the Angel's wrestling with

Jacob at Peniel, there He spake with us'--when He spake, He spake with

him who first bore the name. Be you Israel, and God will surely be your

dew; and life and growth will be possible. That is the first lesson of

this great promise.

II. The second is, that a soul thus bedewed by God will spring into

purity and beauty.

We go back to Hosea's vegetable metaphors. He shall grow as the lily'

is his first promise. If I were addressing a congregation of botanists,

I should have something to say about what kind of a plant is meant, but

that is quite beside the mark for my present purpose. It is sufficient

to notice that in this metaphor the emphasis is laid upon the two

attributes which I have named--beauty and purity. The figure teaches us

that ugly Christianity is not Christ's Christianity. Some of us older

people remember that it used to be a favourite phrase to describe

unattractive saints that they had grace grafted on a crab stick.' There

are a great many Christian people whom one would compare to any other

plant rather than a lily. Thorns and thistles and briers are a good

deal more like what some of them appear to the world. But we are bound,

if we are Christian people, by our obligations to God, and by our

obligations to men, to try to make Christianity look as beautiful in

people's eyes as we can. That is what Paul said, Adorn the teaching';

make it look well, inasmuch as it has made you look attractive to men's

eyes. Men have a fairly accurate notion of beauty and goodness, whether

they have any goodness or any beauty in their own characters or not. Do

you remember the words: Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things

are of good report, whatsoever things are venerable . . . if there be

any praise'--from men--think on these things'? If we do not keep that

as the guiding star of our lives, then we have failed in one very

distinct duty of Christian people--namely, to grow more like a lily,

and to be graceful in the lowest sense of that word, as well as grace

full in the highest sense of it. We shall not be so in the lower,

unless we are so in the higher. It may be a very modest kind of beauty,

very humble, and not at all like the flaring reds and yellows of the

gorgeous flowers that the world admires. These are often like a great

sunflower, with a disc as big as a cheese. But the Christian beauty

will be modest and unobtrusive and shy, like the violet half buried in

the hedge-bank, and unnoticed by careless eyes, accustomed to see

beauty only in gaudy, flaring blooms. But unless you, as a Christian,

are in your character arrayed in the "beauty of holiness,' and the

holiness of beauty, you are not quite the Christian that Jesus Christ

wants you to be; setting forth all the gracious and sweet and refining

influences of the Gospel in your daily life and conduct. That is the

second lesson of our text.

III. The third is, that a God-bedewed soul that has been made fair and

pure by communion with God, ought also to be strong.

He "shall cast forth his roots like Lebanon." Now I take it that simile

does not refer to the roots of that giant range that slope away down

under the depths of the Mediterranean. That is a beautiful emblem, but

it is not in line with the other images in the context. As these are

all dependent on the promise of the dew, and represent different phases

of the results of its fulfilment, it is natural to expect thus much

uniformity in their variety, that they shall all be drawn from

plant-life. If so, we must suppose a condensed metaphor here, and take

"Lebanon" to mean the forest which another prophet calls "the glory of

Lebanon." The characteristic tree in these, as we all know, was the

cedar.

It is named in Hebrew by a word which is connected with that for

"strength." It stands as the very type and emblem of stability and

vigour. Think of its firm roots by which it is anchored deep in the

soil. Think of the shelves of massive dark foliage. Think of its

unchanged steadfastness in storm. Think of its towering height; and

thus arriving at the meaning of the emblem, let us translate it into

practice in our own lives. "He shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon."

Beauty? Yes! Purity? Yes! And braided in with them, if I may so say,

the strength which can say "No!" which can resist, which can persist,

which can overcome; power drawn from communion with God. "Strength and

beauty" should blend in the worshippers, as they do in the "sanctuary"

in God Himself. There is nothing admirable in mere force; there is

often something sickly and feeble, and therefore contemptible in mere

beauty. Many of us will cultivate the complacent and the amiable sides

of the Christian life, and be wanting in the manly "thews that throw

the world," and can fight to the death. But we have to try and bring

these two excellences of character together, and it needs an immense

deal of grace and wisdom and imitation of Jesus Christ, and a close

clasp of His hand, to enable us to do that. Speak we of strength? He is

the type of strength. Of beauty? He is the perfection of beauty. And it

is only as we keep close to Him that our lives will be all fair with

the reflected loveliness of His, and strong with the communicated power

of His grace--"strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

Brethren, if we are to set forth anything, in our daily lives, of this

strength, remember that our lives must be rooted in, as well as bedewed

by, God. Hosea's emblems, beautiful and instructive as they are, do not

reach to the deep truth set forth in still holier and sweeter words; "I

am the Vine, ye are the branches." The union of Christ and His people

is closer than that between dew and plant. Our growth results from the

communication of His own life to us. Therefore is the command stringent

and obedience to it blessed, "Abide in Me, for apart from Me ye can

do"--and are--"nothing." Let us remember that the loftier the top of

the tree and the wider the spread of its shelves of dark foliage, if it

is steadfastly to stand, unmoved by the loud winds when they call, the

deeper must its roots strike into the firm earth. If your life is to be

a fair temple-palace worthy of God's dwelling in, if it is to be

impregnable to assault, there must be quite as much masonry underground

as above, as is the case in great old buildings and palaces. And such a

life must be a life "hid with Christ in God," then it will be strong.

When we strike our roots deep into Him, our branch also shall not

wither, and our leaf shall be green, and all that we do shall prosper.

The wicked are not so. They are like chaff--rootless, fruitless,

lifeless, which the wind driveth away.

IV. Lastly, the God-bedewed soul, beautiful, pure, strong, will bear

fruit.

That is the last lesson from these metaphors. "His beauty shall be as

the olive-tree." Anybody that has ever seen a grove of olives knows

that their beauty is not such as strikes the eye. If it was not for the

blue sky overhead, that rays down glorifying light, they would not be

much to look at or talk about. The tree has a gnarled, grotesque trunk

which divides into insignificant branches, bearing leaves mean in

shape, harsh in texture, with a silvery underside. It gives but a

quivering shade and has no massiveness, nor symmetry. Ay! but there are

olives on the branches. And so the beauty of the humble tree is in what

it grows for man's good. After all, it is the outcome in fruitfulness

which is the main thing about us. God's meaning, in all His gifts of

dew, and beauty, and purity, and strength, is that we should be of some

use in the world.

The olive is crushed into oil, and the oil is used for smoothing and

suppling joints and flesh, for nourishing and sustaining the body as

food, for illuminating darkness as oil in the lamp. And these three

things are the three things for which we Christian people have received

all our dew, and all our beauty, and all our strength--that we may give

other people light, that we may be the means of conveying to other

people nourishment, that we may move gently in the world as

lubricating, sweetening, soothing influences, and not irritating and

provoking, and leading to strife and alienation. The question after all

is, Does anybody gather fruit off us, and would anybody call us trees

of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified'?

That is lesson four from this text. May we all open our hearts for the

dew from heaven, and then use it to produce in ourselves beauty,

purity, strength, and fruitfulness!

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AMOS

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A PAIR OF FRIENDS

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?'--AMOS iii. 8.

They do not need to be agreed about everything. They must, however,

wish to keep each others company, and they must be going by the same

road to the same place. The application of the parable is very plain,

though there are differences of opinion as to the bearing of the whole

context which need not concern us now. The two,' whom the Prophet would

fain see walking together, are God and Israel, and his question

suggests not only the companionship and communion with God which are

the highest form of religion and the aim of all forms and ceremonies of

worship, but also the inexorable condition on which alone that height

of communion can be secured and sustained. Two may walk together,

though the one be God in heaven and the other be I on earth. But they

have to be agreed thus far, at any rate, that both shall wish to be

together, and both be going the same road.

I. So I ask you to look, first, at that possible blessed companionship

which may cheer a life.

There are three phrases in the Old Testament, very like each other, and

yet presenting different facets or aspects of the same great truth.

Sometimes we read about walking before God' as Abraham was bid to do.

That means ordering the daily life under the continual sense that we

are ever in the great Taskmaster's eye' Then there is walking after

God,' and that means conforming the will and active efforts to the rule

that He has laid down, setting our steps firm on the paths that He has

prepared that we should walk in them, and accepting His providences.

But also, high above both these conceptions of a devout life is the one

which is suggested by my text, and which, as you remember, was realised

in the case of the patriarch Enoch--walking with God.' For to walk

before Him may have with it some tremor, and may be undertaken in the

spirit of the slave who would be glad to get away from the jealous eye

that rebukes his slothfulness; and walking after Him' may be a painful

and partial effort to keep His distant figure in sight; but to walk

with Him' implies a constant, quiet sense of His Divine Presence which

forbids that I should ever be lonely, which guides and defends, which

floods my soul and fills my life, and in which, as the companions pace

along side by side, words may be spoken by either, or blessed silence

may be eloquent of perfect trust and rest.

But, dear brother, far above us as such experience seems to sound, such

a life is a possibility for every one of us. We may be able to say, as

truly as our Lord said it, I am not alone, for the Father is with me.'

It is possible that the dreariest solitude of a soul, such as is not

realised when the body is removed from men, but is felt most in the

crowded city where there is none that loves or fathoms and sympathises,

may be turned into blessed fellowship with Him. Yes, but that solitude

will not be so turned unless it is first painfully felt. As Daniel

said, I was left alone, and I saw the great vision.' We need to feel in

our deepest hearts that loneliness on earth before we walk with God.

If we are so walking, it is no piece of fanaticism to say that there

will be mutual communications. Do you not believe that God knows His

way into the spirits that He has endowed with conscious life? Do you

not believe that He speaks now to people as truly as He did to prophets

and Apostles of old? as truly; though the results of His speech to us

of to-day be not of the same authority for others as the words that He

spoke to a Paul or a John. The belief in God's communications as for

ever sounding in the depths of the Christian spirit does not at all

obliterate the distinction between the kind of inspiration which

produced the New Testament and that which is realised by all believing

and obedient souls. High above all our experience of hearing the words

of God in our hearts stands that of those holy men of old who heard

God's message whispered in their ears, that they might proclaim it on

the housetops to all the world through all generations. But though they

and we are on a different level, and God spoke to them for a different

purpose, He speaks in our spirits, if we will comply with the

conditions, as truly as He did in theirs. As really as it was ever true

that the Lord spoke to Abraham, or Isaiah, or Paul, it is true that He

now speaks to the man who walks with Him. Frank speech on both sides

beguiles many a weary mile, when lovers or friends foot it side by

side; and this pair of friends of whom our text speaks have mutual

intercourse. God speaks with His servant now, as of old, as a man

speaketh with his friend'; and we on our parts, if we are truly walking

with Him, shall feel it natural to speak frankly to God. As two friends

on the road will interchange remarks about trifles, and if they love

each other, the remarks about the trifles will be weighted with love,

so we can tell our smallest affairs to God; and if we have Him for our

Pilgrim-Companion, we do not need to lock up any troubles or concerns

of any sort, big or little, in our hearts, but may speak them all to

our Friend who goes with us.

The two may walk together. That is the end of all religion. What are

creeds for? What are services and sacraments for? What is theology for?

What is Christ's redeeming act for? All culminate in this true,

constant fellowship between men and God. And unless, in some measure,

that result is arrived at in our cases, our religion, let it be as

orthodox as you like, our faith in the redemption of Jesus Christ, let

it be as real as you will, our attendances on services and sacraments,

let them be as punctilious and regular as may be, are all sounding

brass and tinkling cymbal.' Get side by side with God; that is the

purpose of all these, and fellowship with Him is the climax of all

religion.

It is also the secret of all blessedness, the only thing that will make

a life absolutely sovereign over sorrow, and fixedly unperturbed by all

tempests, and invulnerable to all the slings and arrows of outrageous

fortune.' Hold fast by God, and you have an amulet against every evil,

and a shield against every foe, and a mighty power that will calm and

satisfy your whole being. Nothing else, nothing else will do so. As

Augustine said, O God! Thou hast made us for Thyself, and in Thyself

only are we at rest.' If the Shepherd is with us we will fear no evil.

II. Now, a word, in the next place, as to the sadly incomplete reality,

in much Christian experience, which contrasts with this possibility.

I am afraid that very, very few so-called Christian people habitually

feel, as they might do, the depth and blessedness of this communion.

And sure I am that only a very small percentage of us have anything

like the continuity of companionship which my text suggests as

possible. There may be, and therefore there should be, running unbroken

through a Christian life one long, bright line of communion with God

and happy inspiration from the sense of His presence with us. Is it a

line in my life, or is there but a dot here, and a dot there, and long

breaks between? The long, embarrassed pauses in a conversation between

two who do not know much of, or care much for, each other are only too

like what occurs in many professing Christians' intercourse with God.

Their communion is like those time-worn inscriptions that arch毬ogists

dig up, with a word clearly cut and then a great gap, and then a letter

or two, and then another gap, and then a little bit more legible, and

then the stone broken, and all the rest gone. Did you ever read the

meteorological reports in the newspapers and observe a record like

this, Twenty minutes' sunshine out of a possible eight hours'? Do you

not think that such a state of affairs is a little like the experience

of a great many Christian people in regard to their communion with God?

It is broken at the best, and imperfect at the completest, and shallow

at the deepest. O, dear brethren! rise to the height of your

possibilities, and live as close to God as He lets you live, and

nothing will much trouble you.

III. And now, lastly, a word about the simple explanation of the

failure to realise this continual presence.

Can two walk together except they be agreed?' Certainly not. Our

fathers, in a sterner and more religious age than ours, used to be

greatly troubled how to account for a state of Christian experience

which they supposed to be due to God's withdrawing of the sense of His

presence from His children. Whether there is any such withdrawal or

not, I am quite certain that that is not the cause of the interrupted

communion between God and the average Christian man.

I make all allowance for the ups and downs and changing moods which

necessarily affect us in this present life, and I make all allowance,

too, for the pressure of imperative duties and distracting cares which

interfere with our communion, though, if we were as strong as we might

be, they would not wile us away from, but drive us to, our Father in

heaven. But when all such allowances have been made, I come back to my

text as the explanation of interrupted communion. The two are not

agreed; and that is why they are not walking together. The

consciousness of God's presence with us is a very delicate thing. It is

like a very sensitive thermometer, which will drop when an iceberg is a

league off over the sea, and scarcely visible. We do not wish His

company, or we are not in harmony with His thoughts, or we are not

going His road, and therefore, of course, we part. At bottom there is

only one thing that separates a soul from God, and that is sin--sin of

some sort, like tiny grains of dust that get between two polished

plates in an engine that ought to move smoothly and closely against

each other. The obstruction may be invisible, and yet be powerful

enough to cause friction, which hinders the working of the engine and

throws everything out of gear. A light cloud that we cannot see may

come between us and a star, and we shall only know it is there, because

the star is not visibly there. Similarly, many a Christian, quite

unconsciously, has something or other in his habits, or in his conduct,

or in his affections, which would reveal itself to him, if he would

look, as being wrong, because it blots out God.

Let us remember that very little divergence will, if the two paths are

prolonged far enough, part their other ends by a world. Our way may go

off from the ways of the Lord at a very acute angle. There may be

scarcely any consciousness of parting company at the beginning. Let the

man travel on upon it far enough, and the two will be so far apart that

he cannot see God or hear Him speak. Take care of the little

divergences which are habitual, for their accumulated results will be

complete separation. There must be absolute surrender if there is to be

uninterrupted fellowship.

Such, then, is the direction in which we are to look for the reasons

for our low and broken experiences of communion with God. Oh, dear

friends! when we do as we sometimes do, wake with a start, like a child

that all at once starts from sleep and finds that its mother is

gone--when we wake with a start to feel that we are alone, then do not

let us be afraid to go straight back. Only be sure that we leave behind

us the sin that parted us.

You remember how Peter signalised himself on the lake, on the occasion

of the second miraculous draught of fishes, when he floundered through

the water and clasped Christ's feet. He did not say then, Depart from

Me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' He had said that before on a

similar occasion, when he felt his sin less, but now he knew that the

best place for the denier was with his head on Christ's bosom. So, if

we have parted from our Friend, there should be no time lost ere we go

back. May it be true of us that we walk with God, so that at last the

great promise may be fulfilled about us, that we shall walk with Him in

white,' being by His love accounted worthy,' and so follow' and keep

company with, the Lamb whithersoever He goeth!'

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SMITTEN IN VAIN

Come to Beth-el, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and

bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years:

5. And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and

publish the free offerings; for this liketh you, O ye children of

Israel, saith the Lord God. 6. And I also have given you cleanness of

teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet

have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord. 7. And also I have

withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the

harvest; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to

rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon, and the piece

whereupon it rained not withered. 8. So two or three cities wandered

unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied; yet have ye

not returned unto Me, saith the Lord. 9. I have smitten you with

blasting and mildew: when your gardens, and your vineyards, and your

fig-trees, and your olive-trees increased, the palmerworm devoured

them: yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord. 10. I have sent

among you the pestilence, after the manner of Egypt; your young men

have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I

have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils; yet

have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord. 11. I have overthrown

some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a

firebrand plucked out of the burning; yet have ye not returned unto Me,

saith the Lord. 12. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; and

because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

13. For, lo, He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and

declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning

darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The Lord, The

God of hosts, is His name.'--AMOS iv. 4-13.

The reign of Jeroboam II. was one of brilliant military success and of

profound moral degradation. Amos was a simple, hardy shepherd from the

southern wilds of Judah, and his prophecies are redolent of his early

life, both in their homely imagery and in the wholesome indignation and

contempt for the silken-robed vice of Israel. No sterner picture of an

utterly rotten social state was ever drawn than this book gives of the

luxury, licentiousness, and oppressiveness of the ruling classes. This

passage deals rather with the religious declension underlying the moral

filth, and sets forth the self-willed idolatry of the people (vs. 4,

5), their obstinate resistance to God's merciful chastisement (vs.

6-11), and the heavier impending judgment (vs. 12, 13).

I. Indignant irony flashes in that permission or command to persevere

in the calf worship. The seeming command is the strongest prohibition.

There can be no worse thing befall a man than that he should be left to

go on forwardly in the way of his heart. The real meaning is

sufficiently emphasised by that second verb, and transgress'. Flock to

one temple after another, and heap altars with sacrifices which you

were never bid to offer, but understand that what you do is not

worship, but sin.' That is a smiting sentence to pass upon elaborate

ceremonial. The word literally means treason or rebellion, and by it

Amos at one blow shatters the whole fabric. Note, too, that the

offering of tithes was not called for by Mosaic law, every three days'

(Revised Version), and that the use of leaven in burnt offerings was

prohibited by it, and also that to call for freewill offerings was to

turn spontaneousness into something like compulsion, and to bring

ostentation into worship. All these characteristics spoiled the

apparent religiousness, over and above the initial evil of

disobedience, and warrant Amos's crushing equation, Your worship =

rebellion.' All are driven home by the last words of verse 5, So ye

love it.' The reason for all this prodigal ostentatious worship was to

please themselves, not to obey God. That tainted everything, and always

does.

The lessons of this burst of sarcasm are plain. The subtle influence of

self creeps in even in worship, and makes it hollow, unreal, and

powerless to bless the worshipper. Obedience is better than costly

gifts. The beginning and end of all worship, which is not at same time

transgression' is the submission of tastes, will, and the whole self.

Again, men will lavish gifts far more freely in apparent religious

service, which is but the worship of their reflected selves, than in

true service of God. Again, the purity of willing offerings is marred

when they are given in response to a loud call, or, when given, are

proclaimed with acclamations. Let us not suppose that all the brunt of

Amos's indignation fell only on these old devotees. The principles

involved in it have a sharp edge, turned to a great deal which is

allowed and fostered among ourselves.

II. The blaze of indignation changes in the second part of the passage

into wounded tenderness, as the Prophet speaks in the name of God, and

recounts the dreary monotony of failure attending all God's loving

attempts to arrest Israel's departure by the mercy of judgment. Mark

the sad cadence of the fivefold refrain, Ye have not returned unto Me,

saith the Lord.' The unto' implies reaching the object to which we

turn, and is not the less forcible but more usual word found in this

phrase, which simply means towards' and indicates direction, without

saying anything as to how far the return has gone. So there may have

been partial moments of bethinking themselves, when the chastisement

was on Israel; but there had been no thorough turning,' which had

landed them at the side of God. Many a man turns towards God, who, for

lack of resolved perseverance, never so turns as to get to God. The

repeated complaint of the inefficacy of chastisements has in it a tone

of sorrow and of wonder which does not belong only to the Prophet. If

we remember who it was who was grieved at the blindness of their

heart,' and who wondered at their unbelief' we shall not fear to

recognise here the attribution of the same emotions to the heart of

God.

To Amos, famine, drought, blasting, locusts, pestilence, and probably

earthquake, were five messengers of God, and Amos was taught by God. If

we looked deeper, we should see more clearly. The true view of the

relation of all material things and events to God is this which the

herdsman of Tekoa proclaimed. These messengers were not miracles,' but

they were God's messengers all the same. Behind all phenomena stands a

personal will, and they are nearer the secret of the universe who see

God working in it all, than they who see all forces except the One

which is the only true force. I give cleanness of teeth. I have

withholden the rain. I have smitten. I have sent the pestilence. I have

overthrown some of you.' To the Prophet's eye the world is all aflame

with a present God. Let no scientific views, important and illuminating

as these may be, hide from us the deeper truth, which lies beyond their

region. The child who says God,' has got nearer the centre than the

scientist who says Force.'

But Amos had another principle, that God sent physical calamities

because of moral delinquencies and for moral and religious ends. These

disasters were meant to bring Israel back to God, and were at once

punishments and reformatory methods. No doubt the connection between

sin and material evils was closer under the Old Testament than now. But

if we may not argue as Amos did, in reference to such calamities as

drought, and failures of harvests, and the like, as these affect

communities, we may, at all events, affirm that, in the case of the

individual, he is a wise man who regards all outward evil as having a

possible bearing on his bettering spiritually. If a drought comes,

learn to look to your irrigation, and don't cut down your forests so

wantonly,' say the wise men nowadays; if pestilence breaks out, see to

your drainage.' By all means. These things, too, are God's

commandments, and we have no right to interpret the consequences of

infraction of physical laws as being meant to punish nations for their

breach of moral and religious ones. If we were prophets, we might, but

not else. But still, is God so poor that He can have but one purpose in

a providence? Every sorrow, of whatever sort, is meant to produce all

the good effects which it naturally tends to produce; and since every

experience of pain and loss and grief naturally tends to wean us from

earth, and to drive us to find in God what earth can never yield, all

our sorrows are His messengers to draw us back to Him. Amos' lesson as

to the purpose of trials is not antiquated.

But he has still another to teach us; namely, the awful power which we

have of resisting God's efforts to draw us back. Our wills are ours, we

know not how,' but alas! it is too often not to make them Thine.' This

is the true tragedy of the world that God calls, and we do refuse, even

as it is the deepest mystery of sinful manhood that God calls and we

can refuse. What infinite pathos and grieved love, thrown back upon

itself, is in that refrain, Ye have not returned unto Me!' How its

recurrence speaks of the long-suffering which multiplied means as

others failed, and of the divine charity, which suffered long, was not

soon angry, and hoped all things!' How vividly it gives the impression

of the obstinacy that to all effort opposed insensibility, and clung

the more closely and insanely to the idolatry which was its crime and

its ruin! The very same temper is deep in us all. Israel holds up the

mirror in which we may see ourselves. If blows do not break iron, they

harden it. A wasted sorrow--that is, a sorrow which does not drive us

to God--leaves us less impressible than it found us.

III. Again the mood changes, and the issue of protracted resistance is

prophesied (vs. 12, 13). Therefore' sums up the instances of refusal to

be warned, and presents them as the cause of the coming evil. The

higher the dam is piled, the deeper the water that is gathered behind

it, and the surer and more destructive the flood when it bursts.

Long-delayed judgments are severe in proportion as they are slow. Note

the awful vagueness of threatening in that emphatic thus,' as if the

Prophet had the event before his eyes. There is no need to specify, for

there can be but one result from such obstinacy. The terror of the

Lord' is more moving by reason of the dimness which wraps it. The

contact of divine power with human rebellion can only end in one way,

and that is too terrible for speech. Conscience can translate thus.'

The thunder-cloud is all the more dreadful for the vagueness of its

outline, where its livid hues melt into formless black. What bolts lurk

in its gloom?

The certainty of judgment is the basis of a call to repentance, which

may avert it. The meeting with God for which Israel is besought to

prepare, was, of course, not judgment after death, but the impending

destruction of the Northern Kingdom. But Amos's prophetic call is not

misapplied when directed to that final day of the Lord. Common-sense

teaches preparation for a certain future, and Amos's trumpet-note is

deepened and re-echoed by Jesus: Be ye ready also, for . . . the Son of

man cometh.' Note, too, that Israel's peculiar relation to God is the

very ground of the certainty of its punishment, and of the appeal for

repentance. Just because He is thy God,' will He assuredly come to

judge, and you may assuredly prepare, by repentance, to meet Him. The

conditions of meeting the Judge, and being found of Him in peace,' are

that we should be without spot, and blameless'; and the conditions of

being so spotless and uncensurable are, what they were in Amos's day,

repentance and trust. Only we have Jesus as the brightness of the

Father's glory to trust in, and His all-sufficient work to trust to,

for pardon and purifying.

The magnificent proclamation of the name of the Lord which closes the

passage, is meant as at once a guarantee of His judgment and an

enforcement of the call to be ready to meet Him. He in creation forms

the solid, changeless mountains and the viewless, passing wind. The

most stable and the most mobile are His work. He reads men's hearts,

and can tell them their thoughts afar off. He is the Author of all

changes, both in the physical and the moral world, bringing the daily

wonder of sunrise and the nightly shroud of darkness, and with like

alternation blending joy and sorrow in men's lives. He treads on the

high places of the earth,' making all created elevations the path of

His feet, and crushing down whatever exalts itself. Thus, in creation

almighty, in knowledge omniscient, in providence changing all things

and Himself the same, subjugating all, and levelling a path for His

purposes across every opposition, He manifests His name, as the living,

eternal Jehovah, the God of the Covenant, and therefore of judgment on

its breakers, and as the Commander and God of the embattled forces of

the universe. Is this a God whose coming to judge is to be lightly

dealt with? Is not this a God whom it is wise for us to be ready to

meet?

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THE SINS OF SOCIETY

For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me, and ye

shall live: 5. But seek not Beth-el, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass

not to Beer-sheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and

Beth-el shall come to nought. 6. Seek the Lord, and ye shall live; lest

He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there

be none to quench it in Beth-el. 7. Ye who turn judgment to wormwood,

and leave off righteousness in the earth, 8. Seek Him that maketh the

seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the

morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the

waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The

Lord is His name: 9. That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong,

so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress. 10. They hate him

that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.

11. Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take

from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye

shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye

shall not drink wine of them. 12. For I know your manifold

transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a

bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right 13.

Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an

evil time. 14. Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the

Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. 15. Hate

the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may

be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of

Joseph.'--AMOS v. 4-15.

The reign of Jeroboam II, in which Amos prophesied, was a period of

great prosperity and of great corruption. Amos, born in the Southern

Kingdom, and accustomed to the simple life of a shepherd, blazed up in

indignation at the signs of misused wealth and selfish luxury that he

saw everywhere, in what was to him almost a foreign country. If one

fancies a godly Scottish Highlander sent to the West end of London, or

a Bible-reading New England farmer's man sent to New York's upper ten,'

one will have some notion of this prophet, the impressions made, and

the task laid on him. He has a message to our state of society which,

in many particulars, resembles that which he had to rebuke.

There seems to be a slight dislocation in the order of the verses of

the passage, for verse 7 comes in awkwardly, breaking the connection

between verses 6 and 8, and itself cut off from verse 10, to which it

belongs. If we remove the intruding verse to a position after verse 9,

the whole passage is orderly and falls into three coherent parts: an

exhortation to seek Jehovah, enforced by various considerations (vs.

4-9); a vehement denunciation of social vices (vs. 7, 10-13); and a

renewed exhortation to seek God by doing right to man (vs. 14, 15).

Amos's first call to Israel is but the echo of God's to men, always and

everywhere. All circumstances, all inward experiences, joy and sorrow,

prosperity and disaster, our longings and our fears, they all cry aloud

to us to seek His face. That loving invitation is ever sounding in our

ears. And the promise which Amos gave, though it may have meant on his

lips the continuance of national life only, yet had, even on his lips,

a deeper meaning, which we now cannot but hear in it. For, just as to

seek the Lord' means more to us than it did to Israel, so the

consequent life has greatened, widened, deepened into life eternal. But

Amos's narrower, more external promise is true still, and there is no

surer way of promoting true well-being than seeking God. With Thee is

the fountain of life,' in all senses of the word, from the lowest

purely physical to the highest, and it is only they who go thither to

draw that will carry away their pitchers full of the sparkling

blessing. The fundamental principle of Amos's teaching is an eternal

truth, that to seek God is to find Him, and to find Him is life.

But Amos further teaches us that such seeking is not real nor able to

find, unless it is accompanied with turning away from all sinful quests

after vanities. We must give up seeking Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba,

seats of the calf worship, if we are to seek God to purpose. The sin of

the Northern Kingdom was that it wanted to worship Jehovah under the

symbol of the calves, thus trying to unite two discrepant things. And

is not a great deal of our Christianity of much the same quality? Too

many of us are doing just what Elijah told the crowds on Carmel that

they were doing, trying to shuffle along on both knees.' We would seek

God, but we would like to have an occasional visit to Bethel. It cannot

be done. There must be detachment, if there is to be any real

attachment. And the certain transiency of all creatural objects is a

good reason for not fastening ourselves to them, lest we should share

their fate. Gilgal shall go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to

nought,' therefore let us join ourselves to the Eternal Love and we

shall abide, as it abides, for ever.

The exhortation is next enforced by presenting the consequences of

neglecting it. To seek Him is life, not to seek Him incurs the danger

of finding Him in unwelcome ways. That is for ever true. We do not get

away from God by forgetting Him, but we run the risk of finding in Him,

not the fire which vitalises, purifies, melts, and gladdens, but that

which consumes. The fire is one, but its effects are twofold. God is

for us either that fire into which it is blessedness to be baptized, or

that by which it is death to be burned up. And what can Bethel, or

calves, or all the world do to quench it or pluck us out of it?

Once more the exhortation is urged, if we link verse 8 with verse 6,

and supply Seek ye' at its beginning. Here the enforcement is drawn

from the considerations of God's workings in nature and history. The

shepherd from Tekoa had often gazed up at the silent splendours of the

Pleiades and Orion, as he kept watch over his flocks by night, and had

seen the thick darkness on the wide uplands thinning away as the

morning stole op over the mountains across the Dead Sea, and the day

dying as he gathered his sheep together. He had cowered under the

torrential rains which swept across his exposed homeland, and had heard

God's voice summoning the obedient waters of the sea, that He might

pour them down in rain. But the moral government of the world also

calls on men to seek Jehovah. He causeth destruction to flash forth on

the strong, so that destruction cometh upon the fortress.' High things

attract the lightning. Godless strength is sure, sooner or later, to be

smitten down, and no fortress is so impregnable that He cannot capture

and overthrow it. Surely wisdom bids us seek Him that does all these

wonders, and make Him our defence and our high tower.

The second part gives a vivid picture of the vices characteristic of a

prosperous state of society which is godless, and therefore selfishly

luxurious. First, civil justice is corrupted, turned into bitterness,

and prostrated to the ground. Then bold denouncers of national sins are

violently hated. Do we not know that phase of an ungodly and rich

society? What do the newspapers say about Christians who try to be

social reformers? Are the epithets flung at them liker bouquets or

rotten eggs? Fanatics and faddists' are the mildest of them. Then the

poor are trodden down and have to give large parts of their scanty

harvests to the rich. Have capital and labour just proportions of their

joint earnings? Would a sermon on verse 11 be welcome in the suburbs of

industrial centres, where the employers have their houses of hewn

stone'? Such houses, side by side with the poor men's huts, struck the

eye of the shepherd from Tekoa as the height of sinful luxury, and

still more sinful disproportion in the social condition of the two

classes. What would he have said if he had lived in England or America?

Justice, too, was bought and sold. A murderer could buy himself off,

while the poor man, who could not pay, lost his case. We do not bribe

juries, but (legal) justice is an expensive luxury still, and counsel's

fees put it out of the reach of poor men.

One of the worst features of such a state of society as Amos saw is

that men are afraid to speak out in condemnation of it, and the ill

weeds grow apace for want of a scythe. Amos puts a certain sad emphasis

on prudent,' as if he was feeling how little he could be called so, and

yet there is a touch of scorn in him too. The man who is over-careful

of his skin or his reputation will hold his tongue; even good men may

become so accustomed to the glaring corruptions of society in the midst

of which they have always lived, that they do not feel any call to

rebuke or wage war against them; but the brave man, the man who takes

his ideals from Christ, and judges society by its conformity with

Christ's standard, will not keep silence, and the more he feels that It

is an evil time' the more will he feel that he cannot but speak out,

whatever comes of his protest. What masquerades as prudence is very

often sinful cowardice, and such silence is treason against Christ.

The third part repeats the exhortation to seek,' with a notable

difference. It is now good' that is to be sought, and evil' that is to

be turned from. These correspond respectively to Jehovah,' and Bethel,

Gilgal, and Beersheba,' in former verses. That is to say, morality is

the garb of religion, and religion is the only true source of morality.

If we are not seeking the things that are lovely and of good report,

our professions of seeking God are false; and we shall never earnestly

and successfully seek good and hate evil unless we have begun by

seeking and finding God, and holding Him in our heart of hearts. Modern

social reformers, who fancy that they can sweeten society without

religion, might do worse than go to school to Amos.

Notable, too, is the lowered tone of confidence in the beneficial

result of obeying the Prophet's call. In the earlier exhortation the

promise had been absolute. Seek ye Me, and ye shall live'; now it has

cooled to it may be.' Is Amos faltering? No; but while it is always

true that blessed life is found by the seeker after God, because He

finds the very source of life, it is not always true that the

consequences of past turnings from Him are diverted by repentance. It

may be' that these have to be endured, but even they become tokens of

Jehovah's graciousness, and the purified remnant of Joseph' will

possess the true life more abundantly because they have been exercised

thereby.

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THE CARCASS AND THE EAGLES

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of

Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of

Israel came! 2. Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to

Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they

better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?

3. Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to

come near; 4. That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon

their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out

of the midst of the stall; 5. That chant to the sound of the viol, and

invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; 6. That drink

wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they

are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. 7. Therefore now shall

they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them

that stretched themselves shall be removed. 8. The Lord God hath sworn

by Himself, saith the Lord the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of

Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with

all that is therein.'--AMOS vi. 1-8.

Amos prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam, the son of Joash.

Jeroboam's reign was a time of great prosperity for Israel. Moab,

Gilead, and part of Syria were reconquered, and the usual effects of

conquest, increased luxury and vainglory, followed. Amos was not an

Israelite born, for he came from Tekoa, away down south, in the wild

country west of the Dead Sea, where he had been a simple herdsman till

the divine call sent him into the midst of the corrupt civilisation of

the Northern Kingdom. The first words of his prophecy give its whole

spirit: The Lord will roar from Zion.' The word rendered roar' is the

term specially used for the terrible cry with which a lion leaps on its

surprised prey (Amos iii. 4, 8). It is from Zion, the seat of God's

Temple, that the roar' proceeds, and Amos's prophecy is but the echo of

it in Israel.

The prophecy of judgment in this passage is directed against the sins

of the upper classes in Samaria. They are described in verse 1 as the

notable men . . . to whom the house of Israel come,' which, in modern

language, is just conspicuous citizens,' who set the fashion, and are

looked to as authorities and leaders, whether in political or

commercial or social life. The word by which they are designated is

used in Numbers i. 17: Which are expressed by name.' The word carried

back the thoughts of the degenerate aristocracy of Israel to the faith

and zeal of their forefathers' (Pusey, Minor Prophets, on this verse).

Israel, Amos calls The first of the nations.' It is singular that such

a title should be given to the nation against whose corruption his one

business is to testify, but probably there is keen irony in the word.

It takes Israel at its own estimate, and then goes on to show how

rotten, and therefore short-lived, was the prosperity which had swollen

national pride to such a pitch. The chiefs of the foremost nation in

the world should surely be something better than the heartless

debauchees whom the Prophet proceeds to paint. Anglo-Saxons on both

sides of the Atlantic, who are by no means deficient in this same

complacent estimate of their own superiority to all other peoples, may

take note. The same thought is prominent in the description of these

notables as at ease.' They are living in a fool's paradise, shutting

their eyes to the thunder-clouds that begin to rise slowly above the

horizon, and keeping each other in countenance in laughing at Amos and

his gloomy forecasts. They trusted in the mountain of Samaria,' which,

they thought, made the city impregnable to assault. No doubt they

thought that the Prophet's talk about doing right and trusting in

Jehovah was very fanatical and unpractical, just as many in England and

America think that their nations are exalted, not by righteousness, but

by armies, navies, and dollars or sovereigns.

Verse 2 is very obscure to us from our ignorance of the facts

underlying its allusions. In fact, it has been explained in exactly

opposite ways, being taken by some to enumerate three instances of

prosperous communities, which yet are not more prosperous than Israel,

and by others to enumerate three instances of God's judgments falling

on places which, though strong, had been conquered. In the former

explanation, God's favour to Israel is made the ground of an implied

appeal to their gratitude; in the latter, His judgments on other

nations are made the ground of an appeal to their fear, lest like

destruction should fall on them.

But the main points of the passage are the photograph of the crimes

which are bringing the judgment of God, and the solemn divine oath to

inflict the judgment. The crimes rebuked are not the false worship of

the calves, though in other parts of his prophecy Amos lashes that with

terrible invectives, nor foul breaches of morality, though these were

not wanting in Israel, but the vices peculiar to selfish, luxurious

upper classes in all times and countries, who forget the obligations of

wealth, and think only of its possibilities of self-indulgence. French

noblesse before the Revolution, and English peers and commercial

magnates, and American millionaires, would yield examples of the same

sin. The hardy shepherd from Tekoa had learned plain living and high

thinking' before he was a prophet, and would look with wondering and

disgusted eyes at the wicked waste which he saw in Samaria. He begins

with scourging the reckless security already referred to. These

notables in Israel were at ease' because they put far away the evil

day,' by refusing to believe that it was at hand, and paying no heed to

prophets' warnings, as their fellows do still and always, and as we all

are tempted to do. They who see and declare the certain end of national

or personal sins are usually jeered at as pessimists, fanatics,

alarmists, bad patriots, or personal ill-wishers, and the men whom they

try to warn fancy that they hinder the coming of a day of retribution

by disbelieving in its coming. Incredulity is no lightning-conductor to

keep off the flash, and, listened to or not, the low growls of the

thunder are coming nearer.

With one hand these sinners tried to push away the evil day, while with

the other they drew near to themselves that which made its coming

certain--the seat of violence,' or, rather, the sitting,' or session.'

Violence, or wrongdoing, is enthroned by them, and where men enthrone

iniquity, God's day of vengeance is not far off.

Then follows a graphic picture of the senseless, corrupting luxury of

the Samaritan magnates, on which the Tekoan shepherd pours his scorn,

but which is simplicity itself, and almost asceticism, before what he

would see if he came to London or New York. To him it seemed effeminate

to loll on a divan at meals, and possibly it was a custom imported from

abroad. It is noted that the older custom in Israel was to sit while

eating.' The woodwork of the divans, inlaid with ivory, had caught his

eye in some of his peeps into the great houses, and he inveighs against

them very much as one of the Pilgrim Fathers might do if he could see

the furniture in the drawing-rooms of some of his descendants. There is

no harm in pretty things, but the 泴hetic craze does sometimes

indicate and increase selfish heartlessness as to the poverty and

misery, which have not only no ivory on their divans, but no divans at

all. Thus stretched in unmanly indolence on their cushions, they feast

on delicacies. Lambs out of the flock' and calves out of the stall'

seem to mean animals too young to be used as food. These gourmands,

like their successors, prided themselves on having dainties out of

season, because they were more costly then. And their feasts had the

adornment of music, which the shepherd, who knew only the pastoral pipe

that gathered his sheep, refers to with contempt. He uses a very rare

word of uncertain meaning, which is probably best rendered in some such

way as the Revised Version does: They sing idle songs.' To him their

elaborate performances seemed like empty babble. Worse than that, they

devise musical instruments like David.' But how unlike him in the use

they make of art! What a descent from the praises of God to the idle

songs' fit for the hot dining-halls and the guests there! Amos was

indignant at the profanation of art, and thought it best used in the

service of God. What would he have said if he had been fastened into a

front-row box' and treated to a modern opera?

The revellers drink wine in bowls' by which larger vessels than

generally employed are intended. They drank to excess, or as we might

say, by bucketfuls. So the dainty feast, with its artistic refinement

and music, ends at last in a brutal carouse, and the heads anointed

with the most costly unguents drop in drunken slumber. A similar

picture of Samaritan manners is drawn by Isaiah (chap. xxviii.), and

obviously drunkenness was one of the besetting sins of the capital.

But the darkest hue in the dark picture has yet to be added: They are

not grieved for the affliction (literally, the breach' or wound') of

Joseph.' The tribe of Ephraim, Joseph's son, being the principal tribe

of the Northern Kingdom, Joseph is often employed as a synonym for

Israel. All these pieces of luxury, corrupting and effeminate as they

are, might be permitted, but heartless indifference to the miseries

groaning at the door of the banqueting-hall goes with them. The

classes' are indifferent to the condition of the masses.' Put Amos into

modern English, and he is denouncing the heartlessness of wealth,

refinement, art, and culture, which has no ear for the complaining of

the poor, and no eyes to see either the sorrows and sins around it, or

the lowering cloud that is ready to burst in tempest.

The inevitable issue is certain, because of the very nature of God. It

is outlined with keen irony. Amos sees in imagination the long

procession of sad captives, and marching in the front ranks, the

self-indulgent Sybarites, whose pre-eminence is now only the melancholy

prerogative of going first in the fettered train. What has become of

their revelry? It is gone, like the imaginary banquets of dreams, and

instead of luxurious lolling on silken couches, there is the weary

tramp of the captive exiles. Such result must be, since God is what He

is. He has sworn by Himself'; His being and character are the pledge

that it will be so as Amos has declared. How can such a God as He is do

otherwise than hate the pride of such a selfish, heartless,

God-forgetting aristocracy? How can He do otherwise than deliver up the

city? God has not changed, and though His mills grind slowly, they do

grind still; and it is as true for England and America, as it was for

Samaria, that a wealthy and leisurely upper class, which cares only for

material luxury glossed over by art, which has condescended to be its

servant, is bringing near the evil day which it hugs itself into

believing will never come.

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RIPE FOR GATHERING

Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer

fruit. 2. And He said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of

summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon My

people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more. 3. And the

songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God:

there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them

forth with silence. 4. Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even

to make the poor of the land to fail. 5. Saying, When will the new moon

be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth

wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the

balances by deceit? 6. That we may buy the poor for silver, and the

needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? 7.

The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never

forget any of their works. 8. Shall not the land tremble for this, and

every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a

flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt.

9. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I

will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in

the clear day: 10. And I w ill turn your feasts into mourning, and all

your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all

loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning

of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day. 11. Behold, the

days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land,

not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words

of the Lord: 12. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the

north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of

the Lord, and shall not find it. 13. In that day shall the fair virgins

and young men faint for thirst. 14. They that swear by the sin of

Samaria, and say, Thy God, O Dan, liveth: and, The manner of Beer-sheba

liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again.'--AMOS viii.

1-14.

There are three visions in the former chapter, each beginning as verse

1. This one is therefore intended to be taken as the continuation of

these, and it is in substance a repetition of the third, only with more

detail and emphasis. An insolent attempt, by the priest of Beth-el, to

silence the Prophet, and the fiery answer which he got for his pains,

come between. The stream of Amos's prophecy flows on, uninterrupted by

the boulder which had tried to dam it up. Some courage was needed to

treat Amaziah and his blasphemous bluster as a mere parenthesis.

We have first to note the vision and its interpretation. It is such as

a countryman, a dresser of sycamore trees' would naturally have.

Experience supplies forms and material for the imagination, and moulds

into which God-given revelations run. The point of the vision is rather

obscured by the rendering summer fruit.' Ripe fruit' would be better,

since the emblem represents the Northern Kingdom as ripe for the

dreadful ingathering of judgment. The word for this (qayits) and that

for the end' (qets) are alike in sound, but the play of words cannot be

reproduced, except by some clumsy device, such as the end ripens' or

the time of ripeness comes.' The figure is frequent in other prophecies

of judgment, as, for instance, in Revelation xiv. 14-20.

Observe the repetition, from the preceding vision, of I will not pass

by them any more.' The first two visions had threatened judgments,

which had been averted by the Prophet's intercession; but the third,

and now the fourth, declare that the time for prolonged impunity is

passed. Just as the mellow ripeness of the fruit fixes the time of

gathering it, so there comes a stage in national and individual

corruption, when there is nothing to be done but to smite. That period

is not reached because God changes, but because men get deeper in sin.

Because the harvest is ripe,' the long-delayed command, Put in thy

sickle' is given to the angel of judgment, and the clusters of those

black grapes, whose juice in the wine-press of the wrath of God is

blood, are cut down and cast in. It is a solemn lesson, applying to

each soul as well as to communities. By neglect of God's voice, and

persistence in our own evil ways, we can make ourselves such that we

are ripe for judgment, and can compel long-suffering to strike. Which

are we ripening for--the harvest when the wheat shall be gathered into

Christ's barns, or that when the tares shall be bound in bundles for

burning?

The tragedy of that fruit-gathering is described with extraordinary

grimness and force in the abrupt language of verse 3. The merry songs

sung in the palace (this rendering seems more appropriate here than

temple') will be broken off, and the singers' voices will quaver into

shrill shrieks, so suddenly will the judgment be. Then comes a picture

as abrupt in its condensed terribleness as anything in Tacitus--Many

the corpses; everywhere they fling them; hush!' We see the ghastly

masses of dead (corpse' is in the singular, as if a collective noun),

so numerous that no burial-places could hold them; and no ceremonial

attended them, but they were rudely flung anywhere by anybody (no

nominative is given), with no accustomed voice of mourning, but in

gloomy silence. It is like Defoe's picture of the dead-cart in the

plague of London. Such is ever the end of departing from God--songs

palsied into silence or turned into wailing when the judgment bursts;

death stalking supreme, and silence brooding over all.

The crimes that ripened men for this terrible harvest are next set

forth, in part, in verses 4 to 6. These verses partly coincide verbally

with the previous indictment in Amos ii. 6, etc., which, however, is

more comprehensive. Here only one form of sin is dealt with. And what

was the sin that deserved the bad eminence of being thus selected as

the chief sign that Israel was ripe and rotten? Precisely the one which

gets most indulgence in the Christian Church; namely, eagerness to be

rich, and sharp, unkindly dealing. These men, who were only fit to be

swept out of the land, were most punctual in their religious duties.

They would not on any account do business either on a festival or on

Sabbath, but they were very impatient till--shall we say? Monday

morning came--that they might get to their beloved work again.

Their lineal descendants are no strangers on the exchanges, or in the

churches of London or New York. They were not only outwardly scrupulous

and inwardly weary of religious observances, but when they did get to

business,' they gave short measure and took a long price, and knew how

to turn the scales always in their own favour. It was the expedient of

rude beginners in the sacred art of getting the best of a bargain, to

put a false bottom in the ephah, and to stick a piece of lead below the

shekel weight, which the purchaser had to make go up in the scale with

his silver. There are much neater ways of doing the same thing now; and

no doubt some very estimable gentlemen in high repute as Christians,

who give respectability to any church or denomination, could have

taught these early practitioners a lesson or two.

They were as cruel as they were greedy. They bought their brethren as

slaves, and if a poor man had run into their debt for even a pair of

shoes, they would sell him up in a very literal sense. Avarice,

unbridled by the fear of God, leads by a short cut to harshness and

disregard of the claims of others. There are more ways of buying the

needy for a pair of shoes than these people practised.

The last touch in the picture is meanness, which turned everything into

money. Even what fell through the sieve when wheat was winnowed, which

ought to have been given to anybody, was carefully scraped up, and,

dirty as it was, sold. Is not nothing for nothing' an approved maxim

to-day? Are not people held up as shining lights of commerce, who have

the faculty of turning everything into saleable articles? Some serious

reflections ought to be driven home to us who live in great commercial

communities, and are in manifold ways tempted to learn their ways, and

so get a snare unto our souls,' by this gibbeting of tempers and

customs, very common among ourselves, as the very head and front of the

sin of Israel, which determined its ripeness for destruction.

The catalogue of sins is left incomplete (compare with chapter ii.), as

if holy indignation turned for relief to the thought of the certain

judgment. That certainly is strongly affirmed by the representation of

the oath of Jehovah. He can swear by no other,' therefore He swears by

Himself'; and the excellency of Jacob' cannot with propriety mean

anything else than Him who is, or ought to be, the sole ground of

confidence and occasion of boasting' to the nation (Hos. v. 5). He

gives His own being as the guarantee that judgment shall fall. As

surely as God is God, injustice and avarice will ruin a nation. We talk

now about necessary consequences and natural laws rendering penalties

inevitable. The Bible suggests a deeper foundation for their certain

incidence--even the very nature of God Himself. As long as He is what

He is, covetousness and its child, harshness to the needy, will be sin

against Him, and be avenged sooner or later. God has a long and a wide

memory, and the sins which He remembers' are those which He has not

forgiven, and will punish.

Amos heaps image on image to deepen the impression of terror and

confusion. Everything is turned to its opposite. The solid land reels,

rises, and falls, like the Nile in flood (see Revised Version). The sun

sets at midday, and noon is darkness. Feasts change to mourning, songs

to lamentations. Rich garments are put aside for sackcloth, and flowing

locks drop off and leave bald heads. These are evidently all figures

vividly piled together to express the same thought. The crash that

destroyed their national prosperity and existence would shake the most

solid things and darken the brightest. It would come suddenly, as if

the sun plunged from the zenith to the west. It would make joy a

stranger, and bring grief as bitter as when a father or a mother mourns

the death of an only son. Besides all this, something darker beyond is

dimly hinted in that awful, vague, final threat, The end thereof as a

bitter day.'

Now all these threats were fulfilled in the fall of the kingdom of

Israel; but that day of the Lord' was in principle a miniature

foreshadowing of the great final judgment. Some of the very features of

the description here are repeated with reference to it in the New

Testament. We cannot treat such prophecies as this as if they were

exhausted by their historical fulfilment. They disclose the eternal

course of divine judgment, which is to culminate in a future day of

judgment. The oath of God is not yet completely fulfilled. Assuredly as

He lives and is God, so surely will modern sinners have to stand their

trial; and, as of old, the chase after riches will bring down crashing

ruin. We need that vision of judgment as much as Samaria did when Amos

saw the basket of ripe fruit, craving, as it were, to be plucked. So do

obstinate sinners invite destruction.

The last section specifies one feature of judgment, the deprivation of

the despised word of the Lord (vs. 11-14). Like Saul, whose piteous

wail in the witch's hovel was, God . . . answereth me no more,' they

who paid no heed to the word of the Lord shall one day seek far and

wearily for a prophet, and seek in vain. The word rendered wander,'

which is used in the other description of people seeking for water in a

literal drought (iv. 8), means reel,' and gives the picture of men

faint and dizzy with thirst, yet staggering on in vain quest for a

spring. They seek everywhere, from the Dead Sea on the east to the

Mediterranean on the west, and then up to the north, and so round again

to the starting-point. Is it because Judah was south that that quarter

is not visited? Perhaps, if they had gone where the Temple was, they

would have found the stream from under its threshold, which a later

prophet saw going forth to heal the marshes and dry places. Why was the

search vain? Has not God promised to be found of those that seek,

however far they have gone away? The last verse tells why. They still

were idolaters, swearing by the sin of Samaria,' which is the calf of

Beth-el, and by the other at Dan, and going on idolatrous pilgrimages

to Beer-sheba, far away in the south, across the whole kingdom of Judah

(Amos v. 5). It was vain to seek for the word of the Lord with such

doings and worship.

The truth implied is universal in its application. God's message

neglected is withdrawn. Conscience stops if continually unheeded. The

Gospel may still sound in a man's ears, but have long ceased to reach

farther. There comes a time when men shall wish wasted opportunities

back, and find that they can no more return than last summer's heat.

There may be a wish for the prophet in time of distress, which means no

real desire for God's word, but only for relief from calamity. There

may be a sort of seeking for the word, which seeks in the wrong places

and in the wrong ways, and without abandoning sins. Such quest is vain.

But if, driven by need and sorrow, a poor soul, feeling the thirst

after the living God, cries from ever so distant a land of bondage, the

cry will be answered. But let us not forget that our Lord has told us

to take heed how we hear, on the very ground that to him that hath

shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be

taken away.'

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JONAH

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GUILTY SILENCE AND ITS REWARD

Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2.

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great, city, and cry against it; for their

wickedness is come up before Me. 3. But Jonah rose up to flee unto

Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he

found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went

down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the

Lord. 4. But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was

a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. 5.

Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and

cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it

of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he

lay, and was fast asleep. 6. So the shipmaster came to him, and said

unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so

be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. 7. And they said

every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know

for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot

fell upon Jonah. 8. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for

whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence

comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? 9. And

he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of

heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. 10. Then were the men

exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the

men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had

told them. 11. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee,

that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was

tempestuous. 12. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth

into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my

sake this great tempest is upon you. 13. Nevertheless the men rowed

hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought,

and was tempestuous against them. 14. Wherefore they cried unto the

Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not

perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for

Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased Thee. 15. So they took up Jonah,

and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from her raging.

16. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice

unto the Lord, and made vows. 17. Now the Lord had prepared a great

fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three

days and three nights.'--JONAH i. 1-17.

Jonah was apparently an older contemporary of Hosea and Amos. The

Assyrian power was looming threateningly on the northern horizon, and a

flash or two had already broken from that cloud. No doubt terror had

wrought hate and intenser narrowness. To correct these by teaching, by

an instance drawn from Assyria itself, God's care for the Gentiles and

their susceptibility to His voice, was the purpose of Jonah's mission.

He is a prophet of Israel, because the lesson of his history was for

them, though his message was for Nineveh. He first taught by example

the truth which Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue of Nazareth, and

Peter learned on the housetop at Joppa, and Paul took as his guiding

star. A truth so unwelcome and remote from popular belief needed

emphasis when first proclaimed; and this singular story, as it were,

underlines it for the generation which heard it first. Its place would

rather have been among the narratives than the prophets, except for

this aspect of it. So regarded, Jonah becomes a kind of representative

of Israel; and his history sets forth large lessons as to its function

among the nations, its unwillingness to discharge it, the consequences

of disobedience, and the means of return to a better mind.

Note then, first, the Prophet's unwelcome charge. There seems no

sufficient reason for doubting the historical reality of Jonah's

mission to Nineveh; for we know that intercourse was not infrequent,

and the silence of other records is, in their fragmentary condition,

nothing wonderful. But the fact that a prophet of Israel was sent to a

heathen city, and that not to denounce destruction except as a means of

winning to repentance, declared emphatically God's care for the world,

and rebuked the exclusiveness which claimed Him for Israel alone. The

same spirit haunts the Christian Church, and we have all need to ponder

the opposite truth, till our sympathies are widened to the width of

God's universal love, and we discern that we are bound to care for all

men, since He does so.

Jonah sullenly resolved not to obey God's voice. What a glimpse into

the prophetic office that gives us! The divine Spirit could be

resisted, and the Prophet was no mere machine, but a living man who had

to consent with his devoted will to bear the burden of the Lord. One

refused, and his refusal teaches us how superb and self-sacrificing was

the faithfulness of the rest. So we have each to do in regard to God's

message intrusted to us. We must bow our wills, and sink our

prejudices, and sacrifice our tastes, and say, Here am I; send me.'

Jonah represents the national feelings which he shared. Why did he

refuse to go to Nineveh? Not because he was afraid of his life, or

thought the task hopeless. He refused because he feared success. God's

goodness was being stretched rather too far, if it was going to take in

Nineveh. Jonah did not want it to escape. If he had been sent to

destroy it, he would probably have gone gladly. He grudged that heathen

should share Israel's privileges, and probably thought that gain to

Nineveh would be loss to Israel. It was exactly the spirit of the

prodigal's elder brother. There was also working in him the concern for

his own reputation, which would be damaged if the threats he uttered

turned out to be thunder without lightning, by reason of the repentance

of Nineveh.

Israel was set among the nations, not as a dark lantern, but as the

great lampstand in the Temple court proclaimed, to ray out light to all

the world. Jonah's mission was but a concrete instance of Israel's

charge. The nation was as reluctant to fulfil the reason of its

existence as the Prophet was. Both begrudged sharing privileges with

heathen dogs, both thought God's care wasted, and neither had such

feelings towards the rest of the world as to be willing to be

messengers of forgiveness to them. All sorts of religious

exclusiveness, contemptuous estimates of other nations, and that

bastard patriotism which would keep national blessings for our own

country alone, are condemned by this story. In it dawns the first faint

light of that sun which shone at its full when Jesus healed the

Canaanite's daughter, or when He said, Other sheep I have, which are

not of this fold.'

Note, next, the fatal consequences of refusal to obey the God-given

charge. We need not suppose that Jonah thought that he could actually

get away from God's presence. Possibly he believed in a special

presence of God in the land of Israel, or, more probably, the phrase

means to escape from service. At any rate, he determined to do his

flight thoroughly. Tarshish was, to a Hebrew, at the other end of the

world from Nineveh. The Jews were no sailors, and the choice of the sea

as means of escape indicates the obstinacy of determination in Jonah.

The storm is described with a profusion of unusual words, all

apparently technical terms, picked up on board, just as Luke, in the

only other account of a storm in Scripture, has done. What a difference

between the two voyages! In the one, the unfaithful prophet is the

cause of disaster, and the only sluggard in the ship. In the other, the

Apostle, who has hazarded his life to proclaim his Lord, is the source

of hope, courage, vigour, and safety. Such are the consequences of

silence and of brave speech for God. No wonder that the fugitive

Prophet slunk down into some dark corner, and sat bitterly brooding

there, self-accused and condemned, till weariness and the relief of the

tension of his journey lulled him to sleep. It was a stupid and heavy

sleep. Alas for those whose only refuge from conscience is oblivion!

Over against this picture of the insensible Prophet, all unaware of the

storm (which may suggest the parallel insensibility of Israel to the

impending divine judgments), is set the behaviour of the heathen

sailors, or salts,' as the story calls them. Their conduct is part of

the lesson of the book; for, heathen as they are, they have yet a sense

of dependence, and they pray; they are full of courage, battling with

the storm, jettisoning the cargo, and doing everything possible to save

the ship. Their treatment of Jonah is generous and chivalrous. Even

when they hear his crime, and know that the storm is howling like a

wild beast for him, they are unwilling to throw him overboard without

one more effort; and when at last they do it, their prayer is for

forgiveness, inasmuch as they are but carrying out the will of Jehovah.

They are so much touched by the whole incident that they offer

sacrifices to the God of the Hebrews, and are, in some sense, and

possibly but for a time, worshippers of Him.

All this holds the mirror up to Israel, by showing how much of human

kindness and generosity, and how much of susceptibility for the truth

which Israel had to declare, lay in rude hearts beyond its pale. This

crew of heathen of various nationalities and religions were yet men who

could be kind to a renegade Prophet, peril their lives to save his, and

worship Jehovah. I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,'

is the same lesson in another form. We may find abundant opportunities

for learning it; for the characters of godless men, and of some among

the heathen, may well shame many a Christian.

Jonah's conduct in the storm is no less noble than his former conduct

had been base. The burst of the tempest blew away all the fog from his

mind, and he saw the stars again. His confession of faith; his calm

conviction that he was the cause of the storm; his quiet, unhesitating

command to throw him into the wild chaos foaming about the ship; his

willing acceptance of death as the wages of his sin, all tell how true

a saint he was in the depth of his soul. Sorrow and chastisement turn

up the subsoil. If a man has any good in him, it generally comes to the

top when he is afflicted and looks death in the face. If there is

nothing but gravel beneath, it too will be brought up by the plough.

There may be much selfish unfaithfulness overlying a real devoted

heart.

Jonah represented Israel here too, both in that the consequence of the

national unfaithfulness and greedy, exclusive grasp of their privileges

would lead to their being cast into the roaring waves of the sea of

nations, amid the tumult of the peoples, and in that, for them as for

him, the calamity would bring about a better mind, the confession of

their faith, and acknowledgment of their sin. The history of Israel was

typified in this history, and the lessons it teaches are lessons for

all churches, and for all God's children for all time. If we shirk our

duty of witnessing for Him, or any other of His plain commands,

unfaithfulness will be our ruin. The storm is sure to break where His

Jonahs try to hide, and their only hope lies in bowing to the

chastisement and consenting to be punished, and avowing whose they are

and whom they serve. If we own Him while the storm whistles round us,

the worst of it is past, and though we have to struggle amid its waves,

He will take care of us, and anything is possible rather than that we

should be lost in them.

The miracle of rescue is the last point. Jonah's repentance saved his

life. Tossed overboard impenitent he would have been drowned. So Israel

was taught that the break-up of their national life would not be their

destruction if they turned to the Lord in their calamity. The wider

lesson of the means of making chastisement into blessing, and securing

a way of escape--namely, by owning the justice of the stroke, and

returning to duty--is meant for us all. He who sends the storm watches

its effect on us, and will not let His repentant servants be utterly

overwhelmed. That is a better use to make of the story than to discuss

whether any kind of known Mediterranean fish could swallow a man. If we

believe in miracles, the question need not trouble us. And miracle

there must be, not only in the coincidence of the fish and the Prophet

being in the same bit of sea at the same moment, but in his living for

so long in his strange ark of safety.'

The ever-present providence of God, the possible safety of the nation,

even when in captivity, the preservation of every servant of God who

turns to the Lord in his chastisement, the exhibition of penitence as

the way of deliverance, are the purposes for which the miracle was

wrought and told. Flippant sarcasms are cheap. A devout insight yields

a worthy meaning. Jesus Christ employed this incident as a symbol of

His Death and Resurrection. That use of it seems hard to reconcile with

any view but that the story is true. But it does not seem necessary to

suppose that our Lord regarded it as an intended type, or to seek to

find in Jonah's history further typical prophecy of Him. The salient

point of comparison is simply the three days' entombment; and it is

rather an illustrative analogy than an intentional prophecy. The

subsequent action of the Prophet in Nineveh, and the effect of it, were

true types of the preaching of the Gospel by the risen Lord, through

His servants, to the Gentiles, and of their hearing the Word. But it

requires considerable violence in manipulation to force the bestowing

of Jonah, for safety and escape from death, in the fish's maw, into a

proper prophecy of the transcendent fact of the Resurrection.

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LYING VANITIES'

They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.'--JONAH ii.

8.

Jonah's refusal to obey the divine command to go to Nineveh and cry

against it is best taken, not as prosaic history, but as a poetical

representation of Israel's failure to obey the divine call of

witnessing for God. In like manner, his being cast into the sea and

swallowed by the great fish, is a poetic reproduction, for homiletical

purposes, of Israel's sufferings at the hands of the heathen whom it

had failed to warn. The song which is put into Jonah's mouth when in

the fish's belly, of which our text is a fragment, represents the

result on the part of the nation of these hard experiences. Lying

vanities' mean idols, and their own mercy' means God. The text is a

brief, pregnant utterance of the great truth which had been forced home

to Israel by sufferings and exile, that to turn from Jehovah to false

gods was to turn from the sure source of tender care to lies and

emptiness. That is but one case of the wider truth that an ungodly life

is the acme of stupidity, a tragic mistake, as well as a great sin.

In confirmation and enforcement of our text we may consider:--

I. The illusory vanity of the objects pursued.

The Old Testament tone of reference to idols is one of bitter contempt.

Its rigid monotheism was intensified and embittered by the universal

prevalence of idolatry; and there is a certain hardness in its tone in

reference to the gods of the nations round about, which has little room

for pity, and finds expression in such names as those of our

text--vanities,' lies,' nothingness,' and the like. To the Jew,

encompassed on all sides by idol-worshippers, the alternative was

vehement indignation or entire surrender. The Mohammedan in British

India exhibits much the same attitude to Vishnu and Siva as the Jew did

to Baal and Ashtoreth. It is easy to be tolerant of dead gods, but it

becomes treason to Jehovah to parley with them when they are alive.

But the point which we desire to insist upon here is somewhat wider

than the vanity of idols. It is the emptiness of all objects of human

pursuit apart from God. These last three words need to be made very

prominent; for in itself every creature of God is good,' and the

emptiness does not inhere in themselves, but first appears when they

are set in His place. He, and only He, can, and does, satisfy the whole

nature--is authority for the will, peace for the conscience, love for

the heart, light for the understanding, rest for all seeking. He, and

He alone, can fill the past with the light in which is no regret, the

present with a satisfaction rounded and complete, the future with a

hope certain as experience, to which we shall ever approximate, and

which we can never exhaust and outgrow. Any, or all, the other objects

of human endeavour may be won, and yet we may be miserable. The

inadequacy of all these ought to be pressed home upon us more than it

is, not only by their limitations whilst they last, but by the

transiency of them all. The fashion of this world passeth away,' as the

Apostle John puts it, in a forcible expression which likens all this

frame of things to a panorama being unwound from one roller and on to

another. The painted screen is but paint at the best, and is in

perpetual motion, which is not arrested by the vain clutches of hands

that would fain stop the irresistible and tragic gliding past.

These vanities are lying vanities.' There is only one aim of life

which, being pursued and attained, fulfils the promises by which it

drew man after it. It is a bald commonplace, reiterated not only by

preachers but by moralists of every kind, and confirmed by universal

experience, that a hope fulfilled is a hope disappointed. There is only

one thing more tragic than a life which has failed in its aims, and it

is a life which has perfectly succeeded in them, and has found that

what promised to be bread turns to ashes. The word of promise may be

kept to the ear, but is always broken to the hope. Many a millionaire

loses the power to enjoy his millions by the very process by which he

gains them. The old Jewish thinker was wise not only in taking as the

summing up of all worldly pursuits the sad sentence, All is vanity,'

but in putting it into the lips of a king who had won all he sought.

The sorceress draws us within her charmed circle by lying words and

illusory charms, and when she has so secured the captives, her mask is

thrown off and her native hideousness displayed.

II. The hard service which lying vanities require.

The phrase in our text is a quotation, slightly altered, from Psalm

xxxi. 6: I hate them that regard lying vanities; but I trust in the

Lord.' The alteration in the form of the verb as it occurs in Jonah

expresses the intensity of regard, and gives the picture of watching

with anxious solicitude, as the eyes of a servant turned to his master,

or those of a dog to its owner. The world is a very hard master, and

requires from its servants the concentration of thought, heart, and

effort. We need only recall the thousand sermons devoted to the

enforcement of the gospel of getting on,' which prosperous worldlings

are continually preaching. A chorus of voices on every side of us is

dinning into the ears of every young man and woman the necessity for

success in life's struggle of taking for a motto, This one thing I do.'

How many a man is there, who in the race after wealth or fame, has

flung away aspirations, visions of noble, truthful love to life, and a

hundred other precious things? Browning tells a hideous story of a

mother flinging, one after another, her infants to the wolves as she

urged her sledge over the snowy plain. No less hideous, and still more

maiming, are the surrenders that men make when once their hearts have

been filled with the foolish ambitions of worldly success. Let us fix

it in our minds, that nothing that time and sense can give is worth the

price that it exacts.

It is only heaven that can be had for the asking;

It is only God that is given away.'

All sin is slavery. Its yoke presses painfully on the neck, and its

burden is heavy indeed, and the rest which it promises never comes.

III. The self-inflicted loss.

Our text suggests that there are two ways by which we may learn the

folly of a godless life--One, the consideration of what it turns to,

the other, the thought of what it departs from.

They forsake their own Mercy,' that is God. The phrase is here almost

equivalent to His name'; and it carries the blessed thought that He has

entered into relations with every soul, so that each man of us--even if

he have turned to lying vanities'--can still call Him, my own Mercy.'

He is ours; more our own than is anything without us. He is ours,

because we are made for Him, and He is all for us. He is ours by His

love, and by His gift of Himself in the Son of His love. He is ours; if

we take Him for ours by an inward communication of Himself to us in the

innermost depths of our being. He becomes the Master-Light of all our

seeing.' In the mysterious inwardness of mutual possession, the soul

which has given itself to God and possesses Him, has not only

communion, but may even venture to claim as its own the deeper and more

mysterious union with God. Those multiform mercies, which endure for

ever,' and speed on their manifold errands into every remotest region

of His universe, gather themselves together, as the diffused lights of

some nebul� �oncentrate themselves into a sun. That sun, like the star

that led the wise men from the East, and finally stood over one poor

house in an obscure village, will shine lambent above, and will pass

into, the humblest heart that opens for it. They who can say, as we all

can if we will, My God,' can never want.

And if we turn to the alternative in our text, and consider who they

are to whom we turn when we turn from God, there should be nothing more

needed to drive home the wholesome conviction of the folly of the

wisest, who deliberately prefers shadow to substance, lying vanities to

the one true and only reality. I beseech you to take that which is your

own, and which no man can take from you. Weigh in the scales of

conscience, and in the light of the deepest necessities of your nature,

the whole pile of those emptinesses that have been telling you lies

ever since you listened to them; and place in the other scale the mercy

of God, and the Christ who brings it to you, and decide which is the

weightier, and which it becomes you to take for your pattern for ever.

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THREEFOLD REPENTANCE

And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, 2.

Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the

preaching that I bid thee. 3. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh,

according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great

city of three days' journey. 4. And Jonah began to enter into the city

a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh

shall he overthrown. 5. So the people of Ninoveh believed God, and

proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even

to the least of them. 6. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he

arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him

with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7. And he caused it to be proclaimed

and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles,

saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let

them not feed, nor drink water: 8. But let man and beast be covered

with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one

from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. 9. Who

can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce

anger, that we perish not? 10. And God saw their works, that they

turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had

said that He would do unto them; and He did it not.'--JONAH iii. 1-10.

This passage falls into three parts: Jonah's renewed commission and new

obedience (vs. 1-4), the repentance of Nineveh (vs. 5-9), and the

acceptance thereof by God (ver. 10). We might almost call these three

the repentance of Jonah, of Nineveh, and of God. The evident intention

of the narrative is to parallel the Ninevites turning from their sins,

and God's turning from His anger and purpose of destruction; and if the

word repentance' is not applied to Jonah, his conduct sufficiently

shows the thing.

I. Note the renewed charge to the penitent Prophet, and his new

eagerness to fulfil it. His deliverance and second commission are put

as if all but simultaneous, and his obedience was swift and glad. Jonah

did not venture to take for granted that the charge which he had

shirked was still continued to him. If God commands to take the

trumpet, and we refuse, we dare not assume that we shall still be

honoured with the delivery of the message. The punishment of dumb lips

is often dumbness. Opportunities of service, slothfully or

faintheartedly neglected, are often withdrawn. We can fancy how Jonah,

brought back to the better mind which breathes in his psalm, longed to

be honoured by the trust of preaching once more, and how rapturously

his spirit would address itself to the task. Duties once unwelcome

become sweet when we have passed through the experience of the misery

that comes from neglecting them. It is God's mercy that gives us the

opportunity of effacing past disobedience by new alacrity.

The second charge is possibly distinguishable from the first as being

less precise. It may be that the exact nature of the preaching that I

bid thee' was not told Jonah till he had to open his mouth in Nineveh;

but, more probably, the second charge was identical with the first.

The word rendered preach' is instructive. It means to cry' and suggests

the manner befitting those who bear God's message. They should sound it

out loudly, plainly, urgently, with earnestness and marks of emotion in

their voice. Languid whispers will not wake sleepers. Unless the

messenger is manifestly in earnest, the message will fall flat. Not

with bated breath, as if ashamed of it; nor with hesitation, as if not

quite sure of it; nor with coldness, as if it were of little

urgency,--is God's Word to be pealed in men's ears. The preacher is a

crier. The substance of his message, too, is set forth. The preaching

which I bid thee'--not his own imaginations, nor any fine things of his

own spinning. Suppose Jonah had entertained the Ninevites with

dissertations on the evidences of his prophetic authority, or submitted

for their consideration a few thoughts tending to show the agreement of

his message with their current opinions in religion, or an argument for

the existence of a retributive Governor of the world, he would not have

shaken the city. The less the Prophet shows himself, the stronger his

influence. The more simply he repeats the stern, plain, short message,

the more likely it is to impress. God's Word, faithfully set forth,

will prove itself. The preacher or teacher of this day has

substantially the same charge as Jonah had; and the more he suppresses

himself, and becomes but a voice through which God speaks, the better

for himself, his hearers, and his work.

Nineveh, that great aggregate of cities, was full, as Eastern cities

are, of open spaces, and might well be a three days' journey in

circumference. What a task for that solitary stranger to thunder out

his loud cry among all these crowds! But he had learned to do what he

was bid; and without wasting a moment, he began to enter into the city

a day's journey,' and, no doubt, did not wait till the end of the day

to proclaim his message. Let us learn that there is an element of

threatening in God's most merciful message, and that the appeal to

terror and to the desire for self-preservation is part of the way to

preach the Gospel. Plain warnings of coming evil may be spoken

tenderly, and reveal love as truly as the most soothing words. The

warning comes in time. Forty days' of grace are granted. The gospel

warns us in time enough for escape. It warns us because God loves; and

they are as untrue messengers of His love as of His justice who slur

over the declaration of His wrath.

II. Note the repentance of Nineveh (vs. 5-9). The impression made by

Jonah's terrible cry is perfectly credible and natural in the excitable

population of an Eastern city, in which even now any appeal to terror,

especially if associated with religious and prophetic claims, easily

sets the whole in a frenzy. Think of the grim figure of this foreign

man, with his piercing voice and half-intelligible speech, dropped from

the clouds as it were, and stalking through Nineveh, pealing out his

confident message, like that gaunt fanatic who walked Jerusalem in its

last agony, crying, Woe! woe unto the bloody city!' or that other, who,

with flaming fire on his head and madness in his eyes, affrighted

London in the plague. No wonder that alarm was kindled, and, being

kindled, spread like wildfire. Apparently the movement was first among

the people, who began to fast before the news penetrated to the

seclusion of the palace. But the contagion reached the king, and the

popular excitement was endorsed and fanned by a royal decree. The

specified tokens of repentance are those of ordinary mourning, such as

were common all over the East, with only the strange addition, which

smacks of heathen ideas, that the animals were made sharers in them.

There is great significance in that believed God' (ver. 5). The

foundation of all true repentance is crediting God's word of

threatening, and therefore realising the danger, as well as the

disobedience, of our sin. We shall be wise if we pass by the human

instrument, and hear God speaking through the Prophet. Never mind about

Jonah, believe God.

We learn from the Ninevites what is true repentance They brought no

sacrifices or offerings, but sorrow, self-abasement, and amendment. The

characteristic sin of a great military power would be violence,' and

that is the specific evil from which they vow to turn. The loftiest

lesson which prophets found Israel so slow to learn, A broken and a

contrite heart Thou wilt not despise,' was learned by these heathens.

We need it no less. Nineveh repented on a peradventure that their

repentance might avail. How pathetic that Who can tell?' (ver. 9) is!

We know what they hoped. Their doubt might give fervour to their cries,

but our certainty should give deeper earnestness and confidence to

ours.

The deepest meaning of the whole narrative is set forth in our Lord's

use of it, when He holds up the men of Nineveh as a condemnatory

instance to the hardened consciences of His hearers. Probably the very

purpose of the book was to show Israel that the despised and yet

dreaded heathen were more susceptible to the voice of God than they

were: I will provoke you to jealousy by them which are no people.' The

story was a smiting blow to the proud exclusiveness and self-complacent

contempt of prophetic warnings, which marked the entire history of

God's people. As Ezekiel was told: Thou are not sent . . . to many

peoples of a strange speech and of an hard language. . . . Surely, if I

sent thee to them, they would hearken unto thee. But the house of

Israel will not hearken unto thee.' It is ever true that long

familiarity with the solemn thoughts of God's judgment and punishment

of sin abates their impression on us. Our Puritan forefathers used to

talk about gospel-hardened sinners,' and there are many such among us.

The man who lives by Niagara does not hear its roar as a stranger does.

The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with other generations

than that which was this generation' in Christ's time; and that which

is this generation' to-day will, in many of its members, be condemned

by them.

But the wave of feeling soon retired, and there is no reason to believe

that more than a transient impression was made. It does not seem

certain that the Ninevites knew what God' they hoped to appease.

Probably their pantheon was undisturbed, and their repentance lasted no

longer than their fear. Transient repentance leaves the heart harder

than before, as half-melted ice freezes again more dense. Let us beware

of frost on the back of a thaw. Repentance which is repented of' is

worse than none.

III. We note the repentance of God (ver. 10). Mark the recurrence of

the word turn,' employed in verses 8, 9, and 10 in reference to men and

to God. Mark the bold use of the word repent,' applied to God, which,

though it be not applied to the Ninevites in the previous verses, is

implied in every line of them. The same expression is found in Exodus

xxxii. 14, which may be taken as the classical passage warranting its

use. The great truth involved is one that is too often lost sight of in

dealing with prophecy; namely, that all God's promises and threatenings

are conditional. Jeremiah learned that lesson in the house of the

potter, and we need to keep it well in mind. God threatens, precisely

in order that He may not have to perform His threatenings. Jonah was

sent to Nineveh to cry, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be

overthrown,' in order that it might not be overthrown. What would have

been the use of proclaiming the decree, if it had been irreversible?

There is an implied if' in all God's words. Except ye repent' underlies

the most absolute threatenings of evil. If we hold fast the beginning

of our confidence firm unto the end,' is presupposed in the brightest

and broadest promises of good.

The word repent' is denied and affirmed to have application to God. He

is not a son of man, that He should repent,' inasmuch as His

immutability and steadfast purpose know no variableness. But just

because they cannot change, and He must ever be against them that do

evil, and ever bless them that turn to Him with trust, therefore He

changes His dealings with us according to our relation to Him, and

because He cannot repent, or be other than He was and is, repents of

the evil that He had said that He would do' unto sinners when they

repent of the evil that they have done against Him, inasmuch as He

leaves His threatening unfulfilled, and does it not.'

So we might almost say that the purpose of this book of Jonah is to

teach the possibility and efficacy of repentance, and to show how the

penitent man, heathen or Jew, ever finds in God changed dealings

corresponding to his changed heart. The widest charity, the humbling

lesson for people brought up in the blaze of revelation, that dwellers

in the twilight or in the darkness are dear to God and may be more

susceptible of divine impressions than ourselves, the rebuke of all

pluming ourselves on our privileges, the boundlessness of God's mercy,

are among the other lessons of this strange book; but none of them is

more precious than its truly evangelic teaching of the blessedness of

true penitence, whether exemplified in the renegade Prophet returning

to his high mission, or the fierce Ninevites humbled and repentant, and

finding mercy from the God of the whole earth.

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MICAH

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IS THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD STRAITENED?

O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord

straitened? Are these His doings?'--MICAH ii. 7.

The greater part of so-called Christendom is to-day [1] celebrating the

gift of a Divine Spirit to the Church; but it may well be asked whether

the religious condition of so-called Christendom is not a sad satire

upon Pentecost. There seems a woful contrast, very perplexing to faith,

between the bright promise at the beginning and the history of the

development in the future. How few of those who share in to-day's

services have any personal experience of such a gift! How many seem to

think that that old story is only the record of a past event, a

transient miracle which has no kind of relation to the experience of

the Christians of this day! There were a handful of believers in one of

the towns of Asia Minor, to whom an Apostle came, and was so startled

at their condition that he put to them in wonder the question that

might well be put to multitudes of so-called Christians amongst us: Did

you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?' And their answer is only

too true a transcript of the experience of large masses of people who

call themselves Christians: We have not so much as heard whether there

be any Holy Ghost.'

I desire, then, dear brethren, to avail myself of this day's

associations in order to press upon your consciences and upon my own

some considerations naturally suggested by them, and which find voice

in those two indignant questions of the old Prophet:--Is the Spirit of

the Lord straitened?' Are these'--the phenomena of existing popular

Christianity--are these His doings?' And if we are brought sharp up

against the consciousness of a dreadful contrast, it may do us good to

ask what is the explanation of so cloudy a day following a morning so

bright.

I. First, then, I have to ask you to think with me of the promise of

the Pentecost.

What did it declare and hold forth for the faith of the Church? I need

not dwell at any length upon this point. The facts are familiar to you,

and the inferences drawn from them are commonplace and known to us all.

But let me just enumerate them as briefly as may be.

Suddenly there came a sound, as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it

filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared cloven

tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them; and they were all

filled with the Holy Ghost.'

What lay in that? First, the promise of a Divine Spirit by symbols

which express some, at all events, of the characteristics and

wonderfulness of His work. The rushing of a mighty wind' spoke of a

power which varies in its manifestations from the gentlest breath that

scarce moves the leaves on the summer trees to the wildest blast that

casts down all which stands in its way.

The natural symbolism of the wind, to popular apprehension the least

material of all material forces, and of which the connection with the

immaterial part of a man's personality has been expressed in all

languages, points to a divine, to an immaterial, to a mighty, to a

life-giving power which is free to blow whither it listeth, and of

which men can mark the effects, though they are all ignorant of the

force itself.

The other symbol of the fiery tongues which parted and sat upon each of

them speaks in like manner of the divine influence, not as destructive,

but full of quick, rejoicing energy and life, the power to transform

and to purify. Whithersoever the fire comes, it changes all things into

its own substance. Whithersoever the fire comes, there the ruddy spires

shoot upwards towards the heavens. Whithersoever the fire comes, there

all bonds and fetters are melted and consumed. And so this fire

transforms, purifies, ennobles, quickens, sets free; and where the

fiery Spirit is, there are energy, swift life, rejoicing activity,

transforming and transmuting power which changes the recipient of the

flame into flame himself.

Then, still further, in the fact of Pentecost there is the promise of a

Divine Spirit which is to influence all the moral side of humanity.

This is the great and glorious distinction between the Christian

doctrine of inspiration and all others which have, in heathen lands,

partially reached similar conceptions--that the Gospel of Jesus Christ

has laid emphasis upon the Holy Spirit, and has declared that holiness

of heart is the touchstone and test of all claims of divine

inspiration. Gifts are much, graces are more. An inspiration which

makes wise is to be coveted, an inspiration which makes holy is

transcendently better. There we find the safeguard against all the

fanaticisms which have sometimes invaded the Christian Church, namely,

in the thought that the Spirit which dwells in men, and makes them free

from the obligations of outward law and cold morality, is a Spirit that

works a deeper holiness than law dreamed, and a more spontaneous and

glad conformity to all things that are fair and good, than any

legislation and outward commandment could ever enforce. The Spirit that

came at Pentecost is not merely a Spirit of rushing might and of

swift-flaming energy, but it is a Spirit of holiness, whose most

blessed and intimate work is the production in us of all homely virtues

and sweet, unpretending goodnesses which can adorn and gladden

humanity.

Still further, the Pentecost carried in it the promise and prophecy of

a Spirit granted to all the Church. They were all filled with the Holy

Ghost.' This is the true democracy of Christianity, that its very basis

is laid in the thought that every member of the body is equally close

to the Head, and equally recipient of the life. There is none now who

has a Spirit which others do not possess. The ancient aspiration of the

Jewish law-giver: Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets,

and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them,' is fulfilled in the

experience of Pentecost; and the handmaiden and the children, as well

as the old men and the servants, receive of that universal gift.

Therefore sacerdotal claims, special functions, privileged classes, are

alien to the spirit of Christianity, and blasphemies against the

inspiring God. If one is your Master, all ye are brethren,' and if we

have all been made to drink into one Spirit, then no longer hath any

man dominion over our faith nor power to intervene and to intercede

with God for us.

And still further, the promise of this early history was that of a

Spirit which should fill the whole nature of the men to whom He was

granted; filling--in the measure, of course, of their receptivity--them

as the great sea does all the creeks and indentations along the shore.

The deeper the creek, the deeper the water in it; the further inland it

runs, the further will the refreshing tide penetrate the bosom of the

continent. And so each man, according to his character, stature,

circumstances, and all the varying conditions which determine his power

of receptivity, will receive a varying measure of that gift. Yet it is

meant that all shall be full. The little vessel, the tiny cup, as well

as the great cistern and the enormous vat, each contains according to

its capacity. And if all are filled, then this quick Spirit must have

the power to influence all the provinces of human nature, must touch

the moral, must touch the spiritual. The temporary manifestations and

extraordinary signs of His power may well drop away as the flower drops

when the fruit has set. The operations of the Divine Spirit are to be

felt thrilling through all the nature, and every part of the man's

being is to be recipient of the power. Just as when you take a candle

and plunge it into a jar of oxygen it blazes up, so my poor human

nature immersed in that Divine Spirit, baptized in the Holy Ghost,

shall flame in all its parts into unsuspected and hitherto

inexperienced brightness. Such are the elements of the promise of

Pentecost.

II. And now, in the next place, look at the apparent failure of the

promise.

Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?' Look at Christendom. Look at all

the churches. Look at yourselves. Will any one say that the religious

condition of any body of professed believers at this moment corresponds

to Pentecost? Is not the gap so wide that to fill it up seems almost

impossible? Is not the stained and imperfect fulfilment a miserable

satire upon the promise? If the Lord be with us,' said one of the

heroes of ancient Israel, wherefore is all this come upon us?' I am

sure that we may say the same. If the Lord be with us, what is the

meaning of the state of things which we see around us, and must

recognise in ourselves? Do any existing churches present the final

perfect form of Christianity as embodied in a society? Would not the

best thing that could happen, and the thing that will have to happen

some day, be the disintegration of the existing organisations in order

to build up a more perfect habitation of God through the Spirit? I do

not wish to exaggerate. God knows there is no need for exaggerating.

The plain, unvarnished story, without any pessimistic picking out of

the black bits and forgetting ail the light ones, is bad enough.

Take three points on which I do not dwell and apply them to yourselves,

dear brethren, and estimate by them the condition of things around us.

First, say whether the ordinary tenor of our own religious life looks

as if we had that Divine Spirit in us which transforms everything into

its own beauty, and makes men, through all the regions of their nature,

holy and pure. Then ask yourselves the question whether the standard of

devotion and consecration in any church witnesses of the presence of a

Divine Spirit. A little handful of people, the best of them very

partially touched with the life of God, and very imperfectly

consecrated to His service, surrounded by a great mass about whom we

can scarcely, in the judgment of charity, say even so much, that is the

description of most of our congregations. Are these His doings?' Surely

somebody else's than His.

Take another question. Do the relations of modern Christians and their

churches to one another attest the presence of a unifying Spirit? We

have all been made to drink into one Spirit,' said Paul. Alas, alas!

does it seem as if we had? Look round professing Christendom, look at

the rivalries and the jealousies between two chapels in adjoining

streets. Look at the gulfs between Christian men who differ only on

some comparative trifle of organisation and polity, and say if such

things correspond to the Pentecostal promise of one Spirit which is to

make all the members into one body? Is the Spirit of the Lord

straitened? Are these His doings?'

Take another branch of evidence. Look at the comparative impotence of

the Church in its conflict with the growing worldliness of the world. I

do not forget how much is being done all about us to-day, and how still

Christ's Gospel is winning triumphs, but I do not suppose that any man

can look thoughtfully and dispassionately on the condition, say, for

instance, of Manchester, or of any of our great towns, and mark how the

populace knows nothing and cares nothing about us and our Christianity,

and never comes into our places of worship, and has no share in our

hopes any more than if they lived in Central Africa, and that after

eighteen hundred years of nominal Christianity, without feeling that

some malign influence has arrested the leaping growth of the early

Church, and that somehow or other that lava stream, if I might so call

it, which poured hot from the heart of God in the old days has had its

flow checked, and over its burning bed there has spread a black and

wrinkled crust, whatsoever lingering heat there may still be at the

centre. If God be with us, why has all this come upon us?'

III. And now, lastly, let us think for a moment of the solution of the

contradiction.

The indignant questions of my text may be taken, with a little possibly

permissible violence, as expressing and dismissing some untrue

explanations. One explanation that sometimes is urged is, the Spirit of

the Lord is straitened. That explanation takes two forms. Sometimes you

hear people saying, Christianity is effete. We have to go now to fresh

fountains of inspiration, and turn away from these broken cisterns that

can hold no water.' I am not going to argue that question. I do not

think for my part that Christianity will be effete until the world has

got up to it and beyond it in its practice, and it will be a good while

before that happens. Christianity will not be worn out until men have

copied and reduced to practice the example of Jesus Christ, and they

have not quite got that length yet. No shadow of a fear that the gospel

has lost its power, or that God's Spirit has become weak, should be

permitted to creep over our hearts. The promise is, I will send another

Comforter, and He shall abide with you for ever.' It is a permanent

gift that was given to the Church on that day. We have to distinguish

in the story between the symbols, the gift, and the consequences of the

gift. The first and the last are transient, the second is permanent.

The symbols were transient. The people who came running together saw no

tongues of fire. The consequences were transient. The tongues and the

miraculous utterances were but for a time. The results vary according

to the circumstances; but the central thing, the gift itself, is an

irrevocable gift, and once bestowed is ever with the Church to all

generations.

Another form of the explanation is the theory that God in His

sovereignty is pleased to withhold His Spirit for reasons which we

cannot trace. But it is not true that the gift once given varies in the

degree in which it is continued. There is always the same flow from

God. There are ebbs and flows in the spiritual power of the Church.

Yes! and the tide runs out of your harbours. Is there any less water in

the sea because it does? So the gift may ebb away from a man, from a

community, from an epoch, not because God's manifestation and

bestowment fluctuate, but because our receptivity changes. So we

dismiss, and are bound to dismiss, if we are Christians, the

unbelieving explanation, The Spirit of the Lord is straitened,' and not

to sit with our hands folded, as if an inscrutable sovereignty, with

which we have nothing to do, sometimes sent more and sometimes less of

His spiritual gifts upon a waiting Church. It is not so. With Him is no

variableness.' The gifts of God are without repentance; and the Spirit

that was given once, according to the Master's own word already quoted,

is given that He may abide with us for ever.

Therefore we have to come back to this, which is the point to which I

seek to bring you and myself, in lowly penitence and contrite

acknowledgment--that it is all our own fault and the result of evils in

ourselves that may be remedied, that we have so little of that divine

gift; and that if the churches of this country and of this day seem to

be cursed and blasted in so much of their fruitless operations and

formal worship, it is the fault of the churches, and not of the Lord of

the churches. The stream that poured forth from the throne of God has

not lost itself in the sands, nor is it shrunken in its volume. The

fire that was kindled on Pentecost has not died down into grey ashes.

The rushing of the mighty wind that woke on that morning has not calmed

and stilled itself into the stagnancy and suffocating breathlessness of

midday heat. The same fulness of the Spirit which filled the believers

on that day is available for us all. If, like that waiting Church of

old, we abide in prayer and supplication, the gift will be given to us

too, and we may repeat and reproduce, if not the miracles which we do

not need, yet the necessary inspiration of the highest and the noblest

days and saints in the history of the Church. If ye, being evil, know

how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your

Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?' Ask and ye

shall receive,' and be filled with the Holy Ghost and with power.'

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[1] Whitsunday

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CHRIST THE BREAKER

The Breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have

passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall

pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them.'--MICAH ii. 13.

Micah was contemporary with Isaiah. The two prophets stand, to a large

extent, on the same level of prophetic knowledge. Characteristic of

both of them is the increasing clearness of the figure of the personal

Messiah, and the increasing fulness of detail with which His functions

are described. Characteristic of both of them is the presentation which

we find in this text of that Messiah's work as being the gathering

together of the scattered captive people and the leading them back in

triumph into the blessed land.

Such is the image which underlies my text. Of course I have nothing to

do now with questions as to any narrower and nearer historical

fulfilment, because I believe that all these Messianic prophecies which

were susceptible of, and many of which obtained, a historical and

approximate fulfilment in the restoration of the Jews from the

Babylonish captivity, have a higher and broader and more real

accomplishment in that great deliverance wrought by Jesus Christ, of

which all these earlier and partial and outward manifestations were

themselves prophecies and shadows.

So I make no apology for taking the words before us as having their

only real accomplishment in the office and working of Jesus Christ. He

is the Breaker which is come up before us.' He it is that has broken

out the path on which we may travel, and in whom, in a manner which the

Prophet dreamed not of, the Lord is at the head' of us, and our King

goes before us. So that my object is simply to take that great name,

the Breaker, and to see the manifold ways in which in Scripture it is

applied to the various work of Jesus Christ in our redemption.

I. I follow entirely the lead of corresponding passages in other

portions of Scripture, and to begin with, I ask you to think of that

great work of our Divine Redeemer by which He has broken for the

captives the prison-house of their bondage.

The image that is here before us is either that of some foreign land in

which the scattered exiles were bound in iron captivity, or more

probably some dark and gloomy prison, with high walls, massive gates,

and barred windows, wherein they were held; and to them sitting

hopeless in the shadow of death, and bound in affliction and iron,

there comes one mysterious figure whom the Prophet could not describe

more particularly, and at His coming the gates flew apart, and the

chains dropped from their hands; and the captives had heart put into

them, and gathering themselves together into a triumphant band, they

went out with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; freemen, and

on the march to the home of their fathers. The Breaker is gone up

before them; they have broken, and passed through the gate, and are

gone out by it.'

And is not that our condition? Many of us know not the bondage in which

we are held. We are held in it all the more really and sadly because we

conceit ourselves to be free. Those poor, light-hearted people in the

dreadful days of the French Revolution, used to keep up some ghastly

mockery of society and cheerfulness in their prisons; and festooned the

bars with flowers, and made believe to be carrying on their life freely

as they used to do; but for all that, day after day the tumbrils came

to the gates, and morning after morning the jailer stood at the door of

the dungeons with the fatal list in his hand, and one after another of

the triflers was dragged away to death. And so men and women are living

a life which they fancy is free, and all the while they are in bondage,

held in a prison-house. You, my brother! are chained by guilt; you are

chained by sin, you are chained by the habit of evil with a strength of

which you never know till you try to shake it off.

And there comes to each of us a mighty Deliverer, who breaks the gates

of brass, and who cuts the bars of iron in sunder. Christ comes to us.

By His death He has borne away the guilt; by His living Spirit He will

bear away the dominion of sin from our hearts; and if the Son will make

us free we shall be free indeed. Oh! ponder that deep truth, I pray

you, which the Lord Christ has spoken in words that carry conviction in

their very simplicity to every conscience: He that committeth sin is

the slave of sin.' And as you feel sometimes--and you all feel

sometimes--the catch of the fetter on your wrists when you would fain

stretch out your hands to good, listen as to a true gospel to this old

word which, in its picturesque imagery, carries a truth that should be

life. To us all the Breaker is gone up before us,' the prison gates are

open. Follow His steps, and take the freedom which He gives; and be

sure that you stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you

free, and be not entangled again with any yoke of bondage.'

Men and women! Some of you are the slaves of your own lusts. Some of

you are the slaves of the world's maxims. Some of you are held in

bondage by some habit that you abominate, but cannot get away from.

Here is freedom for you. The dark walls of the prison are round us all.

The Scripture hath shut up all in sin, that He might have mercy upon

all.' Blessed be His name! As the angel came to the sleeping Apostle,

and to his light touch the iron gates swung obedient on their hinges,

and Roman soldiers who ought to have watched their prey were lulled to

sleep, and fetters that held the limbs dropped as if melted; so,

silently, in His meek and merciful strength, the Christ comes to us

all, and the iron gate which leadeth out into freedom opens of its own

accord at His touch, and the fetters fall from our limbs, and we go

forth free men. The Breaker is gone up before us.'

II. Again, take another application of this same figure found in

Scripture, which sets forth Jesus Christ as being the Opener of the

path to God.

I am the Way and the Truth and the Life, no man cometh to the Father

but by Me,' said He. And again, By a new and living way which He hath

opened for us through the veil' (that is to say, His flesh), we can

have free access with confidence by the faith of Him.' That is to say,

if we rightly understand our natural condition, it is not only one of

bondage to evil, but it is one of separation from God. Parts of the

divine character are always beautiful and sweet to every human heart

when it thinks about them. Parts of the divine character stand frowning

before a man who knows himself for what he is; and conscience tells us

that between God and us there is a mountain of impediment piled up by

our own evil. To us Christ comes, the Path-finder and the Path; the

Pioneer who breaks the way for us through all the hindrances, and leads

us up to the presence of God.

For we do not know God as He is except by Jesus Christ. We see

fragments, and often distorted fragments, of the divine nature and

character apart from Jesus, but the real divine nature as it is, and as

it is in its relation to me, a sinner, is only made known to me in the

face of Jesus Christ. When we see Him we see God; Christ's tears are

God's pity, Christ's gentleness is God's meekness, Christ's tender,

drawing love is not only a revelation of a most pure and sweet

Brother's heart, but a manifestation through that Brother's heart of

the deepest depths of the divine nature. Christ is the heart of God.

Apart from Him, we come to the God of our own consciences and we

tremble; we come to the God of our own fancies and we presume; we come

to the God dimly guessed at and pieced together from out of the hints

and indications of His works, and He is little more than a dead name to

us. Apart from Christ we come to a peradventure which we call a God; a

shadow through which you can see the stars shining. But we know the

Father when we believe in Christ. And so all the clouds rising from our

own hearts and consciences and fancies and misconceptions, which we

have piled together between God and ourselves, Christ clears away; and

thus He opens the path to God.

And He opens it in another way too, on which I cannot dwell. It is only

the God manifest in Jesus Christ that draws men's hearts to Him. The

attractive power of the divine nature is ail in Him who has said, I, if

I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.' The God whom men know, or

think they know, outside of the revelation of divinity in Jesus Christ,

is a God before whom they sometimes tremble, who is far more often

their terror than their love, who is their ghastliest doubt' still more

frequently than He is their dearest faith.' But the God that is in

Christ woos and wins men to Him, and from His great sweetness there

streams out, as it were, a magnetic influence that draws hearts to Him.

The God that is in Christ is the only God that humanity ever loved.

Other gods they may have worshipped with cowering terror and with

far-off lip reverence, but this God has a heart, and wins hearts

because He has. So Christ opens the way to Him.

And still further, in a yet higher fashion, that Saviour is the

Path-breaker to the Divine Presence, in that He not only makes God

known to us, and not only makes Him so known to us as to draw us to

Him, but in that likewise He, by the fact of His Cross and passion, has

borne and borne away the impediments of our own sin and transgression

which rise for ever between us and Him, unless He shall sweep them out

of the way. He has made the rough places plain and the crooked things

straight'; levelled the mountains and raised the valleys, and cast up

across all the wilderness of the world a highway along which the

wayfaring man though a fool' may travel. Narrow understandings may

know, and selfish hearts may love, and low-pitched confessions may

reach the ear of the God who comes near to us in Christ, that we in

Christ may come near to Him. The Breaker is gone up before us; having

therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest of all . . . by

a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us . . . let us

draw near with true hearts'

III. Then still further, another modification of this figure is found

in the frequent representations of Scripture, by which our Lord is the

Breaker, going up before us in the sense that He is the Captain of our

life's march.

We have, in the words of my text, the image of the gladly-gathered

people flocking after the Leader. They have broken up, and have passed

through the gate, and are gone out by it; and their King shall pass

before them, and the Lord on the head of them.' The Prophet knew not

that the Lord their King, of whom it is enigmatically said that He too,

as well as the Breaker,' is to go before them, was in mysterious

fashion to dwell in that Breaker; and that those two, whom He sees

separately, are yet in a deep and mysterious sense one. The host of the

captives, returning in triumphant march through the wilderness and to

the promised land, is, in the Prophet's words, headed both by the

Breaker and by the Lord. We know that the Breaker is the Lord, the

Angel of the Covenant in whom is the name of Jehovah.

And so we connect with all these words of my text such words as

designate our Saviour as the Captain of our salvation; such words as

His own in which He says, When He putteth forth His sheep He goeth

before them'--such words as His Apostle used when he said, Leaving us

an ensample that we should follow in His steps.' And by all there is

suggested this--that Christ, who breaks the prison of our sins, and

leads us forth on the path to God, marches at the head of our life's

journey, and is our Example and Commander; and Himself present with us

through all life's changes and its sorrows.

Here is the great blessing and peculiarity of Christian morals that

they are all brought down to that sweet obligation: Do as I did.' Here

is the great blessing and strength for the Christian life in all its

difficulties--you can never go where you cannot see in the desert the

footprints, haply spotted with blood, that your Master left there

before you, and planting your trembling feet in the prints, as a child

might imitate his father's strides, may learn to recognise that all

duty comes to this: Follow Me'; and that all sorrow is calmed,

ennobled, made tolerable, and glorified, by the thought that He has

borne it.

The Roman matron of the legend struck the knife into her bosom, and

handed it to her husband with the words, It is not painful!' Christ has

gone before us in all the dreary solitude, and in all the agony and

pains of life. He has hallowed them all, and has taken the bitterness

and the pain out of each of them for them that love Him. If we feel

that the Breaker is before us, and that we are marching behind Him,

then whithersoever He leads us we may follow, and whatsoever He has

passed through we may pass through. We carry In His life the

all-sufficing pattern of duty. We have in His companionship the

all-strengthening consolation. Let us leave the direction of our road

in His hands, who never says Go!' but always Come!' This General

marches in the midst of His battalions and sets His soldiers on no

enterprises or forlorn hopes which He has not Himself dared and

overcome.

So Christ goes as our Companion before us, the true pillar of fire and

cloud in which the present Deity abode, and He is with us in real

companionship. Our joyful march through the wilderness is directed,

patterned, protected, companioned by Him, and when He putteth forth His

own sheep,' blessed be His name, He goeth before them.'

IV. And now, lastly, there is a final application of this figure which

sets forth our Lord as the Breaker for us of the bands of death, and

the Forerunner entered for us into the heavens.'

Christ's resurrection is the only solid proof of a future life.

Christ's present resurrection life is the power by partaking in which,

though we were dead, yet shall we live.'

He has trodden that path, too, before us. He has entered into the great

prison-house into which the generations of men have been hounded and

hurried; and where they lie in their graves, as in their narrow cells.

He has entered there; with one blow He has struck the gates from their

hinges, and has passed out, and no soul can any longer be shut in as

for ever into that ruined and opened prison. Like Samson, He has taken

the gates which from of old barred its entrance, and borne them on His

strong shoulders to the city on the hill, and now Death's darts are

blunted, his fetters are broken, and his gaol has its doors wide open,

and there is nothing for him to do now but to fall upon his sword and

to kill himself, for his prisoners are free. Oh, death! I will be thy

plague; oh, grave! I will be thy destruction.' The Breaker has gone up

before us'; therefore it is not possible that we should be holden of

the impotent chains that He has broken.

The Forerunner is for us entered and passed through the heavens, and

entered into the holiest of all. We are too closely knit to Him, if we

love Him and trust Him, to make it possible that we shall be where He

is not, or that He shall be where we are not. Where He has gone we

shall go. In heaven, blessed be His name! He will still be the leader

of our progress and the captain at the head of our march. For He crowns

all His other work by this, that having broken the prison-house of our

sins, and opened for us the way to God, and been the leader and the

captain of our march through all the pilgrimage of life, and the opener

of the gate of the grave for our joyful resurrection, and the opener of

the gate of heaven for our triumphal entrance, He will still as the

Lamb that is in the midst of the Throne, go before us, and lead us into

green pastures and by the still waters, and this shall be the

description of the growing blessedness and power of the saints' life

above, These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'

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AS GOD, SO WORSHIPPER

. . . All the peoples will walk every one in the name of his god, and

we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.'--MICAH

iv. 5 (R.V.).

This is a statement of a general truth which holds good of all sorts of

religion. To walk' is equivalent to carrying on a course of practical

activity. The name' of a god is his manifested character. So the

expression Walk in the name' means, to live and act according to, and

with reference to, and in reliance on, the character of the

worshipper's god. In the Lord's prayer the petition Hallowed be Thy

name' precedes the petition Thy will be done.' From reverent thoughts

about the name must flow life in reverent conformity to the will.

I. A man's god is what rules his practical life.

Religion is dependence upon a Being recognised to be perfect and

sovereign, whose will guides, and whose character moulds, the whole

life. That general statement may be broken up into parts; and we may

dwell upon the attitude of dependence, or of that of submission, or

upon that of admiration and recognition of ideal perfection, or upon

that of aspiration; but we come at last to the one thought--that the

goal of religion is likeness and the truest worship is imitation. Such

a view of the essence of religion gives point to the question, What is

our god? and makes it a very easily applied, and very searching test,

of our lives. Whatever we profess, that which we feel ourselves

dependent on, that which we invest, erroneously or rightly, with

supreme attributes of excellence, that which we aspire after as our

highest good, that which shapes and orders the current of our lives, is

our god. We call ourselves Christians. I am afraid that if we tried

ourselves by such a test, many of us would fail to pass it. It would

thin the ranks of all churches as effectually as did Gideon's ordeal by

water, which brought down a mob of ten thousand to a little steadfast

band of three hundred. No matter to what church we belong, or how

flaming our professions, our practical religion is determined by our

answer to the question, What do we most desire? What do we most eagerly

pursue? England has as much need as ever the house of Jacob had of the

scathing words that poured like molten lead from the lips of Isaiah the

son of Amoz, Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there

any end of their treasures. Their land is also full of idols: they

worship the work of their own hands.' Money, knowledge, the good

opinion of our fellows, success in a political career--these, and the

like, are our gods. There is a worse idolatry than that which bows down

before stocks and stones. The aims that absorb us; our highest ideal of

excellence; that which possessed, we think would secure our

blessedness; that lacking which everything else is insipid and

vain--these are our gods: and the solemn prohibition may well be

thundered in the ears of the unconscious idolaters not only in the

English world, but also in the English churches. Thou shalt not give My

glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.'

II. The worshipper will resemble his god in character.

As we have already said, the goal of religion is likeness, and the

truest worship is imitation. It is proved by the universal experience

of humanity that the level of morality will never rise above the type

enshrined in their gods; or if it does, in consequence of contact with

a higher type in a higher religion, the old gods will be flung to the

moles and the bats. They that make them are like unto them; so is every

one that trusteth in them.' That is a universal truth. The worshippers

were in the Prophet's thought as dumb and dead as the idols. They who

worship vanity' inevitably become vain.' A Venus or a Jupiter, a Baal

or an Ashtoreth, sets the tone of morals.

This truth is abundantly enforced by observation of the characters of

the men amongst us who are practical idolaters. They are narrowed and

lowered to correspond with their gods. Low ideals can never lead to

lofty lives. The worship of money makes the complexion yellow, like

jaundice. A man who concentrates his life's effort upon some earthly

good, the attainment of which seems to be, so long as it is unattained,

his passport to bliss, thereby blunts many a finer aspiration, and

makes himself blind to many a nobler vision. Men who are always hunting

after some paltry and perishable earthly good, become like dogs who

follow scent with their noses at the ground, and are unconscious of

everything a yard above their heads. We who live amidst the rush of a

great commercial community see many instances of lives stiffened,

narrowed, impoverished, and hardened by the fierce effort to become

rich. And wherever we look with adequate knowledge over the many

idolatries of English life, we see similar processes at work on

character. Everywhere around us the peoples are walking every one in

the name of his god.' That character constitutes the worshipper's

ideal; it is a pattern to which he aims to be assimilated; it is a good

the possession of which he thinks will make him blessed; it is that for

which he willingly sacrifices much which a clearer vision would teach

him is far more precious than that for which he is content to barter

it.

The idolaters walking in the name of their god is a rebuke to the

Christian men who with faltering steps and many an aberration are

seeking to walk in the name of the Lord their God. If He is in any real

and deep sense our God,' we shall see in Him the realised ideal of all

excellence, the fountain of all our blessedness, the supreme good for

our seeking hearts, the sovereign authority to sway our wills; the

measure of our conscious possession of Him will be the measure of our

glad imitation of Him, and our joyful spirits, enfranchised by the

assurance of our loving possession of Him who is love, will hear Him

ever whisper to us, Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is

perfect.' The desire to reproduce in the narrow bounds of our human

spirits the infinite beauties of the Lord our God will give elevation

to our lives, and dignity to our actions attainable from no other

source. If we hallow His name, we shall do His will, and earth will

become a foretaste of heaven.

III. The worshipper will resemble his god in fate.

We may observe that it is only of God's people that Micah in our text

applies the words for ever and ever.' The peoples'' worship perishes.

They walk for a time in the name of their god, but what comes of it at

last is veiled in silence. It is Jehovah's worshippers who walk in His

name for ever and ever, and of whom the great words are true, Because I

live ye shall live also.' We may be sure of this that all the divine

attributes are pledged for our immortality; we may be sure, too, that a

soul which here follows in the footsteps of Jesus, which in its earthly

life walked in the name of the Lord its God, will continue across the

narrow bridge, and go onward for ever and ever' in direct progress in

the same direction in which it began on earth. The imitation, which is

the practical religion of every Christian, has for its only possible

result the climax of likeness. The partial likeness is attained on

earth by contemplation, by aspiration, and by effort; but it is

perfected in the heavens by the perfect vision of His perfect face. We

shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' Not till it has

reached its goal can the Christian life begun here be conceived as

ended. It shall never be said of any one who tried by God's help to

walk in the name of the Lord' that he was lost in the desert, and never

reached his journey's end. The peoples who walked in the name of any

false god will find their path ending as on the edge of a precipice, or

in an unfathomable bog; loss, and woe, and shame will be their portion.

But the name of the Lord is a strong tower,' into which whoever will

may run and be safe, and to walk in the name of the Lord is to walk on

a way that shall be called the Way of Holiness, whereon no ravenous

beast shall go up, but the redeemed shall walk there,' and all that are

on it shall come with singing to Zion, and everlasting joy shall be

upon their heads.'

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A DEW FROM THE LORD'

The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from

the Lord, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of

men.'--MICAH v. 7.

The simple natural science of the Hebrews saw a mystery in the

production of the dew on a clear night, and their poetic imagination

found in it a fit symbol for all silent and gentle influences from

heaven that refreshed and quickened parched and dusty souls. Created by

an inscrutable process in silence and darkness, the dewdrops lay

innumerable on the dry plains and hung from every leaf and thorn, each

little globule a perfect sphere that reflected the sun, and twinkled

back the beams in its own little rainbow. Where they fell the scorched

vegetation lifted its drooping head. That is what Israel is to be in

the world, says Micah. He saw very deep into God's mind and into the

function of the nation.

It may be a question as to whether the text refers more especially to

the place and office of Israel when planted in its own land, or when

dispersed among the nations. For, as you see, he speaks of the remnant

of Jacob' as if he was thinking of the survivors of some great calamity

which had swept away the greater portion of the nation. Both things are

true. When settled in its own land, Israel's office was to teach the

nations God; when dispersed among the Gentiles, its office ought to

have been the same. But be that as it may, the conception here set

forth is as true to-day as ever it was. For the prophetic teachings,

rooted though they may be in the transitory circumstances of a tiny

nation, are not for an age, but for all time,' and we get a great deal

nearer the heart of them when we grasp the permanent truths that

underlie them, than when we learnedly exhume the dead history which was

their occasion.

Micah's message comes to all Christians, and very eminently to English

Christians. The subject of Christian missions is before us to-day, and

some thoughts in the line of this great text may not be inappropriate.

We have here, then,

I. The function of each Christian in his place.

The remnant of Jacob shall be as a dew from the Lord in the midst of

many nations.' What made Israel as a dew'? One thing only; its

religion, its knowledge of God, and its consequent purer morality. It

could teach Greece no philosophy, no art, no refinement, no

sensitiveness to the beautiful. It could teach Rome no lessons of

policy or government. It could bring no wisdom to Egypt, no power or

wealth to Assyria. But God lit His candle and set it on a candlestick,

that it might give light to all that were in the house.' The same thing

is true about Christian people. We cannot teach the world science, we

cannot teach it philosophy or art, but we can teach it God. Now the

possibility brings with it the obligation. The personal experience of

Jesus Christ in our hearts, as the dew that brings to us life and

fertility, carries with it a commission as distinct and imperative as

if it had been pealed into each single ear by a voice from heaven. That

which made Israel the dew amidst many nations,' parched for want of it,

makes Christian men and women fit to fill the analogous office, and

calls upon them to discharge the same functions. For--in regard to all

our possessions, and therefore most eminently and imperatively in

regard to the best--that which we have, we have as stewards, and the

Gospel, as the Apostle found, was not only given to him for his own

individual enjoyment, elevation, ennobling, emancipation, salvation,

but was committed to his charge,' and he was entrusted' with it, as he

says, as a sacred deposit.

Remember, too, that, strange as it may seem, the only way by which that

knowledge of God which was bestowed upon Israel could become the

possession of the world was by its first of all being made the

possession of a few. People talk about the unfairness, the harshness,

of the providential arrangement by which the whole world was not made

participant of the revelation which was granted to Israel. The fire is

gathered on to a hearth. Does that mean that the corners of the room

are left uncared for? No! the brazier is in the middle--as Palestine

was, even geographically in the centre of the then civilised

world--that from the centre the beneficent warmth might radiate and

give heat as well as light to all them that are in the house.'

So it is in regard to all the great possessions of the race. Art,

literature, science, political wisdom, they are all intrusted to a few

who are made their apostles; and the purpose is their universal

diffusion from these human centres. It is in the line of the analogy of

all the other gifts of God to humanity, that chosen men should be

raised up in whom the life is lodged, that it may be diffused.

So to us the message comes: The Lord hath need of thee.' Christ has

died; the Cross is the world's redemption. Christ lives that He may

apply the power and the benefits of His death and of His risen life to

all humanity. But the missing link between the all sufficient

redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and the actual redemption of the

world, is the remnant of Jacob,' the Christian Church which is to be in

the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord.'

Now, that diffusion from individual centres of the life that is in

Jesus Christ is the chiefest reason--or at all events, is one chief

reason--for the strange and inextricable intertwining in modern

society, of saint and sinner, of Christian and non-Christian. The seed

is sown among the thorns; the wheat springs up amongst the tares. Their

roots are so matted together that no hand can separate them. In

families, in professions, in business relations, in civil life, in

national life, both grow together. God sows His seed thin that all the

field may smile in harvest. The salt is broken up into many minute

particles and rubbed into that which it is to preserve from corruption.

The remnant of Jacob is in the midst of many peoples; and you and I are

encompassed by those who need our Christ, and who do not know Him or

love Him; and one great reason for the close intertwining is that,

scattered, we may diffuse, and that at all points the world may be in

contact with those who ought to be working to preserve it from

putrefaction and decay.

Now there are two ways by which this function may be discharged, and in

which it is incumbent upon every Christian man to make his

contribution, be it greater or smaller, to the discharge of it. The one

is by direct efforts to impart to others the knowledge of God in Jesus

Christ which we have, and which we profess to be the very root of our

lives. We can all do that if we will, and we are here to do it. Every

one of us has somebody or other close to us, bound to us, perhaps, by

the tie of kindred and love, who will listen to us more readily than to

anybody else. Christian men and women, have you utilised these channels

which God Himself, by the arrangements of society, has dug for you,

that through them you may pour upon some thirsty ground the water of

life? We could also help, and help far more than any of us do, in

associated efforts for the same purpose. The direct obligation to

direct efforts to impart the Gospel cannot be shirked, though, alas! it

is far too often ignored by us professing Christians.

But there is another way by which the remnant of Jacob' is to be a dew

from the Lord,' and that is by trying to bring to bear Christian

thoughts and Christian principles upon all the relations of life in

which we stand, and upon all the societies, be they greater or

smaller--the family, the city, or the nation--of which we form parts.

We have heard a great deal lately about what people that know very

little about it, are pleased to call the Nonconformist conscience,' I

take the compliment, which is not intended, but is conveyed by the

word. But I venture to say that what is meant, is not the

Nonconformist' conscience, it is the Christian conscience. We

Nonconformists have no monopoly, thank God, of that. Nay, rather, in

some respects, our friends in the Anglican churches are teaching some

of us a lesson as to the application of Christian principles to civic

duty and to national life. I beseech you, although I do not mean to

dwell upon that point at all at this time, to ask yourselves whether,

as citizens, the vices, the godlessness, the miseries--the removable

miseries--of our great town populations, lie upon your hearts. Have you

ever lifted a finger to abate drunkenness? Have you ever done anything

to help to make it possible that the masses of our town communities

should live in places better than the pigsties in which many of them

have to wallow? Have you any care for the dignity, the purity, the

Christianity of our civic rulers; and do you, to the extent of your

ability, try to ensure that Christ's teaching shall govern the life of

our cities? And the same question may be put yet more emphatically with

regard to wider subjects, namely, the national life and the national

action, whether in regard to war or in regard to other pressing

subjects for national consideration. I do not touch upon these; I only

ask you to remember the grand ideal of my text, which applies to the

narrowest circle--the family; and to the wider circles--the city and

the nation, as well as to the world. Time was when a bastard piety

shrank back from intermeddling with these affairs and gathered up its

skirts about it in an ecstasy of unwholesome unworldliness. There is

not much danger of that now, when Christian men are in the full swim of

the currents of civic, professional, literary, national life. But I

will tell you of what there is a danger--Christian men and women moving

in their families, going into town councils, going into Parliament,

going to the polling booths, and leaving their Christianity behind

them. The remnant of Jacob shall be as a dew from the Lord.'

Now let me turn for a moment to a second point, and that is

II. The function of English Christians in the world.

I have suggested in an earlier part of this sermon that possibly the

application of this text originally was to the scattered remnant. Be

that as it may, wherever you go, you find the Jew and the Englishman. I

need not dwell upon the ubiquity of our race. I need not point you to

the fact that, in all probability, our language is destined to be the

world's language some day. I need do nothing more than recall the fact

that a man may go on board ship, in Liverpool or London, and go round

the world; everywhere he sees the Union Jack, and everywhere he lands

upon British soil. The ubiquity of the scattered Englishman needs no

illustration.

But I do wish to remind you that that ubiquity has its obligation. We

hear a great deal to-day about Imperialism, about the Greater Britain,'

about the expansion of England.' And on one side all that new

atmosphere of feeling is good, for it speaks of a vivid consciousness

which is all to the good in the pulsations of the national life. But

there is another side to it that is not so good. What is the expansion

sought for? Trade? Yes! necessarily; and no man who lives in Lancashire

will speak lightly of that necessity. Vulgar greed, and earth-hunger?

that is evil. Glory? that is cruel, blood-stained, empty. My text tells

us why expansion should be sought, and what are the obligations it

brings with it. The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many

people as a dew from the Lord' There are two kinds of Imperialism: one

which regards the Empire as a thing for the advantage of us here, in

this little land, and another which regards it as a burden that God has

laid on the shoulders of the men whom John Milton, two centuries ago,

was not afraid to call His Englishmen.'

Let me remind you of two contrasted pictures which will give far more

forcibly than anything I can say, the two points of view from which our

world-wide dominion may be regarded. Here is one of them: By the

strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent.

And I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their

treasures, and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people;

and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth;

and there was none that moved a wing, or opened a mouth, or peeped.'

That is the voice of the lust for Empire for selfish advantages. And

here is the other one: The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall

bring presents; yea, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations

shall serve Him, for He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the

poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall redeem their soul from

deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in His sight.'

That is the voice that has learned: He that is greatest among you, let

him be your servant'; and that the dominion founded on unselfish

surrender for others is the only dominion that will last. Brethren!

that is the spirit in which alone England will keep its Empire over the

world.

I need not remind you that the gift which we have to carry to the

heathen nations, the subject peoples who are under the 槩s of our

laws, is not merely our literature, our science, our Western

civilisation, still less the products of our commerce, for all of which

some of them are asking; but it is the gift that they do not ask for.

The dew waiteth not for man, nor tarrieth for the sons of men.' We have

to create the demand by bringing the supply. We have to carry Christ's

Gospel as the greatest gift that we have in our hands.

And now, I was going to have said a word, lastly, but I see it can only

be a word, about--

III. The failure to fulfil the function.

Israel failed. Pharisaism was the end of it--a hugging itself in the

possession of the gift which it did not appreciate, and a bitter

contempt of the nations, and so destruction came, and the fire on the

hearth was scattered and died out, and the vineyard was taken from them

and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.' Change the

name, as the Latin poet says, and the story is told about us. England

largely fails in this function; as witness in India godless civilians;

as witness on every palm-shaded coral beach in the South Seas,

profligate beach-combers, drunken sailors, unscrupulous traders; as

witness the dying out of races by diseases imported with profligacy and

gin from this land. A dew from the Lord!'; say rather a malaria from

the devil! By you,' said the Prophet, is the name of God blasphemed

among the Gentiles.' By Englishmen the missionary's efforts are, in a

hundred cases, neutralised, or hampered if not neutralised.

We have failed because, as Christian people, we have not been

adequately in earnest. No man can say with truth that the churches of

England are awake to the imperative obligation of this missionary

enterprise. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He

spare not thee.' Israel's religion was not diffusive, therefore it

corrupted; Israel's religion did not reach out a hand to the nations,

therefore its heart was paralysed and stricken. They who bring the

Gospel to others increase their own hold upon it. There is a joy of

activity, there is a firmer faith, as new evidences of its power are

presented before them. There is the blessing that comes down upon all

faithful discharge of duty; If the house be not worthy, your peace

shall return to you.' After all, our Empire rests on moral foundations,

and if it is administered by us--and we each have part of the

responsibility for all that is done--on the selfish ground of only

seeking the advantage of the predominant partner,' then our hold will

be loosened. There is no such cement of empire as a common religion. If

we desire to make these subject peoples loyal fellow-subjects, we must

make them true fellow-worshippers. The missionary holds India for

England far more strongly than the soldier does. If we apply Christian

principles to our administration of our Empire, then instead of its

being knit together by iron bands, it will be laced together by the

intertwining tendrils of the hearts of those who are possessors of like

precious faith.' Brethren, there is another saying in the Old

Testament, about the dew. I will be as the dew unto Israel,' says God

through the Prophet. We must have Him as the dew for our own souls

first. Then only shall we be able to discharge the office laid upon us,

to be in the midst of many peoples as dew from the Lord.' If our fleece

is wet and we leave the ground dry, our fleece will soon be dry, though

the ground may be bedewed.

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GOD'S REQUIREMENTS AND GOD'S GIFT

What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love

mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'--MICAH vi. 8.

This is the Prophet's answer to a question which he puts into the mouth

of his hearers. They had the superstitious estimate of the worth of

sacrifice, which conceives that the external offering is pleasing to

God, and can satisfy for sin. Micah, like his great contemporary

Isaiah, and the most of the prophets, wages war against that

misconception of sacrifice, but does not thereby protest against its

use. To suppose that he does so is to misunderstand his whole argument.

Another misuse of the words of my text is by no means uncommon to-day.

One has heard people say, We are plain men; we do not understand your

theological subtleties; we do not quite see what you mean by

"Repentance toward God, and faith in Jesus Christ." "To do justly, and

to love mercy, and to walk humbly with my God," that is my religion,

and I leave all the rest to you.' That is our religion too, but notice

that word require.' It is a harsh word, and if it is the last word to

be said about God's relation to men, then a great shadow has fallen

upon life.

But there is another word which Micah but dimly caught uttered amidst

the thunders of Sinai, and which you and I have heard far more clearly.

The Prophet read off rightly God's requirements, but he had not

anything to say about God's gifts. So his word is a half-truth, and the

more clearly it is seen, and the more earnestly a man tries to live up

to the standard of the requirements laid down here, the more will he

feel that there is something else needed, and the more will he see that

the great central peculiarity and glory of Christianity is not that it

reiterates or alters God's requirements, but that it brings into view

God's gifts. To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God,'

is possible only through repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord

Jesus Christ. And if you suppose that these words of my text disclose

the whole truth about God's relation to men, and men's to God, you have

failed to apprehend the flaming centre of the Light that shines from

heaven.

I. So, then, the first thing that I wish to suggest is God's

requirements.

Now, I do not need to say more than just a word or two about the

summing-up in my text of the plain, elementary duties of morality and

religion. It covers substantially the same ground, in a condensed form,

as does the Decalogue, only that Moses began with the deepest thing and

worked outwards, as it were; laying the foundation in a true relation

to God, which is the most important, and from which will follow the

true relation to men. Micah begins at the other end, and starting with

the lesser, the more external, the purely human, works his way inwards

to that which is the centre and the source of all.

To do justly,' that is elementary morality in two words. Whatever a man

has a right to claim from you, give him; that is the sum of duty. And

yet not altogether so, for we all know the difference between a

righteous man and a good man, and how, if there is only rigidly

righteous action, there is something wanting to the very righteousness

of the action and to the completeness of the character. To do' is not

enough; we must get to the heart, and so love mercy.' Justice is not

all. If each man gets his deserts, as Shakespeare says, who of us shall

scape whipping?' There must be the mercy as well as the justice. In a

very deep sense no man renders to his fellows all that his fellows have

a right to expect of him, who does not render to them mercy. And so in

a very deep sense, mercy is part of justice, and you have not given any

poor creature all that that poor creature has a right to look for from

you, unless you have given him all the gracious and gentle charities of

heart and hand. Justice and mercy do, in the deepest view, run into

one.

Then Micah goes deeper. And to walk humbly with thy God.' Some people

would say that this summary of the divine requirements is defective,

because there is nothing in it about a man's duty to himself, which is

as much a duty as his duty to his fellows, or his duty to God. But

there is a good deal of my duty to myself crowded into that one word,

humbly.' For I suppose we might almost say that the basis of all our

obligations to our own selves lies in this, that we shall take the

right view--that is, the lowly view--of ourselves. But I pass that.

To walk humbly with thy God.' Can two walk together unless they be

agreed?' For walking with God there must be communion, based in love,

and resulting in imitation. And that communion must be constant, and

run through all the life, like a golden thread through some web. So,

then, here is the minimum of the divine requirements, to give everybody

what he has a right to, including the mercy to which he has a right, to

have a lowly estimate of myself, and to live continually grasping the

hand of God, and conscious of His overshadowing wing at all moments,

and of conformity to His will at every step of the road. That is the

minimum; and the people who so glibly say, That is my religion,' have

little consciousness of how far-reaching and how deep-down-going the

requirements of this text are. The requirements result from the very

nature of God, and our relation to Him, and they are endorsed by our

own consciences, for we all know that these, and nothing less than

these are the duties that we owe to God. So much for God's

requirements.

II. Our failure.

There is not one of us that has come up to the standard. Man after man

may be conceived of as bringing in his hands the actions of his life,

and laying them in the awful scales which God's hand holds. In the one

are God's requirements, in the other my life; and in every case down

goes the weight, and weighed in the balances we are altogether lighter

than vanity.' We stand before the great Master in the school, and one

by one we take up our copybooks; and there is not one of them that is

not black with blots and erasures and swarming with errors. The great

cliff stands in front of us with the victor's prize on its topmost

ledge, and man after man tries to climb, and falls bruised and broken

at the base. There is none righteous, no, not one.' Micah's

requirements come to every man that will honestly take stock of his

life and his character as the statement of an unreached and unreachable

ideal to which he never has climbed nor ever can climb.

Oh, brethren! if these words are all the words that are to be said

about God and me, then I know not what lies before the enlightened

conscience except shuddering despair, and a paralysing consciousness of

inevitable failure. I beseech you, take these words, and go apart with

them, and test your daily life by them. God requires me to do justly.

Does there not rise before my memory many an act in which, in regard to

persons and in regard to circumstances, I have fallen beneath that

requirement? He requires me to love mercy.' He requires me to walk

humbly,' and I have often been inflated and self-conceited and

presumptuous. He requires me to walk with Himself, and I have shaken

away His hand from me, and passed whole days without ever thinking of

Him, and the God in whose hands' my breath is, and whose are all' my

ways,' I have not glorified.' I cannot hammer this truth into your

consciences. You have to do it for yourselves. But I beseech you,

recognise the fact that you are implicated in the universal failure,

and that God's requirement is God's condemnation of each of us.

If, then, that is true, that all have come short of the requirement,

then there should follow a universal sense of guilt, for there is the

universal fact of guilt, whether there be the sense of it or not. There

must follow, too, consequences resulting from the failure of each of us

to comply with these divine requirements, consequences very alarming,

very fatal; and there must follow a darkening of the thought of God. I

knew thee that thou wert an austere man, reaping where thou didst not

sow, and gathering where thou didst not straw.' That is the God of all

the people who take my text as the last word of their religion--God

requires of me. The blessed sun in the heavens becomes a lurid ball of

fire when it is seen through the mist of such a conception of the

divine character, and its relation to men. There is nothing that so

drapes the sky in darkness, and hides out the great light of God, as

the thought of His requirements as the last thought we cherish

concerning Him.

There follows, too, upon this conception, and the failure that results

to fulfil the requirements, a hopelessness as to ever accomplishing

that which is demanded of us. Who amongst us is there that, looking

back upon his past in so far as it has been shaped by his own effort

and his own unaided strength, can look forward to a future with any

hope that it will mend the past? Brethren! experience teaches us that

we have not fulfilled, and cannot fulfil, what remains our plain duty,

notwithstanding our inability to discharge it--viz., To do justly, and

to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.' To think of God's

requirements, and of my own failure, is the sure way to paralyse all

activity; just as that man in the parable who said, Thou art an austere

man,' went away and hid his talent in the earth. To think of God's

requirements and my own failures, if heaven has nothing more to say to

me than this stern Thou shalt,' is the short way to despair. And that

is why most of us prefer to be immersed in the trivialities of daily

life rather than to think of God, and of what He asks from us. For the

only way by which some of us can keep our equanimity and our

cheerfulness is by ignoring Him and forgetting what He demands, and

never taking stock of our own lives.

III. Lastly, my text leads us to think of God's gift.

I said it is a half-truth, for it only tells us of what He desires us

to be, and does not tell us of how we may be it. It is meant, like the

law of which it is a condensation, to be the pedagogue, to lead the

child to Jesus Christ, the true Master, and the true Gift of God.

God requires.' Yes, and He requires, in order that we should say to

Him, Lord, Thou hast a right to ask this, and it is my blessedness to

give it, but I cannot. Do Thou give me what Thou dost require, and then

I can.'

The gift of God is Jesus Christ, and that gift meets all our failures.

I have spoken of the sense of guilt that rises from the consciousness

of failure to keep the requirements of the divine law; and the gift of

God deals with that. It comes to us as we lie wounded, bruised,

conscious of failure, alarmed for results, sensible of guilt, and

dreading the penalties, and it says to us, Thine iniquity is taken

away, and thy sin purged.' God requires of thee what thou hast not

done. Trust yourselves to Me, and all iniquity is passed from your

souls.'

I spoke of the hopelessness of future performance, which results from

experience of past failures; and the gift of God deals with that. You

cannot meet the requirements. Christ will put His Spirit into your

spirits, if you will trust yourselves to Him, and then you will meet

them, for the things which are impossible with men are possible with

God. So, if led by Micah, we pass from God's requirements to His gifts,

look at the change in the aspect which God bears to us. He is no longer

standing strict to mark, and stern to judge and condemn: but bending

down graciously to help. His last word to us is not Thou shalt do' but

I will give.' His utterance in the Gospel is not do,' but it is take';

and the vision of God, which shines out upon us from the life and from

the Cross of Jesus Christ, is not that of a great Taskmaster, but that

of Him who helps all our weakness, and makes it strength. A God who

requires' paralyses men, shuts men out from hope and joy and

fellowship; a God who gives draws men to His heart, and makes them

diligent in fulfilling all His blessed requirements.

Think of the difference which the conception of God as giving makes to

the spirit in which we work. No longer, like the Israelites in Egypt,

do we try to make bricks without straw, and break our hearts over our

failures, or desperately abandon the attempt, and live in neglect of

God and His will; but joyfully, with the clear confidence that our

labour is not in vain in the Lord,' we seek to keep the commandments

which we have learned to be the expressions of His love. One of the

Fathers puts all in one lovely sentence: Give what Thou commandest, and

command what Thou wilt.'

Think, too, of the difference which this conception of the giving

rather than of the requiring God brings into what we have to do. We

have not to begin with effort, we have to begin with faith. The

fountain must be filled from the spring before it can send up its

crystal pillar flashing in the sunlight; and we must receive by our

trust the power to will and to do. First fill the lamp with oil, and

let the Master light it, and then let its blaze beam forth. First, we

have to go to the giving God, with thanks unto Him for His unspeakable

gift'; and then we have to say to Him, Thou hast given me Thy Son. What

dost Thou desire that I shall give to Thee?' We have first to accept

the gift, and then, moved by the mercy of God, to ask, Lord I what wilt

Thou have me to do?'

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HABAKKUK

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THE IDEAL DEVOUT LIFE

The Lord God is my Strength, and He will make my feet like hinds' feet,

and He will make me to walk upon mine high places.'--HABAKKUK iii. 19.

So ends one of the most magnificent pieces of imaginative poetry in

Scripture or anywhere else. The singer has been describing a great

delivering manifestation of the Most High God, which, though he knew it

was for the deliverance of God's people, shed awe and terror over his

soul. Then he gathers himself together to vow that in this God, thus

manifested as the God of his salvation, he will rejoice,' whatever

penury or privation may attach to his outward life. Lastly, he rises,

in these final words, to the apprehension of what this God, thus

rejoiced in, will become to those who so put their trust and their

gladness upon Himself.

The expressions are of a highly metaphorical and imaginative character,

but they admit of being brought down to very plain facts, and they tell

us the results in heart and mind of true faith and communion with God.

It is to be noticed that a parallel saying, almost verbatim the same as

that of my text, occurs in the 18th psalm, and that there, too, it is

the last and joyous result of a tremendous manifestation of the

delivering energy of God.

Without any attempt to do more than bring out the deep meaning of the

words, I note that the three clauses of our text present three aspects

of what our lives and ourselves may steadfastly be if we, too, will

rejoice in the God of our salvation.

I. First, such communion with God brings God to a man for his strength.

The 18th psalm, which is closely parallel, as I have remarked, with

this one, gives a somewhat different and inferior version of that

thought when it says, It is the Lord that girdeth me with strength.'

But Habakkuk, though perhaps he could not have put into dogmatic shape

all that he meant, had come farther than that with this: The Lord is my

strength.' He not only gives, as one might put a coin into the hand of

a beggar, while standing separate from him all the while, but He is my

strength.'

And what does that mean? It is an anticipation of that most wonderful

and highest of all the New Testament truths which the Apostle declared

when he said: I can do all things in Christ which strengtheneth me

within.' It is the anticipation in experience--which always comes

before dogmatic formulas that reduce experiences into articulate

utterances, of what the Apostle recorded when he said that he had heard

the voice that declared, My grace is sufficient for thee, and My

strength is made perfect in weakness.'

Ah, brother! do not let us deprive ourselves of the lofty consolations

and the mysterious influx of power which may be ours, if we will open

our eyes to see, and our hearts to receive, what is really the central

blessing of the Gospel, the communication through the same faith as

Habakkuk exercised when he said, I will rejoice in the God of my

salvation,' of an actual divine strength to dwell in and manifest

itself majestically and triumphantly through, our weakness. The Lord is

my strength,' and if we will rejoice in the Lord we shall find that

Habakkuk's experience was lower than ours, inasmuch as he knew less of

God than we do; and we shall be able to surpass his saying with the

other one of the Prophet: The Lord is my strength and song; He also is

become my salvation.' That is the first blessing that this ancient

believer, out of the twilight of early revelation, felt as certain to

come through communion with God.

II. The second is like unto it. Such rejoicing communion with God will

give light-footedness in the path of life.

He makes my feet like hinds' feet.' The stag is, in all languages

spoken by people that have ever seen it, the very type and emblem of

elastic, springing ease, of light and bounding gracefulness, that

clears every obstacle, and sweeps swiftly over the moor. And when this

singer, or his brother psalmist in the other psalm that we have

referred to, says, Thou makest my feet like hinds' feet,' what he is

thinking about is that light and easy, springing, elastic gait, that

swiftness of advance. What a contrast that is to the way in which most

of us get through our day's work! Plod, plod, plod, in a heavy-footed,

spiritless grind, like that with which the ploughman toils down the

sticky furrows of a field, with a pound of clay at each heel; or like

that with which a man goes wearied home from his work at night. The

monotony of trivial, constantly recurring doings, the fluctuations in

the thermometer of our own spirits; the stiff bits of road that we have

all to encounter sooner or later; and as days go on, our diminishing

buoyancy of nature, and the love of walking a little slower than we

used to do; we all know these things, and our gait is affected by them.

But then my text brings a bright assurance, that swift and easy and

springing as the course of a stag on a free hill-side may be the gait

with which we run the race set before us.

It is the same thought, under a somewhat different garb, which the

Apostle has when he tells us that the Christian soldier ought to have

his feet shod with the alacrity that comes from the gospel of peace.'

We are to be always ready to run, and to run with light hearts when we

do. That is a possible result of Christian communion, and ought, far

more than it is, to be an achieved reality with each of us. Of course

physical conditions vary. Of course our spirits go up and down. Of

course the work that we have to do one day seems easier than the same

work does another. All these fluctuations and variations, and causes of

heavy-footedness--and sometimes more sinful ones, causes of

sluggishness--will survive; but in spite of them all, and beneath them

all, it is possible that we may have ourselves thus equipped for the

road, and may rejoice in our work as a strong man to run a race,' and

may cheerily welcome every duty, and cast ourselves into all our tasks.

It is possible, because communion with God manifest in Christ does, as

we have been seeing, actually breathe into men a vigour, and

consequently a freshness and a buoyancy that do not belong to

themselves, and do not come from nature or from surrounding things.

Unless that is true, that Christianity gives to a man the divine

gladness which makes him ready for work, I do not know what is the good

of his Christianity to him.

But not only is that so, but this same communion with God, which is the

opening of the heart for the influx of the divine power, brings to bear

upon all our work new motives which redeem it from being oppressive,

tedious, monotonous, trivial, too great for our endurance, or too

little for our effort. All work that is not done in fellowship with

Jesus Christ tends to become either too heavy to be tackled

successfully, or too trivial to demand our best energies, and in either

case will be done perfunctorily, and as the days go on, mechanically

and wearisomely, as a grind and a pled. Thou makest my feet like hinds'

feet'--if I get the new motive of love to God in Christ well into my

heart so that it comes out and influences all my actions, there will be

no more tasks too formidable to undertake, or too small to be worth an

effort. There will be nothing unwelcome. The rough places will be made

plain, and the crooked things straight, and our feet will be shod with

the preparedness of the gospel of peace.

If we live in daily communion with God, another thought, too, will come

in, which will, in like manner, make us ready to run with' cheerfulness

the race that is set before us.' We shall connect everything that

befalls us, and everything that we have to do, with the final issue,

and life will become solemn, grave, and blessed, because it is the

outer court and vestibule of the eternal life with God in Christ. They

that hold communion with Him, and only they, will, as another prophet

says, run and not be weary,' when there come the moments that require a

special effort; and will walk and not faint' through the else tediously

long hours of commonplace duty and dusty road.

III. The last of the thoughts here is--Communion with God brings

elevation.

He will make me to walk upon my high places.' One sees the herd on the

skyline of the mountain ridge, and at home up there, far above dangers

and attack; able to keep their footing on cliff and precipice, and

tossing their antlers in the pure air. One wave of the hand, and they

are miles away. He sets me upon my high places'; if we will keep

ourselves in simple, loving fellowship with God in Christ; and day by

day, even when the fig-tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit in

the vine,' will still rejoice in the God of our salvation,' He will

lift us up, and Isaiah's other clause in the verse which I have quoted

will be fulfilled: They shall mount up with wings as eagles.' Communion

with God does not only help us to plod and to travel, but it helps us

to soar. If we keep ourselves in touch with Him, we shall be like a

weight that is hung on to a balloon. The buoyancy of the one will lift

the leadenness of the other. If we hold fast by Christ's hand that will

lift us up to the high places, the heights of God, in so far as we may

reach them in this world; and we shall be at home up there. They will

be my high places,' that I never could have got at by my own

scrambling, but to which Thou hast lifted me up, and which, by Thy

grace, have become my natural abode. I am at home there, and walk at

liberty in the loftiness, and fear no fall amongst the cliffs.

Are you and I familiar with these upper ranges of thought and

experience and life? Do we feel at home there more than down in the

bottoms, amongst the swamps, and the miasma, and the mists? Where is

your home, brother? The Mass begins with Sursum corda: Up with your

hearts,' and that is the word for us. But the way to get up is to keep

ourselves in touch with Jesus Christ, and then He will, even whilst our

feet are travelling along this road of earth, set us at His own right

hand in the heavenly places, and make them our high places.' It is safe

up there. The air is pure; the poison mists are down lower; the hunters

do not come there; their arrows or their rifles will not carry so far.

It is only when the herd ventures a little down the hill that it is in

danger from shots.

But the elevation will not be such as to make us despise the low paths

on which duty--the sufficient and loftiest thing of all--lies for us.

Our souls may be like stars, and dwell apart, and yet may lay the

humblest duties upon themselves, and whilst we live in the high places,

we may travel on life's common way in cheerful godliness.' Communion

with Him will make us light-footed, and lift us high, and yet it will

keep us at desk, and mill, and study, and kitchen, and nursery, and

shop, and we shall find that the high places are reachable in every

life, and in every task. So we may go on until at last we shall hear

the Voice that says, Come up higher,' and shall he lifted to the

mountain of God, where the living waters are, and shall fear no snares

or hunters any more for ever.

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ZEPHANIAH

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ZION'S JOY AND GOD'S

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all

the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. . . . 17. He will rejoice over thee

with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with

singing.'--ZEPHANIAH iii. 14, 17.

What a wonderful rush of exuberant gladness there is in these words!

The swift, short clauses, the triple invocation in the former verse,

the triple promise in the latter, the heaped together synonyms, all

help the impression. The very words seem to dance with joy. But more

remarkable than this is the parallelism between the two verses. Zion is

called to rejoice in God because God rejoices in her. She is to shout

for joy and sing because God's joy too has a voice, and breaks out into

singing. For every throb of joy in man's heart, there is a wave of

gladness in God's. The notes of our praise are at once the echoes and

the occasions of His. We are to be glad because He is glad: He is glad

because we are so. We sing for joy, and He joys over us with singing

because we do.

I. God's joy over Zion.

It is to be noticed that the former verse of our text is followed by

the assurance: The Lord is in the midst of thee'; and that the latter

verse is preceded by the same assurance. So, then, intimate fellowship

and communion between God and Israel lies at the root both of God's joy

in man and man's joy in God.

We are solemnly warned by profound thinkers' of letting the shadow of

our emotions fall upon God. No doubt there is a real danger there; but

there is a worse danger, that of conceiving of a God who has no life

and heart; and it is better to hold fast by this--that in Him is that

which corresponds to what in us is gladness. We are often told, too,

that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is a stern and repellent God, and

the religion of the Old Testament is gloomy and servile. But such a

misconception is hard to maintain in the face of such words as these.

Zephaniah, of whom we know little, and whose words are mainly forecasts

of judgments and woes pronounced against Zion that was rebellious and

polluted, ends his prophecy with these companion pictures, like a gleam

of sunshine which often streams out at the close of a dark winter's

day. To him the judgments which he prophesied were no contradiction of

the love and gladness of God. The thought of a glad God might be a very

awful thought; such an insight as this prophet had gives a blessed

meaning to it. We may think of the joy that belongs to the divine

nature as coming from the completeness of His being, which is raised

far above all that makes of sorrow. But it is not in Himself alone that

He is glad; but it is because He loves. The exercise of love is ever

blessedness. His joy is in self-impartation; His delights are in the

sons of men: As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy

God rejoice over thee.' His gladness is in His children when they let

Him love them, and do not throw back His love on itself. As in man's

physical frame it is pain to have secretions dammed up, so when God's

love is forced back upon itself and prevented from flowing out in

blessing, some shadow of suffering cannot but pass across that calm

sky. He is glad when His face is mirrored in ours, and the rays from

Him are reflected from us.

But there is another wonderfully bold and beautiful thought in this

representation of the gladness of God. Note the double form which it

assumes: He will rest'--literally, be silent--in His love; He will joy

over thee with singing.' As to the former, loving hearts on earth know

that the deepest love knows no utterance, and can find none. A heart

full of love rests as having attained its desire and accomplished its

purpose. It keeps a perpetual Sabbath, and is content to be silent.

But side by side with this picture of the repose of God's joy is set

with great poetic insight the precisely opposite image of a love which

delights in expression, and rejoices over its object with singing. The

combination of the two helps to express the depth and intensity of the

one love, which like a song-bird rises with quivering delight and pours

out as it rises an ever louder and more joyous note, and then drops,

composed and still, to its nest upon the dewy ground.

II. Zion's joy in God.

To the Prophet, the fact that the Lord is in the midst of thee' was the

guarantee for the confident assurance Thou shalt not fear any more';

and this assurance was to be the occasion of exuberant gladness, which

ripples over in the very words of our first text. That great thought of

God dwelling in the midst' is rightly a pain and a terror to rebellious

wills and alienated hearts. It needs some preparation of mind and

spirit to be glad because God is near; and they who find their

satisfaction in earthly sources, and those who seek for it in these,

see no word of good news, but rather a fearful looking for of judgment'

in the thought that God is in their midst. The word rendered rejoices'

in the first verse of our text is not the same as that so translated in

the second. The latter means literally, to move in a circle; while the

former literally means, to leap for joy. Thus the gladness of God is

thought of as expressing itself in dignified, calm movements, whilst

Zion's joy is likened in its expression to the more violent movements

of the dance. True human joy is like God's, in that He delights in us

and we in Him, and in that both He and we delight in the exercise of

love. But we are never to forget that the differences are real as the

resemblances, and that it is reserved for the higher form of our

experiences in a future life to enter into the joy of the Lord.'

It becomes us to see to it that our religion is a religion of joy. Our

text is an authoritative command as well as a joyful exhortation, and

we do not fairly represent the facts of Christian faith if we do not

rejoice in the Lord always.' In all the sadness and troubles which

necessarily accompany us, as they do all men, we ought by the effort of

faith to set the Lord always before us that we be not moved. The secret

of stable and perpetual joy still lies where Zephaniah found it--in the

assurance that the Lord is with us, and in the vision of His love

resting upon us, and rejoicing over us with singing. If thus our love

clasps His, and His joy finds its way into our hearts, it will remain

with us that our joy may be full'; and being guarded by Him whilst

still there is fear of stumbling, He will set us at last before the

presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy.

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HAGGAI

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VAIN TOIL

Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough;

ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is

none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag

with holes.'--HAGGAI i. 6.

A large emigration had taken place from the land of captivity to

Jerusalem. The great purpose which the returning exiles had in view was

the rebuilding of the Temple, as the centre-point of the restored

nation. With true heroism, and much noble and unselfish enthusiasm,

they began the work, postponing to it all considerations of personal

convenience. But the usual fate of all great national enthusiasms

attended this. Political difficulties, hard practical realities, came

in the way, and the task was suspended for a time. A handful remained

true to the original ideas; the rest fell away. Personal comfort, love

of ease, the claims of domestic life, the greed of gain, all the

ignoble motives which, like gravitation and friction, check such

movements after the first impulse is exhausted, came into play. Like

every great cause, this one was launched amidst high hopes and honest

zeal: but by degrees the hopes faded and became nothing better than

godly imaginations.' The exiles took to building their own ceiled

houses, and let the House of God lie waste. They began to think more of

settling on the land than of building the Temple. No doubt they said

all the things with which men are wont to hide their selfishness under

the mask of duty:--Men must live; we must take care of ourselves; it is

mad enthusiasm to build a temple when we have not homes; we mean to

build it some time, but we are practical men and must provide for our

wants first.'

This wisdom of theirs turned out folly, as it generally does. There

came, as we learn from this prophet, a season of distress, in which the

harvest, for which they had sacrificed their duties and their calling,

failed: and in spite of their prudent diligence, or rather, just

because of their misplaced and selfish attention to their worldly

well-being, they were poor and hungry. The heaven over them was stayed

from dew, and the earth from her fruit.' Haggai was sent by God to

interpret the calamity, and to urge to the fulfilment of their earlier

purposes.

His words apply to a supernatural condition of things with which he is

dealing, but they contain truths illustrated by it and true for ever.

For us all, as truly as for those Jews, the first thing, the primary,

all-embracing duty, is to serve God, to obey, love, and live with Him.

The same selfish and worldly excuses have force with us: We have

business to look after; men must live; we have no time to think about

religion; I have built a new mill that occupies my thoughts; I have

found a new plaything, and I must try it; I have married a wife, and

therefore I cannot come.' So God and His claims, Christ and His love,

are hustled into a corner to be attended to when opportunity serves,

but to be neglected in the meantime. And the same result follows, not

by miracle, but by natural necessity. Haggai puts these results in our

text with bitter, indignant amplification. His words are all the

working out of one idea-the unprofitableness, on the whole and in the

long-run, of a godless life. He illustrates this in the clauses of our

text in various forms, and my purpose now is simply to apply each of

these to the realities of a godless life.

I. It is a life of fruitless toil.

The Prophet pictures the sowing, the abundant seed thrown broadcast,

the long waiting, and then, finally, a wretched harvest--a few

prematurely yellow ears and short stalks. I remember a friend telling

me that when he was a boy he went out reaping with his father in one of

our years of great drought; and after a day's work threshed out all

that he had cut, and carried it home with him in his handkerchief. That

is what Haggai saw realised in fact, because the sowing had been

without God. It is what we may see in others and feel in ourselves. It

is the very law and curse of godless toil with its unproductive

harvest. The builders set out to build a tower whose top shall reach to

heaven, and they never get higher than a story or two. There is nothing

more tragic than the contrast between what a man actually accomplishes

in his life and what he planned when he began it. Many and many of our

lives are like the half-built houses in Pompeii, where the stones are

lying that had been all squared and polished, and have never been

lifted to their place in the unfinished walls. Much of the seed never

comes up at all; and what we gather is always less than what we

expected. The prize gleams before us; when we get it, is it as good as

it looked when it hung tempting at the unreached goal? A fox-brush is

scarcely sufficient payment for riding over half a county. Ah! but you

say, there is the enthusiasm and stir of the pursuit. Well, yes; it is

something if it is training you for something, and if you can say that

faculties worth the cultivating are developed in that way: and whether

that is so depends on what you think a man is made for, and on whether

these are faculties which will last and find their scope as long as you

last. Consider what you are, what you seek; and then say whether the

most fruitful harvest from which God and His love are left out is not

little.

This fruitlessness of toil is inevitable unless it springs from a

motive which in itself is sufficient, pursues a purpose which will

surely be accomplished, and is done in hope of the world where our

works do follow us.' If we are allied to Christ, then whether our work

be great or small, apparently successful or frustrated, it will be all

right. Though we do not see our fruit, we know that He will bless the

springing thereof, and that no least deed done for Him but shall in the

harvest-day be found waving a nodding head of multiplied results. God

giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him'; and he that goeth forth

weeping shall doubtless return, bringing his sheaves with him.' Your

labour is not in vain to the Lord.'

II. A godless life is one of unsatisfied hunger and thirst.

The poor results of the exiles' toil did not avail to stay gnawing

hunger nor slake burning thirst, and the same result applies only too

sadly to lives lived apart from God. There are a multitude of desires

proper to the human soul besides those which belong to the bodily

frame, and these have their proper objects. Is it true that the objects

are sufficient to satisfy the desires? Does any one of the things for

which we toil feed us full when we have it? Do we not always want just

a little more? And is not that want accompanied with a real and sharp

sense of hunger? Is it not true the appetite GROWS with what it feeds

on? And even if a man schools himself to something like content, it

comes not because the desire is satisfied, but because it is somehow

bridled. Cerberus often breaks his chain, in spite of honied cakes that

have been tossed into the wide mouths of his tripled heads. What do

wealth and ambition do for their votaries? And even he who thirsts for

nobler occupations and lives for higher aims is often obliged to admit,

in weariness, that this also is vanity.'

But even when the desire is satisfied, the man desiring is not. To feed

their bodies men starve their souls. How many longings are crushed or

neglected by him who pushes eagerly after any one longing! We have

either to race from one course to another, splitting life into

intolerable distractions, or we have to circumscribe and limit

ourselves in order to devote all our power to securing one; and if we

secure it, then a hundred others will bark like a kennel of hounds.

And if you say, I know nothing about all this; I have my aims, and on

the whole I secure a tolerable satisfaction for them,' do you not know

a nameless unrest? If you do not, then you are so much the poorer and

the lower, and you have murdered part of yourself. Some one single

tyrannous desire sits solitary in your heart. He has slain all his

brethren that he may rule, as sultans used to do in Constantinople. One

big fish in the aquarium has eaten up all the others.

God only satisfies the soul. It is only the bread which came down from

Heaven,' of which if we eat our souls shall live, and be filled as with

marrow and fatness. That One is all-sufficient in His Oneness.

Possessing Him, we know no satiety; possessing Him, we do not need to

maim any part of our nature; possessing Him, we shall not covet divers

multifarious objects. The loftiest powers of the soul find in Him their

adequate, inexhaustible, eternal object. The lowest desires may, like

the beasts of the forest, seek their meat from God. If we take Him for

our own and live on Him by faith, our blessed experience will be, I am

full: I have all and abound.'

III. The godless life is one of futile defences.

Ye clothe you, but there is none warm.' The clothing was to guard

against the nipping air that blew shrewdly on their hills, and it

failed to keep them from the weather. We may be indulging in fancy in

this application of our text, but still raiment is as needful as food,

and its failure to answer its purpose points to a real sorrow and

insufficiency of a life lived without God. In it there is no real

defence against the manifold evils which storm upon all of us. When the

bitter, biting weather comes, what have you to shelter you from the

cold blast? Some rags of stoical resignation or proverbial

commonplaces? What is done cannot be helped'; What cannot be cured must

be endured'; It is a long lane that has no turning,' and the like. But

what are these? You may have other occupations to interest you, but

these will not heal, though they may divert your attention from, your

gaping wounds. You have friends, and the like, but though you have all

these and much beside, these will not avail. The covering is shorter

than that a man can wrap himself in it.' Naked and shivering, exposed

to the pelting and the pitiless storm, with rags soaked through, and

chilled to the bone, what is there but death before the man in the wild

weather on some trackless moor? And what is there for us if we have to

bear the storms and cold of life without God? No doubt most of us

struggle through somehow. Time heals much; work does a great deal; to

live is so much, that no living being can be wholly miserable. Other

cares and other occupations blossom and grow, and the brown mounds get

covered with sweet springing grass. But how many lie down and die? How

many for the rest of their lives go crushed and broken-spirited? How

many carry about with them, deep in their hearts, a sleepless sorrow?

How many have to bear passionate paroxysms of agony and bursts of angry

grief, all of which might have been softened and soothed and made to

gleam with the mellow light of hope as from a hidden sun, if only,

instead of defiantly and weakly fronting the world alone, they had

found in the man Christ the refuge from the storm and the covert from

the tempest. How can a man face all the awful possibilities and the

solemn certainties of life without God and not go mad? It is impossible

to work without Him; it is impossible to rejoice without Him; but more

impossible still, if that could be, is it to endure without Him. It is

in union with Jesus Christ, and with Him alone, that we shall receive

the pure linen, clean and white,' which is a surer defence than the

warrior's mail, and being clothed we shall not be found naked.'

IV. A godless life is one of fleeting riches.

In Haggai's strong metaphor, the poor day-labourer earns his small wage

and puts it into a ragged bag, or as we should say, a pocket with a

hole in it; and when he comes to look for it, it is gone, and all his

toil is for nothing. What a picture this is of the very experience that

befalls all men who work for less wages than God's Well done.' Take an

instance or two: here is a man who works hard for a long time, and puts

his money into some bank, and one morning he gets a letter to tell him

the bank's doors are closed, and his savings gone--a bag with holes.

Here is a man who climbs by slow degrees to the head of his profession

and lives in popular admiration, and some day he sees a younger

competitor shooting ahead of him, and all is lost--a bag with holes.

Here is a man who has, by some great discovery, established his fame or

his fortune, and a new man, standing on his shoulders, makes a greater,

and his fame dwarfs and his trade runs into other channels--a bag with

holes. Here is a man who has conquered a world, and dies on the rock of

St. Helena, with his pompous titles stripped off him, and instead of

kingdoms a rood or two of garden, and instead of his legions, half a

dozen soldiers, a doctor, and a jailer--a bag with holes. Here is a man

who, having amassed his riches and kept them without loss all his life,

is dying. They cannot go with him. That would not matter; but

unfortunately he has to live yonder, and he will have nothing of all

his labour that he can carry away in his hands'--a bag with holes.

Such loss and final separation befall us all; but he who loves God

loses none of his real treasure when he parts from earthly treasures.

Fortune may turn her wheel as she pleases, his wealth cannot be taken

from him. His riches are laid up in a sure storehouse, where neither

moth nor rust doth corrupt.' We each live for ever. Should we not have

for our object in life that which is eternal as ourselves? Why should

we fix our hopes on that which is not abiding--on things that can

perish, on things that we must lose? Let us not run this awful risk. Do

not impoverish or darken life here; do not condemn yourselves to

unfruitful toil, to unsatisfied desires, to unguarded calamities, to

unstable possessions; but come, as sinful men ought to come, to Jesus

Christ for pardon and for life. Then, in due season, you will reap if

you faint not; and the harvest will not be little, but some sixty-fold

and some an hundred-fold'; then you will hunger no more, neither thirst

any more,' but He that hath mercy on you will lead you to living

fountains of water'; then you will not have to draw your poor rags

round you for warmth, but shall be clothed with the robe of

righteousness and the garment of praise; then you will never need to

fear the loss of your riches, but bear with you whilst you live your

treasures beyond the reach of change, and will find them multiplied a

thousand-fold when you die and go to God, your portion and your joy for

ever.

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BRAVE ENCOURAGEMENTS

In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came

the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying, 2. Speak now to

Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the

son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people,

saying, 3. Who is left among you that saw this house in her first

glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison

of it as nothing? 4. Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord;

and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be

strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am

with you, saith the Lord of Hosts: 5. According to the word that I

covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth

among you: fear ye not. 6. For thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Yet once,

it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and

the sea, and the dry land; 7. And I will shake all nations, and the

desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with

glory, saith the Lord of Hosts. 8. The silver is Mine, and the gold is

Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts. 9. The glory of this latter house shall

be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this

place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts.'--HAGGAI ii. 1-9.

The second year of Darius, in which Haggai prophesied, was 520 B.C.

Political intrigues had stopped the rebuilding of the Temple, and the

enthusiasm of the first return had died away in the face of prolonged

difficulties. The two brave leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, still

survived, and kept alive their own zeal; but the mass of the people

were more concerned about their comforts than about the restoration of

the house of Jehovah. They had built for themselves ceiled houses,' and

were engrossed with their farms.

The Book of Ezra dwells on the external hindrances to the rebuilding.

Haggai goes straight at the selfishness and worldliness of the people

as the great hindrance. We know nothing about him beyond the fact that

he was a prophet working in conjunction with Zechariah. He has been

thought to have been one of the original company who came back with

Zerubbabel, and it has been suggested, though without any certainty,

that he may have been one of the old men who remembered the former

house. But these conjectures are profitless, and all that we know is

that God sent him to rouse the slackened earnestness of the people, and

that his words exercised a powerful influence in setting forward the

work of rebuilding. This passage is the second of his four short

prophecies. We may call it a vision of the glory of the future house of

Jehovah.

The prophecy begins with fully admitting the depressing facts which

were chilling the popular enthusiasm. Compared with the former Temple,

this which they had begun to build could not but be as nothing.' So the

murmurers said, and Haggai allows that they are quite right. Note the

turn of his words: Who is left . . . that saw this house in its former

glory?' There had been many eighteen years ago; but the old eyes that

had filled with tears then had been mostly closed by death in the

interval, and now but few survived. Perhaps if the eyes had not been so

dim with age, the rising house would not have looked so contemptible.

The pessimism of the aged is not always clear-sighted, nor their

comparisons of what was, and what is beginning to be, just. But it is

always wise to be frank in admitting the full strength of the opinions

that we oppose; and encouragements to work will never tell if they

blink difficulties or seek to deny plain facts. Haggai was wise when he

began with echoing the old men's disparagements, and in full view of

them, pealed out his brave incitements to the work.

The repetition of the one exhortation, Be strong, be strong, be

strong,' is very impressive. The very monotony has power. In the face

of the difficulties which beset every good work the cardinal virtue is

strength. To be weak is to be miserable,' and is the parent of

failures. One hears in the exhortation an echo of that to Joshua, to

whom and to his people the command Be strong and of good courage' was

given with like repetition (Joshua i.).

But there is nothing more futile than telling feeble men to be strong,

and trembling ones to be very courageous. Unless the exhorter can give

some means of strength and some reason for courage, his word is idle

wind. So Haggai bases his exhortation upon its sufficient ground, For I

am with you, saith Jehovah of hosts.' Strength is a duty, but only if

we have a source of strength available. The one basis of it is the

presence of God. His name reveals the immensity of His power, who

commands all the armies of heaven, angels, or stars, and to whom the

forces of the universe are as the ordered ranks of His disciplined

army; and who is, moreover, the Captain of earthly hosts, ever giving

victory to those who are His willing soldiers in the day of His power.'

It is not vain to bid a man be strong, if you can assure him that God

is with him. Unless you can, you may save your breath.

Here is the temper for all Christian workers. Let them realise the duty

of strength; let them have recourse to the Fountain of strength; let

them mark the purpose of strength, which is work,' as Haggai puts it so

emphatically. We have nothing to do with the magnitude of what we may

be able to build. It may be very poor beside the great houses that

greater ages or men have been able to rear. But whether it be a temple

brave with gold and cedar, or a log, it is our business to put all our

strength into the task, and to draw that strength from the assurance

that God is with us.

The difficulties connected with the translation of verse 5 need not

concern us here. For my purpose, the general sense resulting from any

translation is clear enough. The covenant made of old, when Israel came

from an earlier captivity, is fresh as ever, and God's Spirit is with

the people; therefore they need not fear. Fear ye not' is another of

the well-meant exhortations which often produce the opposite effect

from the intended one. One can fancy some of the people saying, It is

all very well to talk about not being afraid; but look at our

feebleness, our defencelessness, our enemies; we cannot but fear, if we

open our eyes.' Quite true; and there is only one antidote to fear, and

that is the assurance that God's covenant binds Him to take care of me.

Unless one believes that, he must be strangely blind to the facts of

life if he has not a cold dread coiled round his heart and ever ready

to sting.

The Prophet rises into grand predictions of the glory of the poor house

which the weak hands were raising. Verses 6-9 set things invisible over

against the visible. In general terms the Prophet announces a speedy

convulsion, partly symbolical and partly real, in which all nations'

shall be revolutionised, and as a consequence, shall become Jehovah's

worshippers, bringing their treasures to the Temple, and so filling the

house with glory. This shall be because Jehovah is the true Possessor

of all their wealth. But the scope of verse 9 seems to transcend these

promises, and to point to an undescribed glory,' still greater than

that of the universal flocking of the nations with their gifts, and to

reach a climax in the wide promise of peace given in the Temple, and

thence, as is implied, flowing out like a river' through a

tranquillised world.

Yet once, it is a little while.' How long did the little while last?

There were, possibly, some feeble incipient fulfilments of the prophecy

in the immediate future; for, after the exile, there were convulsions

in the political world which resulted in security to the Jews, and the

religion of Israel began to draw some scattered proselytes. But the

prophecy is not completely fulfilled even now, and it covers the entire

development of the kingdom that cannot be moved' until the end of time.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews thus understands the prophecy

(Hebrews xii. 26, 27), and there are echoes of it in Revelation xxi.,

which describes the final form of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. So

the chronology of prophecy is not altogether that of history; and while

the events stand clear, their perspective is foreshortened. All the

ages are but a little while' in the calendar of heaven. In regard to

the whole of the prophetic utterances, we have often to say with the

disciples, What is this that he saith, a little while?' Eighteen

centuries have rolled away since the seer heard, Behold, I come

quickly,' and the vision still tarries.

The old interpretation of the desire of all nations' as meaning Jesus

Christ gave a literal fulfilment of the prophecy by His presence in the

Temple; but that meaning of the phrase is untenable, both because the

verb is in the plural, which would be impossible if a person were

meant, and because the only interpretation which gives relevancy to

verse 8 is that the expression means the silver and gold, there

declared to be Jehovah's. That venerable explanation, then, cannot

stand. There were offerings from heathen kings, such as those from

Darius recorded in Ezra vi. 6-10, and the gifts of Artaxerxes (Ezra

vii. 15), which may be regarded as incipient accomplishments; but such

facts as these cannot exhaust the prophecy.

It must be admitted that nothing happened during the history of that

Temple to answer to the full meaning of this prophecy. But was it

therefore a delusion that God spoke by Haggai? We must distinguish

between form and substance. The Temple was the centre point of the

kingdom of God on earth, the place of meeting between God and men, the

place of sacrifice. The fulfilment of the prophecy is not to be found

in any house made with hands, but in the true Temple which Jesus Christ

has builded. He in His own humanity was all that the Temple shadowed

and foretold. It is in Him, and in the spiritual Temple which He has

reared, that Haggai's vision will find its full realisation, which is

yet future. The powers that issue from Him shattered the Roman empire,

have ever since been casting earth's kingdoms into new moulds, and have

still destructive work to do. The once more' began when Jesus came, but

the final shaking' lies in front still. Every smaller revolution in

thought or sweeping away of institutions is a prelude to that great

shaking' when everything will go except the kingdom that cannot be

moved. Its result shall be that the treasures of the nations shall be

poured at His feet who is worthy to receive riches,' even as other

prophecies have foretold that men shall bring unto Thee the wealth of

the nations' (Isaiah lx. 11; Revelation xxi. 24, 26).

In that true Temple the glory of the Shechinah, which was wanting in

the second, for ever abides, the glory as of the only-begotten of the

Father'; and in it dwells for ever the dove of peace, ready to glide

into every heart that enters to worship at the shrine. Jesus Christ is

not the desire of all nations' which shall come to the Temple, but is

the Temple to which the wealth of all nations shall be brought, in whom

the true glory of a manifested God abides, and from whom the peace of

God which passeth all understanding, and is His own peace too, shall

enter reconciled souls, and calm turbulent passions, and reconcile

contending peoples, and diffuse its calm through all the nations of the

saved who there walk in the light of the Lord.'

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ZECHARIAH

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DYING MEN AND THE UNDYING WORD

Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?

6. But My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the

prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?'--ZECHARIAH i. 5, 6.

Zechariah was the Prophet of the Restoration. Some sixteen years before

this date a feeble band of exiles had returned from Babylon, with high

hopes of rebuilding the ruined Temple. But their designs had been

thwarted, and for long years the foundations stood unbuilded upon. The

delay had shattered their hopes and flattened their enthusiasm; and

when, with the advent of a new Persian king, a brighter day dawned, the

little band was almost too dispirited to avail itself of it. At that

crisis, two prophets blew soul-animating strains,' and as the narrative

says elsewhere, the work prospered through the prophesying of Haggai

and Zechariah.'

My text comes from the first of Zechariah's prophecies. In it he lays

the foundation for all that he has subsequently to say. He points to

the past, and summons up the august figures of the great pre-Exilic

prophets, and reminds his contemporaries that the words which they

spoke had been verified in the experience of past generations. He puts

himself in line with these, his mighty predecessors, and declares that,

though the hearers and the speakers of that prophetic word had glided

away into the vast unknown, the word remained, lived still, and on his

lips demanded the same obedience as it had vainly demanded from the

generation that was past.

It has sometimes been supposed that of the two questions in my text the

first is the Prophet's--Your fathers, where are they?' and that the

second is the retort of the people--The prophets, do they live for

ever?' It is true that our fathers are gone, but what about the

prophets that you are talking of? Are they any better off? Are they not

dead, too?' But though the separation of the words into dialogue gives

vivacity, it is wholly unnecessary. And it seems to me that Zechariah's

appeal is all the more impressive if we suppose that he here gathers

the mortal hearers and speakers of the immortal word into one class,

and sets over against them the Eternal Word, which lives to-day as it

did then, and has new lessons for a new generation. So it is from that

point of view that I wish to look at these words now, and try to gather

from them some of the solemn, and, as it seems to me, striking lessons

which they inculcate. I follow with absolute simplicity the Prophet's

thoughts.

I. The mortal hearers and speakers of the abiding Word.

Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?'

It is all but impossible to invest that well-known thought with any

fresh force; but, perhaps, if we look at it from the special angle from

which the Prophet here regards it, we may get some new impression of

the old truth. That special angle is to bring into connection the

Eternal Word and the transient vehicles and hearers of it.

Did you ever stand in some roofless, ruined cathedral or abbey church,

and try to gather round you the generations that had bowed and

worshipped there? Did you ever step across the threshold of some

ancient sanctuary, where the feet of vanished generations had worn down

the sand-stone steps at the entrance? It is solemn to think of the

fleeting series of men; it is still more striking to bring them into

connection with that everlasting Word which once they heard, and

accepted or rejected.

But let me bring the thought a little closer. There is not a sitting in

our churches that has not been sat in by dead people. As I stand here

and look round I can re-people almost every pew with faces that we

shall see no more. Many of you, the older habitu�s of this place, can

do the same, and can look and think, Ah! he used to sit there; she used

to be in that corner.' And I can remember many mouldering lips that

have stood in this place where I stand, of friends and brethren that

are gone. Your fathers, where are they?' Graves under us, silent,' is

the only answer. And the prophets, do they live for ever?' No memories

are shorter-lived than the memories of the preachers of God's Word.

Take another thought, that all these past hearers and speakers of the

Word had that Word verified in their lives. Took it not hold of your

fathers?' Some of them neglected it, and its burdens were upon them,

little as they felt them sometimes. Some of them clave to it, and

accepted it, and its blessed promises were all fulfilled to them. Not

one of those who, for the brief period of their earthly lives, came in

contact with that divine message but realised, more or less

consciously, some blessedly and some in darkened lives and ruined

careers, the solemn truth of its promises and of its threatenings. The

Word may have been received, or it may have been neglected, by the past

generations; but whether the members thereof put out a hand to accept,

or withheld their grasp, whether they took hold of it or it took hold

of them--wherever they are now, their earthly relation to that word is

a determining factor in their condition. The syllables died away into

empty air, the messages were forgotten, but the men that ministered

them are eternally influenced by the faithfulness of their

ministrations, and the men that heard them are eternally affected by

the reception or rejection of that word. So, when we summon around us

the congregation of the dead, which is more numerous than the audience

of the living to whom I now speak, the lesson that their silent

presence teaches us is, Wherefore we should give the more earnest heed

to the things that we have heard.'

II. Let us note the abiding Word, which these transient generations of

hearers and speakers have had to do with.

It is maddening to think of the sure decay and dissolution of all human

strength, beauty, wisdom, unless that thought brings with it

immediately, like a pair of coupled stars, of which the one is bright

and the other dark, the corresponding thought of that which does not

pass, and is unaffected by time and change. Just as reason requires

some unalterable substratum, below all the fleeting phenomena of the

changeful creation--a God who is the Rock-basis of all, the staple to

which all the links hang--so we are driven back and back and back, by

the very fact of the transiency of the transient, to grasp, for a

refuge and a stay, the permanency of the permanent. In the year that

King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne'--the passing

away of the mortal shadow of sovereignty revealed the undying and true

King. It is blessed for us when the lesson which the fleeting of all

that can flee away reads to us is that, beneath it all, there is the

Unchanging. When the leaves drop from the boughs of the trees that veil

the face of the cliff, then the steadfast rock is visible; and when the

generations, like leaves, drop and rot, then the rock background should

stand out the more clearly.

Zechariah meant by the word of God' simply the prophetic utterances

about the destiny and the punishment of his nation. We ought to mean by

the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever,' not merely the

written embodiment of it in the Old or New Testament, but the Personal

Word, the Incarnate Word, the everlasting Son of the Father, who came

upon earth to be God's mouthpiece and utterance, and who is for us all

the Word, the Eternal Word of the living God. It is His perpetual

existence rather than the continuous duration of the written word,

declaration of Himself though it is, that is mighty for our strength

and consolation when we think of the transient generations.

Christ lives. That is the deepest meaning of the ancient saying, All

flesh is grass. . . . The Word of the Lord endureth for ever.' He

lives; therefore we can front change and decay in all around calmly and

triumphantly. It matters not though the prophets and their hearers pass

away. Men depart; Christ abides. Luther was once surprised by some

friends sitting at a table from which a meal had been removed, and

thoughtfully tracing with his fingers upon its surface with some drop

of water or wine the one word Vivit'; He lives. He fell back upon that

when all around was dark. Yes, men may go; what of that? Aaron may have

to ascend to the summit of Hor, and put off his priestly garments and

die there. Moses may have to climb Pisgah, and with one look at the

land which he must never tread, die there alone by the kiss of God, as

the Rabbis say. Is the host below leaderless? The Pillar of Cloud lies

still over the Tabernacle, and burns steadfast and guiding in front of

the files of Israel. Your fathers, where are they? The prophets, do

they live for ever?' Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and

for ever.'

Another consideration to be drawn from this contrast is, since we have

this abiding Word, let us not dread changes, however startling and

revolutionary. Jesus Christ does not change. But there is a human

element in the Church's conceptions of Jesus Christ, and still more in

its working out of the principles of the Gospel in institutions and

forms, which partakes of the transiency of the men from whom it has

come. In such a time as this, when everything is going into the

melting-pot, and a great many timid people are trembling for the Ark of

God, quite unnecessarily as it seems to me, it is of prime importance

for the calmness and the wisdom and the courage of Christian people,

that they should grasp firmly the distinction between the divine

treasure which is committed to the churches, and the earthen vessels in

which it has been enshrined. Jesus Christ, the man Jesus, the divine

person, His incarnation, His sacrifice, His resurrection, His

ascension, the gift of His Spirit to abide for ever with His

Church--these are the permanent things which cannot be shaken.' And

creeds and churches and formulas and forms--these are the human

elements which are capable of variation, and which need variation from

time to time. No more is the substance of that eternal Gospel affected

by the changes, which are possible on its vesture, than is the

stateliness of some cathedral touched, when the reformers go in and

sweep out the rubbish and the trumpery which have masked the fair

outlines of its architecture, and vulgarised the majesty of its stately

sweep. Brethren! let us fix this in our hearts, that nothing which is

of Christ can perish, and nothing which is of man can or should endure.

The more firmly we grasp the distinction between the permanent and the

transient in existing embodiments of Christian truth, the more calm

shall we be amidst the surges of contending opinions. He that believeth

shall not make haste.'

III. Lastly, the present generation and its relation to the abiding

Word.

Zechariah did not hesitate to put himself in line with the mighty forms

of Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Hosea. He, too, was a

prophet. We claim, of course, no such authority for present utterers of

that eternal message, but we do claim for our message a higher

authority than the authority of this ancient Prophet. He felt that the

word of God that was put into his lips was a new word, addressed to a

new generation, and with new lessons for new circumstances, fitting as

close to the wants of the little band of exiles as the former messages,

which it succeeded, had fitted to the wants of their generation. We

have no such change in the message, for Jesus Christ speaks to us all,

speaks to all times and to all circumstances, and to every generation.

And so, just as Zechariah based upon the history of the past his appeal

for obedience and acceptance, the considerations which I have been

trying to dwell upon bring with them stringent obligations to us who

stand, however unworthy, in the place of the generations that are gone,

as the hearers and ministers of the Word of God. Let me put two or

three very simple and homely exhortations. First, see to it, brother,

that you accept that Word. By acceptance I do not mean a mere negative

attitude, which is very often the result of lack of interest, the

negative attitude of simply not rejecting; but I mean the opening not

only of your minds but of your hearts to it. For if what I have been

saying is true, and the Word of God has for its highest manifestation

Jesus Christ Himself, then you cannot accept a person by pure

head-work. You must open your hearts and all your natures, and let Him

come in with His love, with His pity, with His inspiration of strength

and virtue and holiness, and you must yield yourselves wholly to Him.

Think of the generations that are gone. Think of their brief moment

when the great salvation was offered to them. Think of how, whether

they received or rejected it, that Word took hold upon them. Think of

how they regard it now, wherever they are in the dimness; and be you

wise in time and be not as those of your fathers who rejected the Word.

Hold it fast. In this time of unrest make sure of your grasp of the

eternal, central core of Christianity, Jesus Christ Himself, the

divine-human Saviour of the world. There are too many of us whose faith

oozes out at their finger ends, simply because they have so many around

them that question and doubt and deny. Do not let the floating icebergs

bring down your temperature; and have a better reason for not

believing, if you do not believe, than that so many and such

influential and authoritative men have ceased to believe. When Jesus

asks, Will ye also go away?' our answer should be, Lord, to whom shall

we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

Accept Him, hold Him fast, trust to His guidance in present day

questions. Zechariah felt that his message belonged to the generation

to whom he spoke. It was a new message. We have no new message, but

there are new truths to be evolved from the old message. The

questionings and problems, social, economical, intellectual,

moral--shall I say political?--of this day, will find their solution in

that ancient word, God so loved the world, that He gave His only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.' There

is the key to all problems. In Him are hid all the treasures and wisdom

of knowledge.'

Zechariah pointed to the experiences of a past generation as the basis

of his appeal. We can point back to eighteen centuries, and say that

the experiences of these centuries confirm the truth that Jesus Christ

is the Saviour of the world. The blessedness, the purity, the power,

the peace, the hope which He has breathed into humanity, the subsidiary

and accompanying material and intellectual prosperity and blessings

that attend His message, its independence of human instruments, its

adaptation to all varieties of class, character, condition,

geographical position, its power of recuperating itself from

corruptions and distortions, its undiminished adaptedness to the needs

of this generation and of each of us--enforce the stringency of the

exhortation, and confirm the truth of the assertion: This is My beloved

Son; hear ye Him!' The voice said, Cry. And I said, What shall I cry?

All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the

field: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but

the Word of our God shall stand for ever.' Three hundred years after

Isaiah a triumphant Apostle added, This is the word which by the Gospel

is preached unto you.' Eighteen hundred years after Peter we can echo

his confident declaration, and, with the history of these centuries to

support our faith, can affirm that the Christ of the Gospel and the

Gospel of the Christ are in deed and in truth the Living Word of the

Living God.

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THE CITY WITHOUT WALLS

Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls. . . . For I, saith

the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the

glory in the midst of her.'--ZECHARIAH ii. 4, 5.

Zechariah was the Prophet of the returning exiles, and his great work

was to hearten them for their difficult task, with their small

resources and their many foes, and to insist that the prime condition

to success, on the part of that portion of the nation that had

returned, was holiness. So his visions, of which there is a whole

series, are very largely concerned with the building of the Temple and

of the city. In this one, he sees a man with a measuring-rod in his

hand coming forth to take the dimensions of the still un-existing city

of God. The words that I have read are the centre portion of that

vision. You notice that there are three clauses, and that the first in

order is the consequence of the other two. Jerusalem shall be builded

as a city without walls . . . for I will be a wall of fire round about

her, and the glory in the midst of her.'

And that exuberant promise was spoken about the Jerusalem over which

Christ wept when he foresaw its inevitable destruction. When the Romans

had cast a torch into the Temple, and the streets of the city were

running with blood, what had become of Zechariah's dream of a wall of

fire round about her? Then can the divine fire be quenched? Yes. And

who quenched it? Not the Romans, but the people that lived within that

flaming rampart. The apparent failure of the promise carries the lesson

for churches and individuals to-day, that in spite of such glowing

predictions, there may again sound the voice that the legend says was

heard within the Temple, on the night before Jerusalem fell. Let us

depart,' and there was a rustling of unseen wings, and on the morrow

the legionaries were in the shrine. If God spared not the natural

branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.'

Now let us look, in the simplest possible way, at these three clauses,

and the promises that are in them; keeping in mind that, like all the

divine promises, they are conditional.

The first is this:--

I. I will be a wall of fire round about her.'

I need not dwell on the vividness and beauty of that metaphor. These

encircling flames will consume all antagonism, and defy all approach.

But let me remind you that the conditional promise was intended for

Jud�� and Jerusalem, and was fulfilled in literal fact. So long as the

city obeyed and trusted God it was impregnable, though all the nations

stood round about it, like dogs round a sheep. The fulfilment of the

promise has passed over, with all the rest that characterised Israel's

position, to the Christian Church, and to-day, in the midst of all the

agitations of opinion, and all the vauntings of men about an effete

Christianity, and dead churches, it is as true as ever it was that the

living Church of God is eternal. If it had not been that there was a

God as a wall of fire round about the Church, it would have been wiped

off the face of the earth long ago. If nothing else had killed it the

faults of its members would have done so. The continuance of the Church

is a perpetual miracle, when you take into account the weakness, and

the errors, and the follies, and the stupidities, and the narrownesses,

and the sins, of the people who in any given day represent it. That it

should stand at all, and that it should conquer, seems to me to be as

plain a demonstration of the present working of God, as is the

existence still, as a separate individuality amongst the peoples of the

earth, of His ancient people, the Jews. Who was it who said, when

somebody asked him for the best proof of the truth of Christianity, The

Jews'? and so we may say, if you want a demonstration that God is

working in the world, Look at the continuance of the Christian Church.'

In spite of all the vauntings of people that have already discounted

its fall, and are talking as if it needed no more to be reckoned with,

that calm confidence is the spirit in which we are to look around and

forward. It does not become any Christian ever to have the smallest

scintillation of a fear that the ship that bears Jesus Christ can fail

to come to land, or can sink in the midst of the waters. There was once

a timid would-be helper who put out his hand to hold up the Ark of God.

He need not have been afraid. The oxen might stumble, and the cart roll

about, but the Ark was safe and stable. A great deal may go, but the

wall of fire will be around the Church. In regard to its existence, as

in regard to the immortal being of each of its members, the great word

remains for ever true: Because I live ye shall live also.'

But do not let us forget that this great promise does not belong only

to the Church as a whole, but that we have each to bring it down to our

own individual lives, and to be quite sure of this, that in spite of

all that sense says, in spite of all that quivering hearts and weeping

eyes may seem to prove, there is a wall of fire round each of us, if we

are keeping near Jesus Christ, through which it is as impossible that

any real evil should pass and get at us, as it would be impossible that

any living thing should pass through the flaming battlements that the

Prophet saw round his ideal city. Only we have to interpret that

promise by faith and not by sense, and we have to make it possible that

it shall be fulfilled by keeping inside the wall, and trusting to it.

As faith dwindles, the fiery wall burns dim, and evil can get across

its embers, and can get at us. Keep within the battlements, and they

will flame up bright and impassable, with a fire that on the outer side

consumes, but to those within is a fire that cherishes and warms.

II. The next point of the promise passes into a more intimate region.

It is well to have a defence from that which is without us; but it is

more needful to have, if a comparison can be made between the two, a

glory in the midst' of us.

The one is external defence; the other inward illumination, with all

which light symbolises--knowledge, joy, purity.

There is even more than that meant by this great promise. For notice

that emphatic little word the--the glory, not a glory--in the midst of

her. Now you all know what the glory' was. It was that symbolic Light

that spoke of the special presence of God, and went with the Children

of Israel in their wanderings, and sat between the Cherubim. There was

no Shechinah,' as it is technically called, in that second Temple. But

yet the Prophet says, The glory'--the actual presence of God--shall be

in the midst of her,' and the meaning of that great promise is taught

us by the very last vision in the New Testament, in which the Seer of

the Apocalypse says, The glory of the Lord did lighten it' (evidently

quoting Zechariah), and the Lamb is the light thereof.' So the city is

lit as by one central glow of radiance that flashes its beams into

every corner, and therefore there shall be no night there.'

Now this promise, too, bears on churches and on individuals. On the

Church as a whole it bears in this way: the only means by which a

Christian community can fulfil its function, and be the light of the

world, is by having the presence of God, in no metaphor, the actual

presence of the illuminating Spirit in its midst. If it has not that,

it may have anything and everything else--wealth, culture, learning,

eloquence, influence in the world--but all is of no use; it will be

darkness. We are light only in proportion as we are light in the Lord.'

As long as we, as communities, keep our hearts in touch with Him, so

long do we shine. Break the contact, and the light fades and flickers

out.

The same thing is true, dear brethren, about individuals. For each of

us the secret of joy, of purity, of knowledge, is that we be holding

close communion with God. If we have Him in the depths of our hearts,

then, and only then, shall we be light in the Lord.'

And now look at the last point which follows, as I have said, as the

result of the other two.

III. Jerusalem shall be without walls.'

It is to be like the defenceless villages scattered up and down over

Israel. There is no need for bulwarks of stone. The wall of fire is

round about. The Prophet has a vision of a great city, of a type

unknown in those old times, though familiar to us in our more peaceful

days, where there was no hindrance to expansion by encircling ramparts,

no crowding together of the people because they needed to hide behind

the city walls; and where the growing community could spread out into

the outer suburbs, and have fresh air and ample space. That is the

vision of the manner of city that Jerusalem was to be. It did not come

true, but the ideal was this. It has not yet come true sufficiently in

regard to the churches of to-day, but it ought to be the goal to which

they are tending. The more a Christian community is independent of

external material supports and defences the better.

I am not going to talk about the policy or impolicy of Established

Churches, as they are called. But it seems to me that the principle

that is enshrined in this vision is their condemnation. Never mind

about stone and lime walls, trust in God and you will not need them,

and you will be strong and established' just in the proportion in which

you are cut loose from all dependence upon, and consequent

subordination to, the civil power.

But there is another thought that I might suggest, though I do not know

that it is directly in the line of the Prophet's vision; and that is--a

Christian Church should neither depend on, nor be cribbed and cramped

by, men-made defences of any kind. Luther tells us somewhere, in his

parabolic way, of people that wept because there were no visible

pillars to hold up the heavens, and were afraid that the sky would fall

upon their heads. No, no, there is no fear of that happening, for an

unseen hand holds them up. A church that hides behind the

fortifications of its grandfathers' erection has no room for expansion;

and if it has no room for expansion it will not long continue as large

as it is. It must either grow greater, or grow, and deserve to grow,

less.

The same thing is true, dear brethren, about ourselves individually.

Zechariah's prophecy was never meant to prevent what he himself helped

to further, the building of the actual walls of the actual city. And

our dependence upon God is not to be so construed as that we are to

waive our own common-sense and our own effort. That is not faith; it is

fanaticism.

We have to build ourselves round, in this world, with other things than

the wall of fire,' but in all our building we have to say, Except the

Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Except the

Lord keep the city, the watchers watch in vain.' But yet neither

Jerusalem nor the Church, nor the earthly state of that believer who

lives most fully the life of faith, exhausts this promise. It waits for

the day when the city shall descend, like a bride adorned for her

husband, having no need of the sun nor of the moon, for the glory . . .

lightens it.' Having walls, indeed, but for splendour, not for defence;

and having gates, which have only one of the functions of a gate--to

stand wide open, to the east and the west, and the north and the south,

for the nations to enter in; and never needing to be barred against

enemies by day, for there shall be no night there.'

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A VISION OF JUDGEMENT AND CLEANSING

And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of

the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. 2. And

the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord

that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out

of the fire? 3. Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood

before the Angel. 4. And He answered and spake unto those that stood

before Him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto

him He said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee,

and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. 5. And I said, Let them

set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head,

and clothed him with garments. And the Angel of the Lord stood by. 6.

And the Angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua, saying, 7. Thus saith

the Lord of Hosts, If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep

My charge, then thou shalt also judge My house, and shalt also keep My

courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by,

8. Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit

before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring

forth My servant The BRANCH. 9. For behold the stone that I have laid

before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will

engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will remove

the iniquity of that land in one day. 10. In that day, saith the Lord

of Hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and

under the fig-tree.'--ZECHARIAH iii. 1-10.

Zechariah worked side by side with Haggai to quicken the religious life

of the people, and thus to remove the gravest hindrances to the work of

rebuilding the Temple. Inward indifference, not outward opposition, is

the real reason for slow progress in God's work, and prophets who see

visions and preach repentance are the true practical men.

This vision followed Haggai's prophecy at the interval of a month. It

falls into two parts--a symbolical vision and a series of promises

founded on it.

I. The Symbolical Vision (vs. 1-5).--The scene of the vision is left

undetermined, and the absence of any designation of locality gives the

picture the sublimity of indefiniteness. Three figures, seen he knows

not where, stand clear before the Prophet's inward eye. They were shown

him by an unnamed person, who is evidently Jehovah Himself. The real

and the ideal are marvellously mingled in the conception of Joshua the

high priest--the man whom the people saw every day going about

Jerusalem--standing at the bar of God, with Satan as his accuser. The

trial is in process when the Prophet is permitted to see. We do not

hear the pleadings on either side, but the sentence is solemnly

recorded. The accusations are dismissed, their bringer rebuked, and in

token of acquittal, the filthy garments which the accused had worn are

changed for the full festal attire of the high priest.

What, then, is the meaning of this grand symbolism? The first point to

keep well in view is the representative character of the high priest.

He appears as laden not with individual but national sins. In him

Israel is, as it were, concentrated, and what befalls him is the image

of what befalls the nation. His dirty dress is the familiar symbol of

sin; and he wears it, just as he wore his sacerdotal dress, in his

official capacity, as the embodied nation. He stands before the

judgment seat, bearing not his own but the people's sins.

Two great truths are thereby taught, which are as true to-day as ever.

The first is that representation is essential to priesthood. It was so

in shadowy and external fashion in Israel; it is so in deepest and most

blessed reality in Christ's priesthood. He stands before God as our

representative--And the Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of

us all.' If by faith we unite ourselves with Him, there ensues a

wondrous transference of characteristics, so that our sin becomes His,

and His righteousness becomes ours; and that in no mere artificial or

forensic sense, but in inmost reality. Theologians talk of a

communicatio idiomatum as between the human and the divine elements in

Christ. There is an analogous passage of the attributes of either to

the other, in the relation of the believer to his Saviour.

The second thought in this symbolic appearance of Joshua before the

angel of the Lord is that the sins of God's people are even now present

before His perfect judgment, as reasons for withdrawing from them His

favour. That is a solemn truth, which should never be forgotten. A

Christian man's sins do accuse him at the bar of God. They are all

visible there; and so far as their tendency goes, they are like wedges

driven in to rend him from God.

But the second figure in the vision is the Satan,' standing in the

plaintiff's place at the Judge's right hand, to accuse Joshua. The Old

Testament teaching as to the evil spirit who accuses' good men is not

so developed as that of the New, which is quite natural, inasmuch as

the shadow of bright light is deeper than that of faint rays. It is

most full in the latest books, as here and in Job; but doctrinal

inferences drawn from such highly imaginative symbolism as this are

precarious. No one who accepts the authority of our Lord can well deny

the existence and activity of a malignant spirit, who would fain make

the most of men's sins, and use them as a means of separating their

doers from God. That is the conception here.

But the main stress of the vision lies, not on the accuser or his

accusation, but on the Judge's sentence, which alone is recorded. The

Angel of the Lord' is named in verse 1 as the Judge, while the sentence

in verse 2 is spoken by the Lord.' It would lead us far away from our

purpose to inquire whether that Angel of the Lord is an earlier

manifestation of the eternal Son, who afterwards became flesh--a kind

of preluding or rehearsing of the Incarnation. But in any case, God so

dwells in Him as that what the Angel says God says and the speaker

varies as in our text. The accuser is rebuked, and God's rebuke is not

a mere word, but brings with it punishment. The malicious accusations

have failed, and their aim is to be gathered from the language which

announces their miscarriage. Obviously Satan sought to procure the

withdrawal of divine favour from Joshua, because of his sin; that is,

to depose the nation from its place as the covenant people, because of

its transgressions of the covenant. Satan here represents what might

otherwise have been called, in theological language, the demands of

justice.' The answer given him is deeply instructive as to the grounds

of the divine forbearance.

Note that Joshua's guilt as the representative of the people is not

denied, but tacitly admitted and actually spoken of in verse 4. Why,

then, does not the accuser have his way? For two reasons. God has

chosen Jerusalem. His great purpose, the fruit of His undeserved mercy,

is not to be turned aside by man's sins. The thought is the same as

that of Jeremiah: If heaven above can be measured . . . then I will

also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done' (Jer.

xxxi. 37). Again, the fact that Joshua was a brand plucked from the

burning'--that is, that the people whom he represented had been brought

unconsumed from the furnace of captivity--is a reason with God for

continuing to extend His favour, though they have sinned. God's past

mercies are a motive with him. Creatural love is limited, and too often

says, I have forgiven so often, that I am wearied, and can do it no

more.' He has, therefore he will. We often come to the end of our

long-suffering a good many times short of the four hundred and ninety a

day which Christ prescribes. But God never does. True, Joshua and his

people have sinned, and that since their restoration, and Satan had a

good argument in pointing to these transgressions; but God does not

say, I will put back the half-burned brand in the fire again, since the

evil is not burned out of it,' but forgives again, because He has

forgiven before.

The sentence is followed by the exchange of the filthy garments

symbolical of sin, for the full array of the high priest. Ministering

angels are dimly seen in the background, and are summoned to unclothe

and clothe Joshua. The Prophet ventures to ask that the sacerdotal

attire should be completed by the turban or mitre, probably that

headdress which bore the significant writing Holiness to the Lord,'

expressive of the destination of Israel and of its ceremonial

cleanness. The meaning of this change of clothing is given in verse 4:

I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee.' Thus the complete

restoration of the pardoned and cleansed nation to its place as a

nation of priests to Jehovah is symbolised. To us the gospel of

forgiveness fills up the outline in the vision; and we know how, when

sin testifies against us, we have an Advocate with the Father, and how

the infinite love flows out to us notwithstanding all sin, and how the

stained garment of our souls can be stripped off, and the fine linen

clean and white,' the priestly dress on the day of atonement, be put on

us, and we be made priests unto God.

II. The remainder of the vision is the address of the Angel of the Lord

to Joshua, developing the blessings now made sure to him and his people

by this renewed consecration and cleansing. First (verse 7) is the

promise of continuance in office and access to God's presence, which,

however, are contingent on obedience. The forgiven man must keep God's

charge, if he is to retain his standing. On that condition, he has a

place of access among those that stand by'; that is, the privilege of

approach to God, like the attendant angels. This promise may be taken

as surpassing the prerogatives hitherto accorded to the high priest,

who had only the right of entrance into the holiest place once a year,

but now is promised the entr�e to the heavenly court, as if he were one

of the bright spirits who stand there. They who have access with

confidence within the veil because Christ is there, have more than the

ancient promise of this vision.

The main point of verse 8 is the promise of the Messiah, but the former

part of the verse is remarkable. Joshua and his fellows are summoned to

listen, for they are men which are a sign.' The meaning seems to be

that he and his brethren who sat as his assessors in official

functions, are collectively a sign or embodied prophecy of what is to

come. Their restoration to their offices was a shadowy prophecy of a

greater act of forgiving grace, which was to be effected by the coming

of the Messiah.

The name Branch' is used here as a proper name. Jeremiah (Jer. xxiii.

5; xxxiii. 15) had already employed it as a designation of Messiah,

which he had apparently learned from Isaiah iv. 2. The idea of the word

is that of the similar names used by Isaiah, a shoot out of the stock

of Jesse, and a Branch out of his roots' (Isaiah xi. 1), and a tender

plant, and as a root out of a dry ground' (Isaiah liii. 2); namely,

that of his origin from the fallen house of David, and the lowliness of

his appearance.

The Messiah is again meant by the stone' in verse 9. Probably there was

some great stone taken from the ruins, to which the symbol attaches

itself. The foundation of the second Temple had been laid years before

the prophecy, but the stone may still have been visible. The Rabbis

have much to say about a great stone which had been in the first

Temple, and there used for the support of the ark, but in the second

was set in the empty place where the ark should have been. Isaiah had

prophesied of the tried corner-stone' laid in Zion, and Psalm cxviii.

22 had sung of the stone rejected and made the head of the corner. We

go in the track, then, of established usage, when we see in this stone

the emblem of Messiah, and associate with it all thoughts of firmness,

preciousness, support, foundation of the true Temple, basis of hope,

ground of certitude, and whatever other substratum of fixity and

immovableness men's hearts or lives need. In all possible aspects of

the metaphor, Jesus is the Foundation.

And what are the seven eyes on the stone'? That may simply be a vivid

way of saying that the fulness of divine Providence would watch over

the Messiah, bringing Him when the time was ripe, and fitting Him for

His work. But if we remember the subsequent explanation (iv. 10) of the

seven,' as the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole

earth,' and connect this with Revelation v. 6, we can scarcely rest

content with that meaning, but find here the deeper thought that the

fulness of the divine Spirit was given to Messiah, even as Isaiah (xi.

2) prophesies of the sevenfold Spirit.

I will engrave the graving thereof' is somewhat obscure. It seems to

mean that the seven eyes will be cut on the stone, like masons' marks.

If the seven eyes are the full energies of the Holy Spirit, God's

cutting of them on the stone is equivalent to His giving them to His

Son; and the fulfilment of the promise was when He gave the Holy Spirit

not by measure unto Him.'

The blessed purpose of Messiah's coming and endowment with the Spirit

is gloriously stated in the last clause of verse 9: I will remove the

iniquity of that land in one day.' Jesus Christ has once for all' made

atonement, as the Epistle to the Hebrews so often says. The better

Joshua by one offering has taken away sin. The breadth of Thy land, O

Immanuel,' stretched far beyond the narrow bounds which Zechariah knew

for Israel's territory. It includes the whole world. As has been

beautifully said, That one day is the day of Golgotha.'

The vision closes with a picture of the felicity of Messianic times,

which recalls the description of the golden age of Solomon, when Judah

and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his

fig-tree' (1 Kings iv. 25). In like manner the nation, cleansed,

restored to its priestly privilege of free access to God by the Messiah

who comes with the fulness of the Spirit, shall dwell in safety, and

shall be knit together by friendship, and unenvyingly shall each share

his good with all others, recognising in every man a neighbour, and

gladly welcoming him to partake of all the blessings which the true

Solomon has brought to his house and heart.

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THE RIGHT OF ENTRY

I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.'--ZECHARIAH

iii. 7.

A WORD or two of explanation will probably be necessary in order to see

the full meaning of this great promise. The Prophet has just been

describing a vision of judgment which he saw, in which the high priest,

as representative of the nation, stood before the Angel of the Lord as

an unclean person. He is cleansed and clothed, his foul raiment

stripped off him, and a fair priestly garment, with Holiness to the

Lord' written on the front of it, put upon him. And then follow a

series of promises, of which the climax is the one that I have read. I

will give thee a place of access,' says the Revised Version, instead of

places to walk'; I will give thee a place of access among those that

stand by'; the attendant angels are dimly seen surrounding their Lord.

And so the promise of my text, in highly figurative fashion, is that of

free and unrestrained approach to God, of a life that is like that of

the angels that stand before His Face.

So, then, the words suggest to us, first, what a Christian life may be.

There are two images blended together in the great words of my text;

the one is that of a king's court, the other is that of a temple. With

regard to the former it is a privilege given to the highest nobles of a

kingdom--or it was so in old days--to have the right of entr�e, at all

moments and in all circumstances, to the monarch. With regard to the

latter, the prerogative of the high priest, who was the recipient of

this promise, as to access to the Temple, was a very restricted one.

Once a year, with the blood that prevented his annihilation by the

brightness of the Presence into which he ventured, he passed within the

veil, and stood before that mysterious Light that coruscated in the

darkness of the Holy of Holies. But this High Priest is promised an

access on all days and at all times; and that He may stand there,

beside and like the seraphim, who with one pair of wings veiled their

faces in token of the incapacity of the creature to behold the Creator;

with twain veiled their feet' in token of the unworthiness of creatural

activities to be set before Him, and with twain did fly' in token of

their willingness to serve Him with all their energies. This Priest

passes within the veil when He will. Or, to put away the two metaphors,

and to come to the reality far greater than either of them, we can,

whensoever we please, pass into the presence before which the

splendours of an earthly monarch's court shrink into vulgarity, and

attain to a real reception of the light that irradiates the true Holy

Place, before which that which shone in the earthly shrine dwindles and

darkens into a shadow. We may live with God, and in Him, and wrap a

veil and privacy of glorious light' about us, whilst we pilgrim upon

earth, and may have hidden lives which, notwithstanding all their

surface occupation with the distractions and duties and enjoyments of

the present, deep down in their centres are knit to God. Our lives may

on the outside thus be largely amongst the things seen and temporal,

and yet all the while may penetrate through these, and lay hold with

their true roots on the eternal. If we have any religious life at all,

the measure in which we possess it is the measure in which we may ever

more dwell in the house of the Lord, and have our hearts in the secret

place of the Most High, amid the stillnesses and the sanctities of His

immediate dwelling.

Our Master is the great Example of this, of whom it is said, not only

in reference to His mysterious and unique union of nature with the

Father in His divinity, but in reference to the humanity which He had

in common with us all, yet without sin, that the Son of Man came down

from heaven, and even in the act of coming, and when He had come, was

yet the Son of Man which is in heaven.' Thus we, too, may have a place

of access among them that stand by,' and not need to envy the angels

and the spirits of the just made perfect, the closeness of their

communion, and the vividness of their vision, for the same, in its

degree, may be ours. We, too, can turn all our desires into petitions,

and of every wish make a prayer. We, too can refer all our needs to His

infinite supply. We, too may consciously connect all our doings with

His will and His glory; and for us it is possible that there shall be,

as if borne on those electric wires that go striding across pathless

deserts, and carry their messages through unpeopled solitudes, between

Him and us a communication unbroken and continuous, which, by a greater

wonder than even that of the telegraph, shall carry two messages, going

opposite ways simultaneously, bearing to Him the swift aspirations and

supplications of our spirits, and bringing to us the abundant answer of

His grace. Such a conversation in heaven, and such association with the

bands of the blessed is possible even for a life upon earth.

Secondly, let us consider this promise as a pattern for us of what

Christian life should be, and, alas! so seldom is.

All privilege is duty, and everything that is possible for any

Christian man to become, it is imperative on him to aim at. There is no

greater sin than living beneath the possibilities of our lives, in any

region, whether religious or other it matters not. Sin is not only

going contrary to the known law of God, but also a falling beneath a

divine ideal which is capable of realisation. And in regard to our

Christian life, if God has flung open His temple-gates and said to us,

Come in, My child, and dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and

abide there under the shadow of the Almighty, finding protection and

communion and companionship in My worship,' there can be nothing more

insulting to Him, and nothing more fatally indicative of the alienation

of our hearts from Him, than that we should refuse to obey the merciful

invitation.

What should we say of a subject who never presented himself in the

court to which he had the right of free entr饿 His absence would be a

mark of disloyalty, and would be taken as a warning-bell in preparation

for his rebellion. What should we say of a son or a daughter, living in

the same city with their parents, who never crossed the threshold of

the father's house, but that they had lost the spirit of a child, and

that if there was no desire to be near there could be no love?

So, if we will ask ourselves, How often do I use this possibility of

communion with God, which might irradiate all my daily life?' I think

we shall need little else, in the nature of evidence, that our piety

and our religious experience are terribly stunted and dwarfed, in

comparison with what they ought to be.

There is an old saying, He that can tell how often he has thought of

God in a day has thought of Him too seldom.' I dare say many of us

would have little difficulty in counting on the fingers of one hand,

and perhaps not needing them all, the number of times in which, to-day,

our thoughts have gone heavenwards. What we may be is what we ought to

be, and not to use the prerogatives of our position is the worst of

sins.

Again, my text suggests to us what every Christian life will hereafter

perfectly be.

Some commentators take the words of my text to refer only to the

communion of saints from the earth, with the glorified angels, in and

after the Resurrection. That is a poor interpretation, for heaven is

here to-day. But still there is a truth in the interpretation which we

need not neglect. Only let us remember that nothing--so far as

Scripture teaches us--begins yonder except the full reaping of the

fruits of what has been sown here, and that if a man's feet have not

learned the path into the Temple when he was here upon earth, death

will not be the guide for him into the Father's presence. All that here

has been imperfect, fragmentary, occasional, interrupted, and marred in

our communion with God, shall one day be complete. And then, oh! then,

who can tell what undreamed-of depths and sweetnesses of renewed

communion and of intercourses begun, for the first time then, between

those that stand by,' and have stood there for ages, will then be

realised?

Ye are come'--even here on earth--to an innumerable company of angels,

to the general assembly and Church of the first-born,' but for us all

there may be the quiet hope that hereafter we shall dwell in the house

of the Lord for ever'; and in solemn troops and sweet societies' shall

learn what fellowship, and brotherhood, and human love may be.

Lastly, notice, not from my text but from its context, how any life may

become thus privileged.

The promise is preceded by a condition: If thou wilt walk in My ways,

and if thou wilt keep My charge, then . . . I will give thee access

among those that stand by.' That is to say, you cannot keep the

consciousness of God's presence, nor have any blessedness of communion

with Him, if you are living in disobedience of His commandments or in

neglect of manifest duty. A thin film of vapour in our sky tonight will

hide the moon. Though the vapour itself may be invisible, it will be

efficacious as a veil. And any sin, great or small, fleecy and thin,

will suffice to shut me out from God. If we are keeping His

commandments, then, and only then, shall we have access with free

hearts into His presence.

But to lay down that condition seems the same thing as slamming the

door in every man's face. But let us remember what went before my text,

the experience of the priest to whom it was spoken in the vision. His

filthy garments were stripped off him, and the pure white robes worn on

the great Day of Atonement, the sacerdotal dress, were put upon him. It

is the cleansed man that has access among those that stand by.' And if

you ask how the cleansing is to be effected, take the great words of

the Epistle to the Hebrews as an all-sufficient answer, coinciding

with, but transcending, what this vision taught Zechariah: Having,

therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest of all, by the

blood of Jesus, . . . and having a High Priest over the house of God;

let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having

our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.' Cleansed by Christ, and

with Him for our Forerunner, we have boldness and access with

confidence by the faith of Him,' who proclaims to the whole world, No

man cometh to the Father but by Me.'

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THE SOURCE OF POWER

And the Angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man

that is wakened out of his sleep, 2. And said unto me, What seest thou?

And I said, I have looked, and behold, a candlestick all of gold, with

a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes

to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof: 3. And two

olive-trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other

upon the left side thereof. 4. So I answered and spake to the Angel

that talked with me, saying, What are these, my Lord? 5. Then the Angel

that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what

these be? And I said, No, my Lord. 6. Then He answered and spake unto

me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not

by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. 7.

Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a

plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings,

crying, Grace, grace unto it. 8. Moreover, the word of the Lord came

unto me, saying, 9. The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of

this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that

the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you. 10. For who hath despised the

day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet

in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the

Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.'--ZECHARIAH iv.

1-10.

THE preceding vision had reference to Joshua the priest, and showed him

restored to his prerogative of entrance into the sanctuary. This one

concerns his colleague Zerubbabel, the representative of civil power,

as he of ecclesiastical, and promises that he shall succeed in

rebuilding the Temple. The supposition is natural that the actual work

of reconstruction was mainly in the hands of the secular ruler.

Flesh is weak, and the Prophet had fallen into deep sleep, after the

tension of the previous vision. That had been shown him by Jehovah, but

in this vision we have the same angel interpreter who had spoken with

Zechariah before. He does not bring the vision, but simply wakes the

Prophet that he may see it, and directs his attention to it by the

question, What seest thou?' The best way to teach is to make the

learner put his conceptions into definite words. We see things more

clearly, and they make a deeper impression, when we tell what we see.

How many lazy looks we give at things temporal as well as at things

eternal, after which we should be unable to answer the Angel's

question! It is not every one who sees what he looks at.

The passage has two parts--the vision and its interpretation, with

related promises.

The vision may be briefly disposed of. Its original is the great lamp

which stood in the tabernacle, and was replaced in the Solomonic Temple

by ten smaller ones. These had been carried away at the Captivity, and

we do not read of their restoration. But the main thing to note is the

differences between this lamp and the one in the tabernacle. The

description here confines itself to these: They are three--the bowl' or

reservoir above the lamp, the pipes from it to the seven lights, and

the two olive-trees which stood on either side of the lamp and

replenished from their branches the supply in the reservoir. The

tabernacle lamp had no reservoir, and consequently no pipes, but was

fed with oil by the priests. The meaning of the variations, then, is

plain. They were intended to express the fuller and more immediately

divine supply of oil. If the Revised Version's rendering of the

somewhat doubtful numerals in verse 2 be accepted, each several light

had seven pipes, thus expressing the perfection of its supplies.

Now, there can be no doubt about the symbolism of the tabernacle lamp.

It represented the true office of Israel, as it rayed out its beams

into the darkness of the desert. It meant the same thing as Christ's

words, Ye are the light of the world,' and as the vision of the seven

golden candlesticks, in Revelation i. 12, 13, 20. The substitution of

separate lamps for one with seven lights may teach the difference

between the mere formal unity of the people of God in the Old Testament

and the true oneness, conjoined with diversity, in the New Testament

Church, which is one because Christ walks in the midst. Zechariah's

lamp, then, called to the minds of the little band of restored exiles

their high vocation, and the changed arrangements for the supply of

that oil, which is the standing emblem for divine communications

fitting for service, or, to keep to the metaphor, fitting to shine,

signified the abundance of these.

The explanation of the vision is introduced, as at Zechariah i. 9, 19,

by the Prophet's question of its meaning. His angelic teacher is

astonished at his dullness, as indeed heavenly eyes must often be at

ours, and asks if he does not know so familiar an object. The Prophet's

No, my Lord,' brings full explanation. Ingenuously acknowledged

ignorance never asks Heaven for enlightenment in vain.

First, the true source of strength and success, as shown by the vision,

is declared in plain terms. What fed the lamp? Oil, which symbolises

the gift of a divine Spirit, if not in the full personal sense as in

the New Testament, yet certainly as a God-breathed influence, preparing

prophets, priests, kings, and even artificers, for their several forms

of service. Whence came the oil? From the two olive-trees, which

though, as verse 14 shows, they represented the two leaders, yet set

forth the truth that their power for their work was from God; for the

Bible knows nothing of nature' as a substitute for or antithesis to

God, and the growth of the olive and its yield of oil is His doing.

This, then, was the message for Zerubbabel and his people, that God

would give such gifts as they needed, in order that the light which He

Himself had kindled should not be quenched. If the lamp was fed with

oil, it would burn, and there would be a Temple for it to stand in. If

we try to imagine the feebleness of the handful of discouraged men, and

the ring of enemies round them, we may feel the sweetness of the

promise which bade them not despond because they had little of what the

world calls might.

We all need the lesson; for the blustering world is apt to make us

forget the true source of all real strength for holy service or for

noble living. The world's power at its mightiest is weak, and the

Church's true power, at her feeblest, is omnipotent, if only she grasps

the strength which is hers, and takes the Spirit which is given. The

eternal antithesis of man's weakness at his haughtiest, and God's

strength even in its feeblest possessors, is taught by that lamp

flaming, whatever envious hands or howling storms might seek to quench

it, because fed by oil from on high. Let us keep to God's strength, and

not corrupt His oil with mixtures of foul-smelling stuff of our own

compounding.

Next, in the strength of that revelation of the source of might a

defiant challenge is blown to the foe. The great mountain' is primarily

the frowning difficulties which lifted themselves against Zerubbabel's

enterprise, and more widely the whole mass of worldly opposition

encountered by God's servants in every age. It seems to bar all

advance; but an unseen Hand crushes it down, and flattens it out into a

level, on which progress is easy. The Hebrew gives the suddenness and

completeness of the transformation with great force; for the whole

clause, Thou shalt become a plain,' is one word in the original.

Such triumphant rising above difficulties is not presumption when it

has been preceded by believing gaze on the source of strength. If we

have taken to heart the former words of the Prophet, we shall not be in

danger of rash overconfidence when we calmly front obstacles in the

path of duty, assured that every mountain shall be made low. A brave

scorn of the world, both in its sweetnesses and its terrors, befits

God's men, and is apt to fulfil its own confidences; for most of these

terrors are like ghosts, who will not wait to be spoken to, but melt

away if fairly faced. Nor should we forget the other side of this

thought; namely, that it is the constant drift of Providence to abase

the lofty in mind, and to raise the lowly. What is high is sure to get

many knocks which pass over lower heads. To men of faith every mountain

shall either become a plain or be cast into the sea.

Then follows, on the double revelation of the source of strength and

the futility of opposition, the assurance of the successful completion

of the work. The stone which is to crown the structure shall be brought

forth and set in its place amid jubilant prayers not offered in vain,

that grace'--that is, the protecting favour of God--may rest on it.

The same thought is reiterated and enlarged in the next word,' which is

somewhat separated from the former, as if the flow of prophetic

communication had paused for a moment, and then been resumed. In verse

9 we have the assurance, so seldom granted to God's workers, that

Zerubbabel shall be permitted to complete the task which he had begun.

It is the fate of most of us to inherit unfinished work from our

predecessors, and to bequeath the like to our successors. And in one

aspect, all human work is unfinished, as being but a fragment of the

fulfilment of the mighty purpose which runs through all the ages. Yet

some are more happy than others, in that they see an approximate

completion of their work. But whether it be so or not, our task is to

do the little we can do, and leave the rest with God,' sure that He

will work all the fragments into a perfect whole, and content to do the

smallest bit of service for Him. Few of us are strong enough to do

separate building. We are like coral insects, whose reef is one, though

its makers are millions.

Zerubbabel finished his task, but its end was but a new beginning of an

order of things of which he did not see the end. There are no

beginnings or endings, properly speaking, in human affairs, but all is

one unbroken flow. One man only has made a real new beginning, and that

is Jesus Christ; and He only will really carry His work to its very

last issues. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending. He is

the Foundation of the true Temple, and He is also the Headstone of the

corner, the foundation on which all rests, the apex to which all runs

up. When He begins, He will also make an end.'

The completion of the work is to be the token that the angel who spake

with me' was God's messenger. We can know that before the fulfilment,

but we cannot but know it after. Better to be sure that the message is

from God while yet the certainty is the result of faith, than to be

sure of it afterwards, when the issue has shattered and shamed our

doubts.

If we realise that God's Spirit is the guarantee for the success of

work done for God, we shall escape the vulgar error of measuring the

importance of things by their size, as, no doubt, many of these

builders were doing. No one will help on the day of great things who

despises that of small ones. They say that the seeds of the big trees'

in California are the smallest of all the conifers. I do not vouch for

the truth of the statement, but God's work always begins with little

seeds, as the history of the Church and of every good cause shows. What

do these feeble Jews?' sneered the spectators of their poor little

walls, painfully piled up, over which a fox could jump. They did very

little, but they were building the city of God, which has outlasted all

the mockers.

Men might look with contempt on the humble beginning, but other eyes

than theirs looked at it with other emotions. The eyes which in the

last vision were spoken of as directed on the foundation stone, gaze on

the work with joy. These are the seven eyes of the Lord,' which are the

seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth' (Rev. v. 6). The

Spirit is here contemplated in the manifoldness of His operations

rather than in the unity of His person. Thus the closing assurance,

which involves the success of the work, since God's eyes rest on it

with delight, comes round to the first declaration, Not by might, not

by power, but by My Spirit.' Note the strong contrast between despise'

and rejoice.' What matter the scoffs of mockers, if God approves? What

are they but fools who look at that which moves His joy, and find in it

only food for scorn? What will become of their laughter at last? If we

try to get so near God as to see things with His eyes, we shall be

saved from many a false estimate of what is great and what is small,

and may have our own poor little doings invested with strange dignity,

because He deigns to behold and bless them.

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THE FOUNDER AND FINISHER OF THE TEMPLE

The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his

hands shall also finish it.'--ZECHARIAH iv. 9.

I am afraid that Zerubbabel is very little more than a grotesque name

to most Bible-readers, so I may be allowed a word of explanation as to

him and as to the original force of my text. He was a prince of the

blood royal of Israel, and the civil leader of the first detachment of

returning exiles. With Joshua, the high priest, he came, at the head of

a little company, to Palestine, and there pathetically attempted, with

small resources, to build up some humble house that might represent the

vanished glories of Solomon's Temple. Political enmity on the part of

the surrounding tribes stopped the work for nearly twenty years. During

all that time, the hole in the ground, where the foundations had been

dug and a few courses of stones been laid, gaped desolate, a sad

reminder to the feeble band of the failure of their hopes. But with the

accession of a new Persian king, new energy sprang up, and new,

favourable circumstances developed themselves. The Prophet Zechariah

came to the front, although quite a young man, and became the

mainspring of the renewed activity in building the Temple. The words of

my text are, of course, in their plain, original meaning, the prophetic

assurance that the man, grown an old man by this time, who had been

honoured to take the first spadeful of soil out of the earth should be

the man to bring forth the headstone with shoutings of Grace, grace

unto it!'

But whilst that is the original application, and whilst the words open

to us a little door into long years of constrained suspension of work

and discouraged hope, I think we shall not be wrong if we recognise in

them something deeper than a reference to the Prince of David's line,

concerning whom they were originally spoken. I take them to be, in the

true sense of the term, a Messianic prophecy; and I take it that, just

because Zerubbabel, a member of that royal house from which the Messiah

was to come, was the builder of the Temple, he was a prophetic person.

What was true about him primarily is thereby shown to have a bearing

upon the greater Son of David who was to come thereafter, and who was

to build the Temple of the Lord. In that aspect I desire to look at the

words now: His hands have laid the foundation of the house, and His

hands shall also finish it.'

I. There is, then, here a large truth as to Christ, the true

Temple-builder.

It is the same blessed message which was given from His own lips long

centuries after, when He spoke from heaven to John in Patmos, and said,

I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last.' The first letter of the

Greek alphabet, and the last letter of the Greek alphabet, and all the

letters that lie between, and all the words that you can make out of

the letters--they are all from Him, and He underlies everything.

Now that is true about creation, in the broadest and in the most

absolute sense. For what does the New Testament say, with the

consenting voice of all its writers? In the beginning was the Word, and

the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Without Him was not

anything made that was made.' His hands laid the foundations of this

great house of the universe, with its many mansions.' And what says

Paul? He is the Beginning, in Him all things consist' . . . that in all

things He might have the pre-eminence.' And what says He Himself from

heaven? I am the First and the Last.' So, in regard to everything in

the universe, Christ is its origin, and Christ is its goal and its end.

He has laid the foundation, and His hands shall also finish it.'

But, further, we turn to the application which is the more usual one,

and say that He is the Beginner and Finisher of the work of redemption,

which is His only from its inception to its accomplishment, from the

first breaking of the ground for the foundations of the Temple to the

triumphant bringing forth of the last stone that crowns the corner and

gleams on the topmost pinnacle of the completed structure. There is

nothing about Jesus Christ, as it seems to me, more manifest, unless

our eyes are blinded by prejudice, than that the Carpenter of Nazareth,

who grew up amidst the ordinary conditions of infant manhood, was

trained as other Jewish children, increased in wisdom, spoke a language

that had been moulded by man, and inherited His nation's mental and

spiritual equipment, yet stands forth on the pages of these four

Gospels as a perfectly original man, to put it on the lowest ground,

and as owing nothing to any predecessor, and not as merely one in a

series, or naturally accounted for by reference to His epoch or

conditions. He makes a new beginning; He presents a perfectly fresh

thing in the history of human nature. Just as His coming was the

introduction into the heart of humanity of a new type, the second Adam,

the Lord from heaven, so the work that He does is all His own. He does

it all Himself, for all that His servants do in carrying out the

purposes dear to His heart is done by His working in and through them,

and though we are fellow-labourers with Him, His hands alone lay every

stone of the Temple.

Not only does my text, in its highest application, point to Jesus

Christ as the Author of redemption from its very beginning, but it also

declares that all through the ages His hand is at work. Shall also

finish it'--then He is labouring at it now; and we have not to think of

a Christ who once worked, and has left to us the task of developing the

consequences of His completed activity, but of a Christ who is working

on and on, steadily and persistently. The builders of some great

edifice, whilst they are laying its lower courses, are down upon our

level, and as the building rises the scaffolding rises, and sometimes

the platform where they stand is screened off by some frail canvas

stretched round it, so that we cannot see them as they ply their work

with trowel and mortar. So Christ came down to earth to lay the courses

of His Temple that had to rest upon earth, but now the scaffolding is

raised and He is working at the top stories. Though out of our sight,

He is at work as truly and energetically as He was when He was down

here. You remember how strikingly one of the Evangelists puts that

thought in the last words of his Gospel--if, indeed, they are his

words. He was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of

God, and they went everywhere, preaching the word.' Well, that looks as

if there were a sad separation between the Commander and the soldiers

that He had ordered to the front, as if He were sitting at ease on a

hill overlooking the battlefield from a safe distance and sending His

men to death. But the next words bring Him and them together--The Lord

also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.'

And so, brethren, a work begun, continued, and ended by the same

immortal Hand, is the work on which the redemption of the world

depends.

II. Notice, secondly, that we have here the assurance of the triumph of

the Gospel.

No doubt, in the long-forgotten days in which my text was spoken, there

were plenty of over-prudent calculators in the little band of exiles

who said, What is the use of our trying to build in face of all this

opposition and with these poor resources of ours?' They would throw

cold water enough on the works of Zerubbabel, and on Zechariah who

inspired them. But there came the great word of promise to them, He

shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings.' The text is the cure

for all such calculations by us Christian people, and by others than

Christian people. When we begin to count up resources, and to measure

these against the work to be done, there is little wonder if good men

and bad men sometimes concur in thinking that the Gospel of Jesus

Christ has very little chance of conquering the world. And that is

perfectly true, unless you take Him into the calculation, and then the

probabilities look altogether different. We are but like a long row of

ciphers, but put one significant figure in front of the row of ciphers

and it comes to be of value. And so, if you are calculating the

probabilities of the success of Christianity in the world and forget to

start with Christ, you have left out the principal factor in the

problem. Churches lose their fervour, their members die and pass away.

He renews and purifies the corrupted Church, and He liveth for ever.

Therefore, because we may say, with calm confidence, His hands have

laid the foundation of the house, and His hands are at work on all the

courses of it as it rises,' we may be perfectly sure that the Temple

which He founded, at which He still toils, shall be completed, and not

stand a gaunt ruin, looking on which passers-by will mockingly say,

This man began to build and was not able to finish.' When Brennus

conquered Rome, and the gold for the city's ransom was being weighed,

he clashed his sword into the scale to outweigh the gold. Christ's

sword is in the scale, and it weighs more than the antagonism of the

world and the active hostility of hell. His hands have laid the

foundation; His hands shall also finish it.'

III. Still further, here is encouragement for despondent and timid

Christians.

Jesus Christ is not going to leave you half way across the bog. That is

not His manner of guiding us. He began; He will finish. Remember the

words of Paul which catch up this same thought: Being confident of this

very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perfect

the same until the day of Jesus Christ.' Brethren! if the seed of the

kingdom is in our hearts, though it be but as a grain of mustard seed,

be sure of this, that He will watch over it and bless the springing

thereof. So, although when we think of ourselves, our own slowness of

progress, our own feeble resolutions, our own wayward hearts, our own

vacillating wills, our many temptations, our many corruptions, our many

follies, we may well say to ourselves, Will there ever be any greater

completeness in this terribly imperfect Christian character of mine

than there is to-day?' Let us be of good cheer, and not think only of

ourselves, but much rather of Him who works on and in and for us. If we

lift up our hearts to Him, and keep ourselves near Him, and let Him

work, He will work. If we do not--like the demons in the old monastic

stories, who every night pulled down the bit of walling that the monks

had in the daytime built for their new monastery--by our own hands pull

down what He, by His hand, has built up, the structure will rise, and

we shall be builded together for a habitation of God through the

Spirit.' Be of good cheer, only keep near the Master, and let Him do

what He desires to do for us all. God is faithful who hath called us to

the fellowship of His Son,' and He also will do it.

IV. Lastly, here is a striking contrast to the fate which attends all

human workers.

There are very few of us who even partially seem to be happy enough to

begin and finish any task, beyond the small ones of our daily life.

Authors die, with books half finished, with sentences half finished

sometimes, where the pen has been laid down. No man starts an entirely

fresh line of action; he inherits much from his past. No man completes

a great work that he undertakes; he leaves it half-finished, and coming

generations, if it is one of the great historical works of the world,

work out its consequences for good or for evil. The originator has to

be contented with setting the thing going and handing on unfinished

tasks to his successors. That is the condition under which we live. We

have to be contented to do our little bit of work, that will fit in

along with that of a great many others, like a chain of men who stand

between a river and a burning house, and pass the buckets from end to

end. How many hands does it take to make a pin? How many did it take to

make the cloth of our dress? The shepherd out in Australia, the packer

in Melbourne, the sailors on the ship that brought the wool home, the

railwayman that took it to Bradford, the spinner, the weaver, the dyer,

the finisher, the tailor--they all had a hand in it, and the share of

none of them was fit to stand upright by itself, as it were, without

something on either side of it to hold it up.

So it is in all our work in the world, and eminently in our Christian

work. We have to be contented with being parts of a mighty whole, to do

our small piece of service, and not to mind though it cannot be singled

out in the completed whole. What does that matter, as long as it is

there? The waters of the brook are lost in the river, and it, in turn,

in the sea. But each drop is there, though indistinguishable.

Multiplication of joy comes from division of labour, One soweth and

another reapeth,' and the result is that there are two to be glad over

the harvest instead of one--that he that soweth and he that reapeth may

rejoice together.' So it is a good thing that the hands that laid the

foundations so seldom are the hands that finish the work; for thereby

there are more admitted into the social gladness of the completed

results. The navvy that lifted the first spadeful of earth in

excavating for the railway line, and the driver of the locomotive over

the completed track, are partners in the success and in the joy. The

forgotten bishop who, I know not how many centuries ago, laid the

foundations of Cologne Cathedral, and the workmen who, a few years

since, took down the old crane that had stood for long years on the

spire, and completed it to the slender apex, were partners in one work

that reached through the ages.

So let us do our little bit of work, and remember that whilst we do it,

He for whom we are doing it is doing it in us, and let us rejoice to

know that at the last we shall share in the joy of our Lord,' when He

sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. Though He builds all

Himself, yet He will let us have the joy of feeling that we are

labourers together with Him. Ye are God's building'; but the Builder

permits us to share in His task and in His triumph.

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THE PRIEST OF THE WORLD AND KING OF MEN

He shall build the Temple of the Lord . . . and He shall be a Priest

upon His throne.'--ZECHARIAH vi. 13.

A handful of feeble exiles had come back from their Captivity. The holy

and beautiful house' where their fathers praised Him was burned with

fire. There was no king among them, but they still possessed a

representative of the priesthood, the other great office of divine

appointment. Their first care was to rear some poor copy of the Temple;

and the usual difficulties that attend reconstruction of any sort, and

dog every movement that rests upon religious enthusiasm, beset them

--strong enemies, and half-hearted friends, and personal jealousies

weakening still more their weak forces. In this time of anarchy, of

toil at a great task with inadequate resources, of despondency that was

rapidly fulfilling its own forebodings, the Prophet, who was the spring

of the whole movement, receives a word in season from the Lord. He is

bidden to take from some of the returned exiles the tribute-money which

they had brought, and having made of it golden and silver crowns--the

sign of kingship--to set them on the high priest's head, thus uniting

the sacerdotal and regal offices, which had always been jealously

separated in Israel. This singular action is explained, by the words

which he is commanded to speak, as being a symbolic prophecy of Him who

is the Branch'--the well-known name which older prophets had used for

the Messiah--indicating that in Him were the reality which the

priesthood shadowed, and the rule which was partly delegated to

Israel's king as well as the power which should rear the true temple of

God among men.

It is in accordance with the law of prophetic development from the

beginning, that the external circumstances of the nation at the moment

should supply the mould into which the promise is run. The earliest of

all Messianic predictions embraced only the existence of evil, as

represented by the serpent, and the conquest of it by one who was known

but as a son of Eve. When the history reaches the patriarchal stage,

wherein the family is the predominant conception, the prophecy

proportionately advances to the assurance, In thy seed shall all the

families of the earth be blessed.' When the mission of Moses had made

the people familiar with the idea of a man who was the medium of

revelation, then a further stage was reached--a Prophet shall the Lord

your God raise up unto you, of your brethren, like unto me.' The

kingdom of David prepared the way for the prediction of the royal

dignity of the Messiah, as the peaceful reign of Solomon for the

expectation of one who should bring peace by righteousness. The

approach of national disaster and sorrow was reflected in Isaiah's

vision of the suffering Messiah, and that prophet's announcements of

exile had for their counterpoise the proclamation of Him who should

bring liberty to the captive. So, here, the kingless band of exiles,

painfully striving to rear again the tabernacle which had fallen down,

are heartened for their task by the thought of the priest-king of the

nation, the builder of an imperishable dwelling-place for God.

To-day we need these truths not less than Zechariah's contemporaries

did. And, thank God! we can believe that, for every modern perplexity,

the blessed old words carry the same strength and consolation. If kings

seem to have perished from among men, if authorities are dying out, and

there are no names of power that can rally the world--yet there is a

Sovereign. If old institutions are crumbling, and must still further

decay ere the site for a noble structure be cleared, yet He shall build

the Temple. If priest be on some lips a name of superstitious folly,

and on others a synonym for all that is despised as effete in religion,

yet this Priest abideth for ever, the guide and the hope for the

history of humanity and for the individual spirit. Let us, then, put

ourselves under the Prophet's guidance, and consider the eternal truths

which he preaches to us too.

I. The true hope of the world is a priest.

The idea of priesthood is universal. It has been distorted and abused;

it has been made the foundation of spiritual tyranny. The priest has

not been the teacher nor the elevator of the people. All over the world

he has been the ally of oppression and darkness, he has hindered and

cramped social and intellectual progress. And yet, in spite of all

this, there the office stands, and wherever men go, by some strange

perversity they take with them this idea, and choose from among

themselves those who, being endowed with some sort of ceremonial and

symbolic purity, shall discharge for their brethren the double office

of representing them before God, of representing God to them. That is

what the world means, with absolute and entire unanimity, by a

priest--one who shall be sacrificer, intercessor, representative;

bearer of man's worship, channel of God's blessing. How comes it, that,

in spite of all the cruelties and lies that have gathered round the

office, it lives, indestructible, among the families of men? Why,

because it springs from, and corresponds to, real and universal wants

in their nature. It is the result of the universal consciousness of

sin. Men feel that there is a gulf betwixt them and God. They know

themselves to be all foul. True, as their knowledge of God dims and

darkens, their conscience hardens and their sense of sin lessens; but,

as long as there is any notion of God at all, there will be a parallel

and corresponding conviction of moral evil. And so, feeling that, and

feeling it, as I believe, not because they are rude and barbarous, but

because, though rude and barbarous, they still preserve some trace of

their true relation to God, they lay hold upon some of their fellows,

and say, Here! be thou for us this thing which we cannot be for

ourselves--stand thou there in front of us, and be at once the

expression of our knowledge that we dare not come before our gods, and

likewise, if it may be, the medium by which their gifts may come on us,

unworthy.'

That is a wide-spread and all but universally expressed instinct of

human nature. Argue about it as you like, explain it away how you

choose, charge the notions of priesthood and sacrifice with

exaggeration, immorality, barbarism, if you will--still the thing

remains. And I believe for my part that, so far from that want being

one which will be left behind, with other rude and savage desires, as

men advance in civilisation--it is as real and as permanent as the

craving of the understanding for truth, and of the heart for love. When

men lose it, it is because they are barbarised, not civilised, into

forgetting it. On that rock all systems of religion and eminently all

theories of Christianity, that leave out priest and sacrifice, will

strike and split. The Gospel for the world must be one which will meet

all the facts of man's condition. Chief among these facts is this

necessity of the conscience, as expressed by the forms in which for

thousands of years the worship of mankind has been embodied all but

everywhere--an altar, and a priest standing by its side.

I need not pause to remind you how this Jewish people, who have at all

events taught the world the purest Theism, and led men up to the most

spiritual religion, had this same institution of a priesthood for the

very centre of its worship. Nor need I dwell at length on the fact that

the New Testament gives--in its full adhesion to the same idea. We are

told that all these sacerdotal allusions in it are only putting pure

spiritual truth in the guise of the existing stage of religious

development--the husk, not the kernel. It seems to me much rather that

the Old Testament ceremonial--Temple, priesthood, sacrifice--was

established for this along with other purposes, to be a shadow of

things to come. Christ's office is not metaphorically illustrated by

reference to the Jewish ritual; but the Jewish ritual is the metaphor,

and Christ's office the reality. He is the Priest.

And what is the priest whom men crave?

The first requisite is oneness with those whom he represents. Men have

ever felt that one of themselves must fill this office, and have taken

from among their brethren their medium of communication with God. And

we have a Priest who, in all things, is made like unto His brethren,'

having taken part of their flesh and blood, and being in all points

tempted like as we are.' The next requisite is that these men, who

minister at earth's altars, should, by some lustration, or abstinence,

or white robe, or other external sign, be separated from the profane

crowd, and possess, at all events, a symbolic purity--expression of the

conviction that a priest must be cleaner and closer to God than his

fellows. And we have a Priest who is holy, harmless, undefiled, radiant

in perfect purity, lustrous with the light of constant union with God.

And again, as in nature and character, so in function, Christ

corresponds to the widely expressed wants of men, as shown in their

priesthoods. They sought for one who should offer gifts and sacrifices

on their behalf, and we have One who is a merciful and faithful High

Priest to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.' They sought

for a man who should pass into the awful presence, and plead for them

while they stood without, and we lift hopeful eyes of love to the

heavens, whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an

High Priest for ever.' They sought for a man who should be the medium

of divine blessings bestowed upon the worshippers, and we know who hath

gone within the veil, having ascended up on high, that He might give

gifts unto men.

The world needs a priest. Its many attempts to find such show how deep

is the sense of need, and what he must be who shall satisfy them. We

have the Priest that the world and ourselves require. I believe that

modern Englishmen, with the latest results of civilisation colouring

their minds and moulding their characters, stand upon the very same

level, so far as this matter is concerned, as the veriest savage in

African wilds, who has darkened even the fragment of truth which he

possesses, till it has become a lie and the parent of lies. You and I,

and all our brethren, alike need a brother who shall be holy and close

to God, who shall offer sacrifices for us, and bring God to us. For you

and me, and all our brethren alike, the good news is true, we have a

great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of

God.' That message quenches the fire on every other altar, and strips

the mitre from every other head. It, and it alone, meets fully and for

ever that strange craving, which, though it has been productive of so

many miseries and so many errors, though it has led to grinding tyranny

and dark superstitions, though it has never anywhere found what it

longs for, remains deep in the soul, indestructible and hungry, till it

is vindicated and enlightened and satisfied by the coming of the true

Priest,' made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the

power of an endless life.'

II. Our text tells us, secondly, that the priest of the world is the

king of men.' He shall be a Priest upon His throne.'

In Israel these two offices were jealously kept apart, and when one

monarch, in a fit of overweening self-importance, tried to unite in his

own person the kingly and the priestly functions, the leprosy rose up

in his forehead,' even as he stood with the censer in his hand, and

Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death.' And the history

of the world is full of instances, in which the struggles of the

temporal and spiritual power have caused calamities only less

intolerable than those which flowed from that alliance of priests and

kings which has so often made monarchy a grinding tyranny, and religion

a mere instrument of statecraft. History being witness, it would seem

to be a very doubtful blessing for the world that one man should wield

both forms of control without check or limitation, and be at once king

and priest. If the words before us refer to any one but to Christ, the

prophet had an altogether mistaken notion about what would be good for

men, politically and ecclesiastically, and we may be thankful that his

dream has never come true. But if they point to the Son of David who

has died for us, and declare that because He is Priest, He is therefore

King--oh! then they are full of blessed truth concerning the basis and

the nature and the purpose of His dominion, which may well make us lift

up our heads and rejoice that in the midst of tyranny and anarchy, of

sovereignties whose ultimate resort is force, there is another

kingdom--the most absolute of despotisms and yet the most perfect

democracy, whose law is love, whose subjects are every one the children

of a King, the kingdom of that Priest-ruler on whose head is Aaron's

mitre, and more than David's crown.

He does rule. The kingdom of Christ' is no unreal fanciful phrase. Take

the lowest ground. Who is it that, by the words He spoke, by the deeds

He did, by the life He lived, has shaped the whole form of moral and

religious thought and life in the civilised world? Is there One among

the great of old, the dead yet sceptred sovereigns, who still rule our

spirits from their urns, whose living power over thought and heart and

deed among the dominant races of the earth is to be compared with His?

And beyond that, we believe that, as the result of His mighty work on

earth, the dominion of the whole creation is His, and He is King of

kings, and Lord of lords, that His will is sovereign and His voice is

absolute law, to which all the powers of nature, all the confusions of

earth's politics, all the unruly wills of men, all the pale kingdoms of

the dead, and all the glorious companies of the heavens, do bow in real

though it be sometimes unconscious and sometimes reluctant obedience.

The foundation of His rule is His sacrifice; or in other words--no

truer though a little more modern in their sound--men will do anything

for Him who does that for them. Men will yield their whole souls to the

warmth and light that stream from the Cross, as the sunflower turns

itself to the sun. He that can give an anodyne which is not an opiate,

to my conscience--He that can appeal to my heart and will, and say, I

have given Myself for thee,' will never speak in vain to those who

accept His gift, when He says, Now give thyself to Me.'

Brethren! it is not the thinker who is the true king of men, as we

sometimes hear it proudly said. We need One who will not only show but

be the Truth; who will not only point, but open and be, the Way; who

will not only communicate thought, but give, because He is, the Life.

Not the rabbi's pulpit, nor the teacher's desk, still less the gilded

chairs of earthly monarchs, least of all the tents of conquerors, are

the throne of the true King. He rules from the Cross. The one dominion

worth naming, that over men's inmost spirits, springs from the one

sacrifice which alone calms and quickens men's inmost spirits. Thou art

the King of Glory, O Christ,' for Thou art the Lamb of God, which

taketh away the sin of the world.'

His rule is wielded In gentleness. Priestly dominion has ever been

fierce, suspicious, tyrannous. His words were softer than oil, yet were

they drawn swords.' But the sway of this merciful and faithful High

Priest is full of tenderness. His sceptre is not the warrior's mace,

nor the jewelled rod of gold, but the reed--emblem of the lowliness of

His heart, and of authority guided by love. And all His rule is for the

blessing of His subjects, and the end of it is that they may be made

free by obedience, emancipated in and for service, crowned as kings by

submission to the King of kings, consecrated as priests by their

reliance on the only Priest over the house of God, whose loving will

rests not until it has made all His people like Himself.

Then, dear brethren! amid all the anarchic chaos of this day, when old

institutions are crumbling or crashing into decay, when the whole

civilised world seems slowly and painfully parting from its old

moorings, and like some unwieldy raft, is creaking and straining at its

chains as it feels the impulse of the swift current that is bearing it

to an unknown sea, when venerable names cease to have power, when old

truths are flouted as antiquated, and the new ones seem so long in

making their appearance, when a perfect Babel of voices stuns us, and

on every side are pretenders to the throne which they fancy vacant, let

us joyfully welcome all change, and hopefully anticipate the future.

Lifting our eyes from the world, let us fix them on the likeness of a

throne above the firmament that is above the cherubs, and rejoice since

there we behold the likeness as the appearance of a man upon it.'

Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee.'

III. Our text still further reminds us that the Priest-King of men

builds among men the Temple of God.

The Prophet and his companions had become familiar in their captivity

with the gigantic palaces and temples which Assyrian and Babylonian

monarchs had a passion for rearing. They had learned to regard the king

as equally magnified by his conquests and by his buildings. Zechariah

foretells that the true King shall rear a temple more lasting than

Solomon's, more magnificent than those which towered on their

marble-faced platforms over the Chaldean plain.

Christ is Himself the true Temple of God. Whatsoever that shadowed

Christ is or gives. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead. The

glory' which once dwelt between the cherubim, tabernacled among us' in

His flesh. As the place of sacrifice, as the place where men meet God,

as the seat of revelation of the divine will, the true tabernacle which

the Lord hath pitched is the Manhood of our Lord.

Christ builds the temple. By faith, the individual soul becomes the

abode of God, and into our desecrated spirits there comes the King of

Glory. Know ye not that ye are the temples of God?' By faith, the whole

body of believing men are builded together for an habitation of God

through the Spirit.'

Christ builds this temple because He is the Temple. By His incarnation

and work, He makes our communion with God and God's dwelling in us

possible. By His death and sacrifice He draws men to Himself, and

blends them in a living unity. By the gift of His Spirit and His life,

He hallows their wills, and makes them partakers of His own likeness;

so that coming to Him, we also are built up a spiritual house.'

Christ builds the temple, and uses us as His servants in the work. Our

prophecy was given to encourage faint-hearted toilers, not to supply an

excuse for indolence. Underlying all our poor labours, and blessing

them all, is the power of Christ. We may well work diligently who work

in the line of His purposes, after the pattern of His labours, in the

strength of His power, under the watchfulness of His eye. The little

band may be few and feeble; let them not be fearful, for He, the

throned Priest, even He, and not they with their inadequate resources,

shall build the temple.

Christ builds on through all the ages, and the prophecy of our text is

yet unfulfilled. Its fulfilment is the meaning and end of all history.

For the present, there has to be much destructive as well as

constructive work done. Many a wretched hovel, the abode of sorrow and

want, many a den of infamy, many a palace of pride, many a temple of

idols, will have to be pulled down yet, and men's eyes will be blinded

by the dust, and their hearts will ache as they look at the ruins. Be

it so. The finished structure will obliterate the remembrance of poor

buildings that cumbered its site. This Emperor of ours may indeed say,

that He found the city of brick and made it marble. Have patience if

His work is slow; mourn not if it is destructive; doubt not, though the

unfinished walls, and corridors that seem to lead nowhere, and all the

confusion of unfinished toils puzzle you, when you try to make out the

plan. See to it, my brother, that you lend a hand and help to rear the

true temple, which is rising slowly through the ages, at which

successive generations toil, and from whose unfinished glories they

dying depart, but which shall be completed, because the true Builder

ever liveth,' and is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'

Above all, brethren! take heed that you are yourselves builded in that

temple. Travellers sometimes find in lonely quarries long abandoned or

once worked by a vanished race, great blocks squared and dressed, that

seem to have been meant for palace or shrine. But there they lie,

neglected and forgotten, and the building for which they were hewn has

been reared without them. Beware lest God's grand temple should be

built up without you, and you be left to desolation and decay. Trust

your souls to Christ, and He will set you in the spiritual house which

the King greater than Solomon is building still.

In one of the mosques of Damascus, which has been a Christian church,

and before that was a heathen temple, the portal bears, deep cut in

Greek characters, the inscription, Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an

everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all

generations.' The confident words seem contradicted by the twelve

centuries of Mohammedanism on which they have looked down. But though

their silent prophecy is unheeded and unheard by the worshippers below,

it shall be proved true one day, and the crescent shall wane before the

steady light of the Sun of Righteousness. The words are carven deep

over the portals of the temple which Christ rears; and though men may

not be able to read them, and may not believe them if they do, though

for centuries traffickers have defiled its courts, and base-born

usurpers have set up their petty thrones, yet the writing stands sure,

a dumb witness against the transient lies, a patient prophet of the

eternal truth. And when all false faiths, and their priests who have

oppressed men and traduced God, have vanished; and when kings that have

prostituted their great and godlike office to personal advancement and

dynastic ambition are forgotten; and when every shrine reared for

obscene and bloody rites, or for superficial and formal worship, has

been cast to the ground, then from out of the confusion and desolation

shall gleam the temple of God, which is the refuge of men, and on the

one throne of the universe shall sit the Eternal Priest--our Brother,

Jesus the Christ.

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MALACHI

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A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a

Father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a master, where is My fear?

saith the Lord of Hosts unto you, O priests, that despise My Name. And

ye say, Wherein have we despised Thy Name? 7. Ye offer polluted bread

upon Mine altar. And ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee?'--MALACHI

i. 6, 7.

A charactistic of this latest of the prophets is the vivacious dialogue

of which our text affords one example. God speaks and the people

question His word, which in reply He reiterates still more strongly.

The other instances of its occurrence may here be briefly noted, and we

shall find that they cover all the aspects of the divine speech to men,

whether He charges sin home upon them or pronounces threatenings of

judgment, or invites by gracious promises the penitent to return. His

charges of sin are repelled in our text and in the following verse by

the indignant question, Wherein have we polluted Thee?' And similarly

in the next chapter the divine accusation, Ye have wearied the Lord

with your words,' is thrown back with the contemptuous retort, Wherein

have we wearied Him?' And in like manner in the third chapter, Ye have

robbed Me,' calls forth no confession but only the defiant answer,'

Wherein have we robbed Thee?' And in a later verse, the accusation,

Your words have been stout against Me,' is traversed by the question,

What have we spoken so much against Thee?' Similarly the threatening of

judgment that the Lord will cut off' the men that profane the holiness

of the Lord' calls forth only the rebutting question, Wherefore?' (ii.

14). And even the gracious invitation, Return unto Me, and I will

return unto you,' evokes not penitence, but the stiff-necked reply,

Wherein shall we return?' (iii. 7). In this sermon we may deal with the

first of these three cases, and consider, God's Indictment, and man's

plea of Not guilty.'

I. God's Indictment.

The precise nature of the charge is to be carefully considered. The

Name is the sum of the revealed character, and that Name has been

despised. The charge is not that it has been blasphemed, but that it

has been neglected, or under-estimated, or cared little about. The

pollution of the table of the Lord is the overt act by which the

attitude of mind and heart expressed in despising His Name is

manifested; but the overt act is secondary and not primary--a symptom

of a deeper-lying disease. And herein our Prophet is true to the whole

tenor of the Old Testament teaching, which draws its indictment against

men primarily in regard to their attitude, and only as a manifestation

of that, to their acts. The same deed may be, if estimated in relation

to human law, a crime: if estimated in relation to godless ethics, a

wrong; and if estimated in the only right way, namely, the attitude

towards God which it reveals, a sin. The despising of His Name' may be

taken as the very definition of sin. It is usual with men to-day to say

that Sin is selfishness'; but that statement does not go deep enough

unless it be recognised that self-regard only becomes sin when it rears

its puny self in opposition to, or in disregard of, the plain will of

God. The New Theology,' of course, minimises, even where it does not,

as it to be consistent should, deny the possibility of sin: for, if God

is all and all is God, there can be no opposition, there can be no

divine will to be opposed, and no human will to oppose it. But the fact

of sin certified by men's own consciences is the rock on which

Pantheism must always strike and sink. A superficial view of human

history and of human nature may try to explain away the fact of sin by

shallow talk about heredity' and environment,' or about ignorance' and

mistakes'; but after all such euphemistic attempts to rechristen the

ugly thing by beguiling names, the fact remains, and conscience bears

sometimes unwilling witness to its existence, that men do set their own

inclinations against God's commands, and that there is in them that

which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' The

root of all sin is the despising of His Name.

And as sin has but one root, it has many branches, and as working

backwards from deed to motive, we find one common element in all the

various acts; so working outwards from motive to deed, we have to see

one common character stamped upon a tragical variety of acts. The

poison-water is exhibited in many variously coloured and tasted

draughts, but however unlike each other they may be, it is always the

same.

The great effort of God's love is to press home this consciousness of

despising His Name upon all hearts. The sorrows, losses, and

disappointments which come to us all are not meant only to make us

suffer, but through suffering to lead us to recognise how far we have

wandered from our Father, and to bring us back to His heart and our

home. The beginning of all good in us is the contrite acknowledgment of

our evil. Christ's first preaching was the continuation of John's

message, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'; and His

tenderest revelation of the divine love incarnated in Himself was meant

to arouse the penitent confession, I am no more worthy to be called Thy

son,' and the quickening resolve, I will arise and go to my Father.'

There is no way to God but through the narrow gate of repentance. There

is no true reception of the gift of Christ which does not begin with a

vivid and heart-broken consciousness of my own sin. We can pass into,

and abide in, the large room of joyous acceptance and fellowship, but

we must reach it by a narrow path walled in by gloomy rocks and trodden

with bleeding feet. The penitent knowledge of oar sin is the first step

towards the triumphant knowledge of Christ's righteousness as ours.

Only they who have called out in the agony of their souls, Lord, save

us, we perish,' have truly learned the love of God, and truly possess

the salvation that is in Christ.

II. Man's plea of Not Guilty.'

That such an answer should be given to such a charge is a strange,

solemn fact, which tragically confirms the true indictment. The effect

of all sin is to make us less conscious of its presence, as persons in

an unventilated room are not aware of its closeness. It is with

profound truth that the Apostle speaks of being hardened by the

deceitfulness' of sin. It comes to us in a cloud and enfolds us in

obscure mist. Like white ants, it never works in the open, but makes a

tunnel or burrows under ground, and, hidden in some piece of furniture,

eats away all its substance whilst it seems perfectly solid. The man's

perception of the standard of duty is enfeebled. We lose our sense of

the moral character of any habitual action, just as a man who has lived

all his life in a slum sees little of its hideousness, and knows

nothing of green fields and fresh air. Conscience is silenced by being

neglected. It can be wrongly educated and perverted, so that it may

regard sin as doing God's service; and the only judgment in which it

can be absolutely trusted is the declaration that it is right to do

right, while all its other decisions as to what is right may be biassed

by self-interest; but the force with which it pronounces its only

unalterable decision depends on the whole tenor of the life of the man.

The sins which are most in accordance with our characters, and are

therefore most deeply rooted in us, are those which we are least likely

to recognise as sins. So, the more sinful we are, the less we know it;

therefore there is need for a fixed standard outside of us. The light

on the deck cannot guide us; there must be the lighthouse on the rock.

This sad answer of the heart untouched by God's appeal prevents all

further access of God's love to that heart. That love can only enter

when the reply to its indictment is, I have despised Thy name.'

Let us not forget the New Testament modification of the divine

accusation. In Christ' is the Name of God fully and finally revealed to

men. For us who live in the blaze of the ineffable brightness of the

revelation, our attitude towards Him who brings it is the test of our

hallowing of the Name' which He brings. He Himself has varied Malachi's

indictment when He said, He that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent

Me.' Our sin is now to be measured by our under-estimate and neglect of

Him, and chiefly of His Cross. That Cross prevents our consciousness of

sin from becoming despair of pardon. Judas went out, and with bitter

weeping, himself ended his traitorous life. If God's last word to us

were, Ye have despised My Name,' and it sank into our souls, there

would be no hope for any of us. But the message which begins with the

universal indictment of sin passes into the message which holds forth

forgiveness and freedom as universal as the sin, and God hath concluded

all in unbelief that He may have mercy upon all.'

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BLEMISHED OFFERINGS

Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept

thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts.'--MALACHI i. 8.

A word of explanation may indicate my purpose in selecting this, I am

afraid, unfamiliar text. The Prophet has been vehemently rebuking a

characteristic mean practice of the priests, who were offering maimed

and diseased animals in sacrifice. They were probably dishonest as well

as mean, because the worshippers would bring sound beasts, and the

priests, for their own profit, slipped in a worthless animal, and kept

the valuable one for themselves. They had become so habituated to this

piece of economical religion, that they saw no harm in it, and when

they offered the lame and the sick and the blind for sacrifice they

said to themselves, It is not evil.' And so Malachi, with the sudden

sharp thrust of my text, tries to rouse their torpid consciences. He

says to them: Take that diseased creature that you are not ashamed to

lay on God's altar, and try what the governor'--the official appointed

by the Persian Kings to rule over the returned exiles--will think about

it. Will an offering of that sort be considered a compliment or an

insult? Do you think it will smooth your way or help your suit with

him? Surely God deserves as much reverence as the deputy of Artaxerxes.

Surely what is not good enough for a Persian satrap is not good enough

for the Lord of Hosts. Offer it to the governor, will he be pleased

with it? Will he accept thy person?'

Now, it seems to me that this cheap religion of the priests, and this

scathing irony of the Prophet's counsel need little modification to fit

us very closely. You will bear me witness, I think, that I do not often

speak to you about money. But I am going to try to bring out something

about the great subject of Christian administration of earthly

possessions from this text, because I believe that the Christian

consciousness of this generation does need a great deal of rousing and

instructing about this matter.

I. We note the startling and strange contrast which the text suggests.

The diseased lamb was laid without scruple or hesitation on God's

altar, and not one of these tricky priests durst have taken it to Court

in order to secure favour there. Generalise that, and it comes to

this--the gifts that we lavish on men are the condemnation of the gifts

that we bring to God; and further, we should be ashamed to offer to men

what we are not in the least ashamed to bring to God. Let me illustrate

in one or two points.

Let us contrast in our own consciences, for instance, the sort of love

that we give to one another with the sort of love that we bring to Him.

How strong, how perennially active, how delighting in sacrifice and

service, what a felt source of blessedness is the love that knits many

husbands and wives, many parents and children, many lovers and friends

together! And in dreadful contrast, how languid, how sporadic and

interrupted, how reluctant when called upon for service and sacrifice,

how little operative in our lives is the love we bring to God! We durst

not lay upon the altar of family affection, of wedded love, of true

friendship, a love of such a sort as we take to God and expect Him to

he satisfied with. It would be an insult if offered to the governor,'

but we think it good enough for the King of kings. Here a gushing

flood, there a straitened trickle coming drop by drop; here a glowing

flame that fills life with warmth and light, there a few dying embers.

Measure and contrast the love that is lavished by men upon one another,

and the love that is coldly brought to Him. And I think we must all bow

our heads penitently.

Contrast the trust that we put in one another, and the trust that we

direct to Him. In the one case it is absolute. I am as sure as I am of

my own existence that so-and-so will always be as true as steel to me,

and will never fail me, and whatever he, or she, does, or fails to do,

no shadow of suspicion, or mist of doubt, will creep across the

sunshine of our sky.' And in contrast to the firm grasp with which we

clasp an infirm human hand, there is a tremulous touch, scarcely a

grasp at all, which we lay upon the one Hand that is strong enough

always to be outstretched for our defence and our blessing. Contrast

your confidence in men, and your confidence in God. Are we not all

committing the absurdity of absolutely trusting that which has no

stability or stay, and refusing so to trust that which is the Rock of

Ages? God's faithfulness is absolute, our faith in it is tremulous.

Men's faithfulness is uncertain, our faith in it is entire.

We might contrast the submission and obedience with which we follow

those who have secured our confidence and evoked our love, as

contrasted with the rebellion, the reluctance, the self-will, which

come in to break and mar our submission to God. Men that will not take

Jesus Christ for their Master, and refuse to follow Him when He speaks,

will bind themselves to some human teacher, and enrol themselves as

disciples in some school of thought or science or philosophy, with a

submission so entire, that it puts to shame the submission which

Christians render to the Incarnate Truth Himself.

And so I might go on, all round the horizon of our human nature, and

signalise the difference that exists between the blemished sacrifices

which each part of our being dares to bring to God and expects Him to

accept, and the sacrifices, unblemished and spotless, which we carry to

one another.

But let me say a word more directly about the subject of which Malachi

is speaking. It seems to me that we may well take a very condemnatory

contrast between what we offer to God in regard to our administration

of earthly good, and what we offer on other altars. Contrast what you

give, for directly beneficent and Christian purposes, with what you

spend, without two thoughts, on your own comfort, indulgence,

recreation, tastes--sometimes doubtful tastes--and the like. Contrast

England's drink bill and England's missionary contribution. We spend

?10,000,000 on some wretched war, and some of you think it is cheap at

the price, and the whole contributions of English Christians to

missionary purposes in a twelvemonth do not amount to a tenth of that

sum. You offer that to the spread of Christ's kingdom. Offer it to your

Government,' and try to compound for your share of the ten millions

that you are going to spend in shells and gunpowder by the amount you

give to Christian missions, and you will very soon have the

tax-gatherer down on you. Will he be pleased with it?'

This one Missionary Society with which we are nominally connected has

an income of ?70,000 a year. I suppose that is about a shilling per

head from the members of our congregations. Of this congregation there

are many that never give us a farthing, except, perhaps, the smallest

coin in their pockets when the collecting-box comes round. I do not

suppose that there is one of us that applies the underlying principle

in our text, of giving God our best, to this work. I am not going to

urge you. It is my business now simply to state, as boldly and strongly

as I can, the fact; and I say with all sadness, with self-condemnation,

as well as bringing an indictment against my brethren, but with the

clearest conviction that I am not exaggerating in the smallest degree,

that the contrast between what we lavish on other things and what we

give for God's work in the world, is a shameful contrast, like that

other which the Prophet gibbeted with his indignant eloquence.

II. And now let me come to another point--viz., that we have here

suggested and implied the true law and principle on which all Christian

giving of all sorts is to be regulated.

And that is--give the best. The diseased animal was no more fit for the

altar of God than it was for the shambles of the viceroy. It was the

entire and unblemished one that would be accepted in either case. But

for us Christian people that general principle has to be expanded. Let

me do it in two or three sentences.

The foundation of all is the unspeakable Gift.' Jesus Christ has given

Himself, God has given His Son. And Jesus Christ and God, in giving,

gave up that we might receive. Do you believe that? Do you believe it

about yourself? If you do, then the next step becomes certain. That

gift, truly received by any man, will infallibly lead to a kindred

(though infinitely inferior) self-surrender. If once we come within the

circle of the attraction of that great Sun, if I might so say, it will

sweep us clean out of our orbit, and turn us into satellites reflecting

His light. To have self for our centre is death and misery, to have

Christ for our centre is life and blessedness. And the one power that

decentralises a man, and sweeps him into an orbit around Jesus, is the

faithful acceptance of His great gift. Just as some little State will

give up its independence in order to be blessedly absorbed into a great

Empire, on the frontiers of which it maintains a precarious existence,

so a man is never so strong, never so blessed, never so truly himself,

as when the might of Christ's sacrifice has melted down all his

selfishness, and has made it flow out in rivers of self-surrender,

self-absorption, self-annihilation, and so self-preservation. He that

loseth his life shall find it.'

Then the next step is that this self-surrender, consequent upon my

faithful acceptance of the Lord's surrender for me, changes my whole

conception as to what I call my possessions. If I, in the depths of my

soul, have yielded myself to Jesus Christ, which I shall have done if I

have truly accepted Him as yielding Himself for me, then the yielding

of self draws after it, necessarily, and without a question, a new

relation between me and all that I have and all that I can do.

Capacities, faculties, means, opportunities, powers of brain and heart

and mind, and everything else--they all belong to Him. As in old times

a nobleman came and put his hands between the King's hands, and

kneeling before him surrendered his lands, and all his property, to the

over-lord, and got them back again for his own, so we shall do, in the

measure in which we have accepted Christ as our Saviour and our Guide.

And so, because am His, I shall feel that I am His steward to

administer what He gives me, not for myself, but for men and for God.

Then there follows another thing, and that is, that Christian giving,

not of money only, but of money in a very eminent degree, is only right

and truly Christian when you give yourself with your gift. A great many

of us put our sixpence, or our half-crown, or our sovereign, into the

plate, and no part of ourselves goes with it, except a little twinge of

unwillingness to part with it. That is how they fling bones to dogs.

That is not how you have to give your money and your efforts to God and

God's cause. Farmers nowadays sow their seed-corn out of a machine with

a number of little conical receptacles at the back of it and a small

hole in the bottom of each, and as the thing goes bumping along over

the furrows, out they fall. That drill does as well as, and better

than, the hand of the sower scattering the seed, but it does not do

near as well in the Christian agriculture in sowing the seed of the

Kingdom. Machine-work will not do there; we have to have the sower's

hand, and the sower's heart with his hand, as he scatters the seed.

Brethren! apply the lesson to yourselves, and let your sympathies and

your prayers and your wishes to help go along with your gifts, if you

intend them to be of any good.

And there is another thing, and that is that, somehow or other, if not

in the individual gifts, at all events in their aggregate, there must

be present the fact of sacrifice. I will not offer unto the Lord burnt

offerings of that which doth cost me nothing,' said the old king. And

we do not give as we ought, unless our gifts involve some measure of

sacrifice. From many a subscription list some of the biggest donations

would disappear, like the top-writing in one of those old manuscripts

where the Gospel has been half-erased and written over with some

foolish legend, which vanishes when the detergent liquid is applied to

the parchment, if that thought were brought to bear upon it. God asks

how much is kept, not how much is given.

Now, dear friends, these are all threadbare, elementary, A.B.C.'

truths. Are they the alphabet of our stewardship and administration of

our possessions?

III. One last suggestion I would make on this text is that it brings

before us the possible blessing and possible grave results of right or

wrong Christian giving.

Will he be pleased with it? Or will he accept thy person?' Will the

governor think the hobbling creature, blind of an eye, and infected

with some sickness, to be a beautiful addition to his flock? Will it

help your suit with him? No!

It is New Testament teaching that our faithfulness in the

administration of earthly possessions of all sorts has a bearing on our

spiritual life. Remember our Lord's triple illustration of this

principle, when He speaks about faithfulness in that which is least,'

leading on to the possession of that which is the greatest; when He

speaks of faithfulness in regard to the unrighteous Mammon' leading on

to being intrusted with the true riches; when He speaks of faithfulness

in our administration of that which is another's--alien to ourselves,

and which may pass into the possession of a thousand more--leading on

to our firmer hold, and our deeper and fuller possession of the riches

which, in the deepest sense of the word, are our own. One very

important element in the development and advance of the religious life

is our right use of these earthly things. I have seen many a case in

which a man was far better when he was a poor man than he was when a

rich one, in which slowly, stealthily, certainly, the love of wealth

has closed round a man like an iron band round a sapling, and has

hindered the growth of his Christian character, and robbed him of the

best things. And, God be thanked! one has seen cases, too, in which, by

their Christian use of outward possessions, men have weakened the

dominion of self upon themselves, have learned the subordinate value of

the wealth that can be counted and detached from its possessor, and

have grown in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ. Dear friends, God has given all of us something in charge, the

faithful use of which is a potent factor in the growth of our Christian

characters.

It is New Testament teaching that our faithful administration of

earthly possessions has a bearing on the future. Remember what Jesus

Christ said, That when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting

habitations.' Remember what His Apostle says, Laying up in store for

themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may

lay hold on eternal life.' Let no fear of imperilling the great truth

of salvation by faith lead us to forget that the faith which saves

manifests its vitality and genuineness, by its effects upon our lives,

and that no small part of our lives is concerned with the right

acquisition and right use of these perishable outward gifts. And let us

take care that we do not, in our dread of damaging the free grace of

God, forget that although we do not earn blessedness, here or

hereafter, by gifts whilst we are living or legacies when we are dead,

the administration of money has an important part to play in shaping

Christian character, and the Christian character which we acquire here

settles our hereafter.

Brethren! we all need to revise our scale of giving, especially in

regard to missionary operations. And if we will do that at the foot of

the Cross, then we shall join the chorus, Worthy is the Lamb that was

slain to receive riches,' and we shall come to Him bringing our silver

and our gold with us,' rejoicing that He gives us the possibility of

sharing His blessedness, according to the word of the Lord Jesus which

He spake, It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

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A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this . . . out of the tents of

Jacob, . . . 14. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been

witness between thee and the wife of thy youth.'--MALACHI ii. 12, 14

(R.V.).

It is obvious from the whole context that divorce and foreign

inter-marriage were becoming increasingly prevalent in Malachi's time.

The conditions in these respects were nearly similar to that prevailing

in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is these sins which the Prophet

is here vehemently condemning, and for which he threatens to cut off

the transgressors out of the tents of Jacob, and to regard no more

their offerings and simulated worship. They might cover the altar of

the Lord with tears,' but the sacrifice which they laid upon it was

polluted by the sins of their daily domestic life, and therefore was

not regarded by Him any more.' Malachi is true to the prophetic spirit

when he denounces a religion which has the form of godliness without

its power over the practical life. But his sharp accusations have their

edge turned by the question, Wherefore?' which again calls out from the

Prophet's lips a more sharply-pointed accusation, and a solemner

warning that none should deal treacherously against the wife of his

youth,' for I hate putting away, saith the Lord.' We may dismiss any

further reference to the circumstances of the text, and regard it as

but one instance of man's way of treating the voice of God when it

warns of the consequences of the sin of man. Looked at from such a

point of view the words of our text bring before us God's merciful

threatenings and man's incredulous rejection of them.

I. God's merciful threatenings.

The fact of sin affects God's relation to and dealings with the sinner.

It does not prevent the flowing forth of His love, which is not drawn

out by anything in us, but wells up from the depths of His being, like

the Jordan from its source at Dan, a broad stream gushing forth from

the rock. But that love which is the outgoing of perfect moral purity

must necessarily become perfect opposition to its own opposite in the

sinfulness of man. The divine character is many-sided, and whilst to

the pure' it shows itself pure,' it cannot but be that to the froward'

it will show itself froward.' Man's sin has for its most certain and

dreadful consequence that, if we may so say, it forces God to present

the stern side of His nature which hates evil. But not merely does sin

thus modify the fact of the divine relation to men, but it throws men

into opposition in which they can see only the darkness which dwells in

the light of God. To the eye looking through a red tinted medium all

things are red, and even the crystal sea before the throne is a sea of

glass mingled with fire.'

No sin can stay our reception of a multitude of good gifts appealing to

our hearts and revealing the patient love of our Father in heaven, but

every sin draws after it as certainly as the shadow follows the

substance, evil consequences which work themselves out on the large

scale in nations and communities, and in the smaller spheres of

individual life. And surely it is the voice of love and not of anger

that comes to warn us of the death which is the wages of sin. It is not

God who has ordained that the soul that sinneth it shall die,' but it

is God who tells us so. The train is rushing full steam ahead to the

broken bridge, and will crash down the gulph and be huddled, a hideous

ruin, on the rocks; surely it is care for life that holds out the red

flag of danger, and surely God is not to be blamed if in spite of the

flag full speed is kept up and the crash comes.

The miseries and sufferings which follow our sins are self-inflicted,

and for the most part automatic. Whatsoever a man soweth, that'--and

not some other crop--will he also reap.' The wages of sin are paid in

ready money; and it is as just to lay them at God's door as it would be

to charge Him with inflicting the disease which the dissolute man

brings upon himself. It is no arbitrary appointment of God's that he

that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption'; nor is it

His will acting as that of a jealous despot which makes it inevitably

true that here and hereafter, Every transgression and disobedience

shall receive its just recompense of reward,' and that to be parted

from Him is death.

If then we rightly understand the connection between sin and suffering,

and the fact that the sorrows which are but the echoes of preceding

sins have all a distinctly moral and restorative purpose, we are

prepared rightly to estimate how tenderly the God who warns us against

our sins by what men call threatenings loves us while He speaks.

II. Man's rejection of God's merciful threatenings.

It is the great mystery and tragedy of life that men oppose themselves

to God's merciful warnings that all sin is a bitter, because it is an

evil, thing. He has to lament, I have smitten your children, and they

have received no correction.' The question Wherefore?' is asked in very

various tones, but none of them has in it the accent of true

conviction; and there is a whole world of difference between the lowly

petition, Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me,' and the curt,

self-complacent brushing aside of God's merciful threatenings in the

text. The last thing which most of us think of as the cause of our

misfortunes is ourselves; and we resent as almost an insult the word,

which if we were wise, we should welcome as the crowning proof of the

seeking love of our Father in heaven. We are more obstinate and foolish

than Balaam, who persisted in his purpose when the angel with the drawn

sword in his hand would have barred his way, not to the tree of life,

but to death. The awful mystery that a human will can, and the yet

sadder mystery that it does, set itself against the divine, is never

more unintelligible, never so stupid, and never so tragic as when God

says, Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?' and we say, Why need I die? I

will not turn.'

The Wherefore?' of our text is widely asked in the present day as an

expression of utter bewilderment at the miseries of humanity, both in

the wide area of this disordered world and in the narrower field of

individual lives. There are whole schools of so-called political and

social thinkers who have yet to learn that the one thing which the

world and the individual need is not a change of conditions or

environment, but redemption from sin. Man's sorrows are but a symptom

of his disease, and he is no more to be healed by tinkering with these

than a fever-stricken patient can be restored to health by treating the

blotches on his skin which tell of the disease that courses through his

veins.

But sometimes the question is more than an expression of bewilderment;

it conceals an arraignment of God's justice, or even a denial that

there is a God at all. There are men among us who hesitate not to avow

that the miseries of the world have rooted out of their minds a belief

in Him; and who point to all the ills under which humanity staggers as

conclusive against the ancient faith of a God of love. They, too,

forget that that love is righteousness, and that if there be sin in the

world and God above it, He must necessarily war against it and hate it.

Our right response to God's merciful threatenings is to ask this

question in the right spirit. We are not wise if we turn a deaf ear to

His warnings, or go on in a headlong course which He by His providences

declared to be dangerous and fatal. We use them as wise men should,

only if our Wherefore?' is asked in order to learn our evil, and having

learned it, to purge our bosoms of the perilous stuff by confession and

to seek pardon and victory in Christ. Then we shall know the secret of

the Lord' which is with them that fear Him'; and the mysteries that

still hang over our own histories and the world's destiny will have

shining down upon them the steadfast light of that love which seeks to

make men blessed by making them good.

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THE LAST WORD OF PROPHECY

Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before

Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even

the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall

come, saith the Lord of Hosts. 2. But who may abide the day of His

coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a

refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: 3. And He shall sit as a

refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi,

and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an

offering in righteousness. 4. Then shall the offering of Judah and

Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in

former years. 5. And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be

a swift Witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and

against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in

his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the

stranger from his right, and fear not Me, saith the Lord of Hosts. 6.

For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not

consumed. 7. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from

mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will

return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we

return? 8. Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say,

Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. 9. Ye are cursed

with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. 10. Bring

ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine

house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will

not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that

there shall not be room enough to receive it. 11. And I will rebuke the

devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your

ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the

field, saith the Lord of Hosts. 12. And all nations shall call you

blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of

Hosts.'--MALACHI iii. 1-12.

Deep obscurity surrounds the person of this last of the prophets. It is

questioned whether Malachi is a proper name at all. It is the Hebrew

word rendered in verse 1 of our passage My messenger,' and this has led

many authorities to contend that the prophecy is in fact anonymous, the

name being only a designation of office. Whether this is so or not, the

name, if it is a name, is all that we know about him. The tenor of his

prophecy shows that he lived after the restoration of the Temple and

its worship, and the sins which he castigates are substantially those

with which Ezra and Nehemiah had to fight. One ancient Jewish authority

asserts that he was Ezra; but the statement has no confirmation, and if

it had been correct, we should not have expected that such an author

would have been anonymous. This dim figure, then, is the last of the

mighty line of prophets, and gives strong utterance to the hope of

Israel'! One clear voice, coming from we scarcely know whose lips,

proclaims for the last time, He comes! He comes!' and then all is

silence for four hundred years. Modern critics, indeed, hold that the

bulk of the Psalter is of later date; but that contention has much to

do before it can be regarded as established.

The first point worthy of notice in this passage, then, is the

concentration, in this last prophetic utterance, of that element of

forward-looking expectancy which marked all the earlier revelation.

From the beginning, the selectest spirits in Israel had set their faces

and pointed their fingers to a great future, which gathered

distinctness as the ages rolled, and culminated in the King from

David's line, of whom many psalms sung, and in the suffering Servant of

the Lord, who shines out from the pages of the second part of Isaiah's

prophecy. This Messianic hope runs through all the Old Testament, like

a broadening river. They that went before cried, Hosanna! Blessed is He

that cometh.'

That hope gives unity to the Old Testament, whatever criticism may have

to teach about the process of its production. The most important thing

about the book is that one purpose informs it all; and the student who

misses the truth that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'

has a less accurate conception of the meaning and inter-relations of

the Old Testament than the unlearned who has accepted that great truth.

We should be willing to learn all that modern scholarship has to teach

about the course of revelation. But we should take care that the new

knowledge does not darken the old certainty that the prophets testified

beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and of the glory that should

follow,' Here, at the very end, stands Malachi, reiterating the

assurance which had come down through the centuries. The prophets, as

it were, had lit a beacon which flamed through the darkness. Hand after

hand had flung new fuel on it when it burned low. It had lighted up

many a stormy night of exile and distress. Now we can dimly see one

more, the last of his order, casting his brand on the fire, which leaps

up again; and then he too passes into the darkness, but the beacon

burns on.

The next point to note is the clear prophecy of a forerunner. My

messenger' is to come, and to prepare the way before Me.' Isaiah had

heard a voice calling, Prepare the way of the Lord,' and Malachi quotes

his words, and ascribes the same office to the messenger.' In the last

verses of his prophecy he calls this messenger Elijah the prophet.'

Here, then, we have a remarkable instance of a historical detail set

forth in prophecy. The coming of the Lord is to be immediately preceded

by the appearance of a prophet, whose function is to effect a moral and

religious reformation, which shall prepare a path for Him. This is no

vague ideal, but definite announcement of a definite fact, to be

realised in a historical personality. How came this half-anonymous Jew,

four hundred years beforehand, to hit upon the fact that the next

prophet in Israel would herald the immediate coming of the Lord? There

ought to be but one answer possible.

Another point to note is the peculiar relation between Jehovah and Him

who comes. Emphatically and broadly it is declared that Jehovah Himself

shall suddenly come to His temple'; and then the prophecy immediately

passes on to speak of the coming of the Messenger of the covenant,' and

dwells for a time exclusively on his work of purifying; and then again

it glides, without conscious breach of continuity or mark of

transition, into, And I will come near to you in judgment.' A

mysterious relationship of oneness and yet distinctness is here

shadowed, of which the solution is only found in the Christian truth

that the Word, which was Grod, and was in the beginning with God,

became flesh, and that in Him Jehovah in very deed tabernacled among

men. The expression the Messenger (or Angel) of the covenant' is

connected with the remarkable representations in other parts of the Old

Testament, of the Angel of Jehovah,' in whom many commentators

recognise a pre-incarnate manifestation of the eternal Word. That

Angel' had redeemed Israel from Egypt, had led them through the desert,

had been the Captain of the Lord's host.' The name of Jehovah was in

Him.' He it is whose coming is here prophesied, and in His coming

Jehovah comes to His temple.

We next note the aspect of the coming which is prominent here. Not the

kingly, nor the redemptive, but the judicial, is uppermost. With keen

irony the Prophet contrasts the professed eagerness of the people for

the appearance of Jehovah and their shrinking terror when He does come.

He is the Lord whom ye seek'; the Messenger of the covenant is He whom

ye delight in.' But all that superficial and partially insincere

longing will turn into dread and unwillingness to abide His scrutiny.

The images of the refiner's fire and the fullers' soap imply painful

processes, of which the intention is to burn out the dross and beat out

the filth. It sounds like a prolongation of Malachi's voice when John

the Baptist peals out his herald cry of one whose fan was in His hand,'

and who should plunge men into a fiery baptism, and consume with fire

that destroyed what would not submit to be cast into the fire that

cleansed. Nor should we forget that our Lord has said, For judgment am

I come into the world.' He came to purify'; but if men would not let

Him do what He came for, He could not but be their bane instead of

their blessing.

The stone is laid. If we build on it, it is a sure foundation; if we

stumble over it, we are broken. The double aspect and effect of the

gospel, which was meant only to have the single operation of blessing,

are clearly set forth in this prophecy, which first promises purging

from sin, so that not only the sons of Levi' shall offer in

righteousness, but that the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be

pleasant,' and then passes immediately to foretell that God will come

in judgment and witness against evil-doers. Judgment is the shadow of

salvation, and constantly attends on it. Neither Malachi nor the

Baptist gives a complete view of Messiah's work, but still less do they

give an erroneous one; for the central portion of both prophecies is

His purifying energy which both liken to cleansing fire.

That real and inward cleansing is the great work of Christ. It was

wrought on as many of His contemporaries as believed on Him, and for

such as did not He was a swift Witness against them. Nor are we to

forget that the prophecy is not exhausted yet; for there remains

another day of His coming' for judgment. The prophets did not see the

perspective of the future, and often bring together events widely

separated in time, just as, to a spectator on a mountain, distances

between points far away towards the horizon are not measurable. We have

to allow for foreshortening.

This blending of events historically widely apart is to be kept in view

in interpreting Malachi's prediction that the coming would result in

Judah's and Israel's offerings being pleasant unto the Lord as in

former years.' That prediction is not yet fulfilled, whether we regard

the name of Israel and the relation expressed in it as having passed

over to the Christian Church, or whether we look forward to that

bringing in of all Israel which Paul says will be as life from the

dead.' But by slow degrees it is being fulfilled, and by Christ men are

being led to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God.

The more directly Messianic part of this prophecy is closed in verse 6

by a great saying, which at once gives the reason for the coming and

for its severe aspect of witness against sin. The unchangeableness of

God, which is declared in His very name, guarantees the continued

existence of Israel. As Paul says in regard to the same subject, The

calling of God is without change of purpose' (on His part). But it is

as impossible that God should leave them to their sins, which would

destroy them, as that He should Himself consume them. Therefore He will

surely come; and coming, will deliver from evil. But they who refuse to

be so delivered will forfeit that title and the pledge of preservation

which it implies.

A new paragraph begins with verse 7, which is not closely connected

with the promises preceding. It recurs to the prevailing tone of

Malachi, the rebuke of negligence in attending to the legal obligations

of worship. That negligence is declared to be a reason for God's

withdrawal from them. But the return,' which is promised on condition

of their renewed obedience, can scarcely be identified with the coming

just foretold. That coming was to bring about offerings of

righteousness which should be pleasant to the Lord. This section (vs.

7-12) promises blessings as results of such offerings, and a return' of

Jehovah to His people contingent upon their return to Him. If the two

sections of this passage are taken as closely connected, this one must

describe the consequences of the coming. But, more probably, this

accusation of negligence and promise of blessing on a change of conduct

are independent of the previous verses. We, however, may fairly take

them as exhibiting the obligations of those who have received that

great gift of purifying from Jesus Christ, and are thereby consecrated

as His priests.

The key-word of the Christian life is sacrifice'--surrender, and that

to God. That is to be stamped on the inmost selves, and by the act of

the will, on the body as well. Yield yourselves to God, and your

members as instruments of righteousness to Him.' It is to be written on

possessions. Malachi necessarily keeps within the limits of the

sacrificial system, but his impetuous eloquence hits us no less. It is

still possible to rob God.' We do so when we keep anything as our own,

and use it at our own will, for our own purposes. Only when we

recognise His ownership of ourselves, and consequently of all that we

call ours,' do we give Him His due. All the slave's chattels belong to

the owner to whom he belongs. Such thorough-going surrender is the

secret of thorough possession. The true way to enjoy worldly goods is

to give them to God.

The lattices of heaven are opened, not to pour down, as of old, fiery

destruction, but to make way for the gentle descent of God's blessing,

which will more than fill every vessel set to receive it. This is the

universal law, not always fulfilled in increase of outward goods, but

in the better riches of communion and of larger possession in God

Himself. He suffers no man to be His creditor, but more than returns

our gifts, as legends tell of some peasant who brought his king a poor

tribute of fruits of his fields, and went away from the

presence-chamber with a jewel in his hand.

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THE UNCHANGING LORD

I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not

consumed.'--MALACHI iii. 6.

The scriptural revelations of the divine Name are always the basis of

intensely practical admonition. The Bible does not think it worth while

to proclaim the Name of God without building on the proclamation

promises or commandments. There is no mere theology' in Scripture; and

it does not speak of attributes,' nor give dry abstractions of

infinitude, eternity, omniscience, unchangeableness, but lays stress on

the personality of God, which is so apt to escape us in these abstract

conceptions, and thus teaches us to think of this personal God our

Father, as infinite, eternal, knowing all things, and never changing.

There is all the difference in our attitude towards the very same truth

if we think of the unchangeableness of God, or if we think that our

Father God is unchangeable. In our text the thought of Him as

unchanging comes into view as the foundation of the continuance of the

unfaithful sons of Jacob in their privileges and in their very lives. I

am the Lord,' Jehovah, the Self-existent, the Eternal whose being is

not under the limitations of succession and time. Because I am Jehovah,

I change not'; and because Jehovah changes not, therefore our finite

and mortal selves abide, and our infinite and sinful selves are still

the objects of His steadfast love.

Let us consider, first, the unchangeable God, and second, the

unchanging God as the foundation of our changeful lives.

I. The unchangeable God.

In the great covenant-name Jehovah there is revealed an existence which

reverses all that we know of finite and progressive being, or finite

and mortal being, or finite and variable nature. With us there are

mutations arising from physical nature. The material must needs be

subject to laws of growth and decadence. Our spiritual nature is

subject to changes arising from the advancement in knowledge. Our moral

nature is subject to fluctuations; circumstances play upon us, and

nothing continueth in one stay.' Change is the condition of life. It

means growth and happiness; it belongs to the perfection of creatures.

But the unchangeableness of God is the negation of all imperfection, it

is the negation of all dependence on circumstances, it is the negation

of all possibility of decay or exhaustion, it is the negation of all

caprice. It is the assurance that His is an underived, self-dependent

being, and that with Him is the fountain of light; it is the assurance

that, raised above the limits of time and the succession of events, He

is in the eternal present, where all things that were and are, and are

to come, stand naked and open. It is the assurance that the calm might

of His eternal will acts, not in spasms of successive volitions

preceded by a period of indecision and equilibrium between contending

motives, but is one continuous uniform energy, never beginning, never

bending, never ending; that the purpose of His will is the eternal

purpose which He hath purposed in Himself.' It is the assurance that

the clear vision of His infinite knowledge, from the heat of which

nothing is hid, has no stages of advancement, and no events lying

nebulous in a dim horizon by reason of distance, or growing in

clearness as they draw nearer, but which pierces the mists of futurity

and the veils of the past and the infinities of the present, and from

the beginning to the end knoweth all things.' It is the assurance that

the mighty stream of love from the heart of God is not contingent on

the variations of our character and the fluctuations of our poor

hearts, but rises from His deep well, and flows on for ever, the river

of God' which is full of water.' It is the assurance that round all the

majesty and the mercy which He has revealed for our adoration and our

trust there is the consecration of permanence, that we might have a

rock on which to build and never be confounded. Is there anywhere in

the past an act of His power, a word of His lip, a revelation of His

heart which has been a strength or a joy or a light to any man? It is

valid for me, and is intended for my use. He fainteth not, nor is

weary.' The bush burns and is not consumed. I will not alter the thing

that has gone out of my lips.' By two immutable things in which it is

impossible for God to lie, we have strong consolation.'

II. The unchanging God as the foundation of our changeful lives.

In the most literal sense our text is true. Because He lives we live

also. He is the same for ever, therefore we are not consumed. The

foundation of our being lies beyond and beneath all the mutable things

from which we are tempted to believe that we draw our lives, and is in

God. The true lesson to be drawn from the mutable phenomena of earth

is--heaven. The many links in the chain must have a staple. Reason

requires that behind all the fleeting shall be the permanent. There

must be a basis which does not partake of change. The lesson from all

the mutable creation is the immutable God.

Since God changes not, the life of our spirits is not at the mercy of

changing events. We look back on a lifetime of changing scenes through

which we have passed, and forward to a similar succession, and this

mutability is sad to many of us, and in some aspects sad to all, so

powerless we are to fix and arrest any of our blessings. Which we shall

keep we know not; we only know that, as certainly as buds and blossoms

of spring drop, and the fervid summer darkens to November fogs and

December frosts, so certainly we shall have to part with much in our

passage through life. But if we let God speak to us, the necessary

changes that come to us will not be harmful but blessed, for the lesson

that the mutability of the mutual is meant to impress upon us is, the

permanency of the divine, and our dependence, not on them, but on Him.

We may look upon all the world of time and chance and think that He who

Himself is unchanging changeth all. The eye of the tempest is a point

of rest. The point in the heavens towards which, according to some

astronomers, the whole of the solar system is drifting, is a fixed

point. If we depend on Him, then change is not all sad; it cannot take

God away, but it may bring us nearer to Him. We cannot be desolate as

long as we have Him. We know not what shall be on the morrow. Be it so;

it will be God's to-morrow. When the leaves drop we can see the rock on

which the trees grow; and when changes strip the world for us of some

of its waving beauty and leafy shade, we may discern more clearly the

firm foundation on which our hopes rest. All else changes. Be it so;

that will not kill us, nor leave us utterly forlorn as long as we hear

the voice which says, I am the Lord; I change not; therefore ye are not

consumed.'

God's purposes and promises change not, therefore our faith may rest on

Him, notwithstanding our own sins and fluctuations. It is this aspect

of the divine immutability which is the thought of our text. God does

not turn from His love, nor cancel His promises, nor alter His purposes

of mercy because of our sins. If God could have changed, the godless

forgetfulness of, and departure from, Him of the Sons of Jacob' would

have driven Him to abandon His purposes; but they still live--living

evidences of His long-suffering. And in that preservation of them God

would have them see the basis of hope for the future. So this is the

confidence with which we should cheer ourselves when we look upon the

past, and when we anticipate the future. The sins that have been in our

past have deserved that we should have been swept away, but we are here

still. Why are we? Why do we yet live? Because we have to do with an

unchanging love, with a faithfulness that never departs from its word,

with a purpose of blessing that will not be turned aside. So let us

look back with this thought and be thankful; let us look forward with

it and be of good cheer. Trust yourself, weak and sinful as you are, to

that unchanging love. The future will have in it faults and failures,

sins and shortcomings, but rise from yourself to God. Look beyond the

light and shade of your own characters, or of earthly events to the

central light, where there is no glimmering twilight, no night, no

variableness nor shadow of turning.' Let us live in God, and be strong

in hope. Forward, not backward, let us look and strive; so our souls,

fixed and steadied by faith in Him, will become in a manner partakers

of His unchangeableness; and we too in our degree will be able to say,

The Lord is at my side; I shall not be moved.'

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A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts.

But ye say, Wherein shall we return?'--MALACHI iii. 7 (R.V.).

In previous sermons we have considered God's indictment of man's sin

met by man's plea of not guilty,' and God's threatenings brushed aside

by man's question. Here we have the climax of self-revealing and

patient love in God's wooing voice to draw the wanderer back, met by

man's refusing answer. These three divine utterances taken together

cover the whole ground of His speech to us; and, alas! these three

human utterances but too truly represent for the most part our answers

to Him.

I. God's invitation to His wandering child.

The gracious invitation of our text presupposes a state of departure.

The child who is tenderly recalled has first gone away. There has been

a breach of love. Dependence has been unwelcome, and cast off with the

vain hope of a larger freedom in the far-off land; and this is the true

charge against us. It is not so much individual acts of sin but the

going away in heart and spirit from our Father God which describes the

inmost essence of our true condition, and is itself the source of all

our acts of sin. Conscience confirms the description. We know that we

have departed from Him in mind, having wasted our thoughts on many

things and not having had Him in the multitude of them in us. We have

departed from Him in heart, having squandered our love and dissipated

our desires on many objects, and sought in the multiplicity of many

pearls--some of them only paste--a substitute for the all-sufficient

simplicity of the One of great price. We have departed from Him in

will, having reared up puny inclinations and fleeting passions against

His calm and eternal purpose, and so bringing about the shock of a

collision as destructive to us as when a torpedo-boat crashes in the

dark against a battleship, and, cut in two, sinks.

The gracious invitation of our text follows, I am the Lord, I change

not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' Threatenings, and

the execution of these in acts of judgment, are no indication of a

change in the loving heart of God; and because it is the same, however

we have sinned against it and departed from it, there is ever an

invitation and a welcome. We may depart from Him, but He never departs

from us. Nor does He wait for us to originate the movement of return,

but He invites us back. By all His words in His threatenings and in His

commandments, as in the acts of His providence, we can hear His call to

return. The fathers of our flesh never cease to long for their prodigal

child's return; and their patient persistence of hope is but brief and

broken when contrasted with the infinite long-suffering of the Father

of spirits. We have heard of a mother who for long empty years has

nightly set a candle in her cottage window to guide her wandering boy

back to her heart; and God has bade us think more loftily of the

unchangeableness of His love than that of a woman who may forget, that

she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb.

II. Man's answer to God's invitation.

It is a refusal which is half-veiled and none the less real. There is

no unwillingness to obey professed, but it is concealed under a mask of

desiring a little more light as to how a return is to be accomplished.

There are not many of us who are rooted enough in evil as to be able to

blurt out a curt I will not' in answer to His call. Conscience often

bars the way to such a plain and unmannerly reply; but there are many

who try to cheat God, and who do to some extent cheat themselves, by

professing ignorance of the way which would lead them to His heart.

Some of us have learned only too well to raise questions about the

method of salvation instead of accepting it, and to dabble in theology

instead of making sure work of return. Some of us would fain substitute

a host of isolated actions, or apparent moral or religious observance,

for the return of will and heart to God; and all who in their

consciences answer God's call by saying, Wherein shall we return?' with

such a meaning are playing tricks with themselves, and trying to

hoodwink God.

But the question of our text has often a nobler origin, and comes from

the depths of a troubled heart. Not seldom does God's loving invitation

rouse the dormant conscience to the sense of sin. The man, lying broken

at the foot of the cliff down which he has fallen, and seeing the

brightness of God far above, has his heart racked with the question:

How am I, with lame limbs, to struggle back to the heights above? How

shall man be just with God?' All the religions of the world, with their

offerings and penances and weary toils, are vain attempts to make a way

back to the God from whom men have wandered, and that question, Wherein

shall we return?' is really the meaning of the world's vain seeking and

profitless effort.

God has answered man's question; for Christ is at once the way back to

God, and the motive which draws us to walk in it. He draws us back by

the magnetism of His love and sacrifice. We return to God when we cling

to Jesus. He is the highest, the tenderest utterance of the divine

voice; and when we yield to His invitation to Himself we return to God.

He calls to each of us, Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.' What

can we reply but, I come; let me never wander from Thee'?

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STOUT WORDS,' AND THEIR CONFUTATION

Your words have been stout against Me, saith the Lord: yet ye say, What

have we spoken so much against Thee? 14. Ye have said, It is vain to

serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and

that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts? 15. And now we

call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea,

they that tempt God are even delivered. 16. Then they that feared the

Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it;

and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared

the Lord, and that thought upon His name. 17. And they shall be Mine,

saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I

will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. 18.

Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked;

between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. IV. 1. For,

behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud,

yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that

cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave

them neither root nor branch. 2. But unto you that fear My Name shall

the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall

go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 3. And ye shall tread

down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet,

in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of Hosts. 4. Remember

ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for

all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. 5. Behold, I will send you

Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of

the Lord: 6. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the

children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come

and smite the earth with a curse.'--MALACHI iii. 13-18; iv. 1-6.

This passage falls into three parts,--the stout words' against God

which the Prophet sets himself to confute (verses 13-15); the prophecy

of the day which will show their falsehood (verse 16 to iv. 3); and the

closing exhortation and prediction (iv. 4-6).

I. The returning exiles had not had the prosperity which they had

hoped. So many of them, even of those who had served God, began to let

doubts darken their trust, and to listen to the whispers of their own

hearts, reinforced by the mutterings of others, and to ask: What is the

use of religion? Does it make any difference to a man's condition?'

Here had they been keeping God's charge, and going in black garments

before the Lord,' in token of penitence, and no good had come to them,

while arrogant neglect of His commandments did not seem to hinder

happiness, and they that work wickedness are built up.' Sinful lives

appeared to have a firm foundation, and to rise high and palace-like,

while righteous ones were like huts. Goodness seemed to spell ruin.

What was wrong in these stout words'? It was wrong to attach such worth

to external acts of devotion, as if these were deserving of reward. It

was wrong to suspend the duty of worship on the prosperity resulting

from it, and to seek profit' from keeping his charge.' Such religion

was shallow and selfish, and had the evils of the later Pharisaism in

germ in it. It was wrong to yield to the doubts which the apparently

unequal distribution of worldly prosperity stirred in their hearts. But

the doubts themselves were almost certain to press on Old Testament

believers, as well as on Old Testament scoffers, especially under the

circumstances of Malachi's time. The fuller light of Christianity has

eased their pressure, but not removed it, and we have all had to face

them, both when our own hearts have ached with sorrow and when

pondering on the perplexities of this confused world. We look around,

and, like the psalmist, see the prosperity of the wicked,' and, like

him, have to confess that our steps had wellnigh slipped' at the sight.

The old, old question is ever starting up. Doth God know?' The mystery

of suffering and the mystery of its distribution, the apparent utter

want of connection between righteousness and well-being, are still

formidable difficulties in the way of believing in a loving,

all-knowing, and all-powerful God, and are stock arguments of the

unbeliever and perplexities of humble faith. Never to have felt the

force of the difficulty is not so much the sign of steadfast faith as

of scant reflection. To yield to it, and still more, to let it drive us

to cast religion aside, is not merely folly, but sin. So thinks

Malachi.

II. To the stout words of the doubters is opposed the conversation of

the godly. Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another,'

nourishing their faith by believing speech with like-minded. The more

the truths by which we believe are contradicted, the more should we

commune with fellow-believers. Attempts to rob us should make us hold

our treasure the faster. Bold avowal of the faith is especially called

for when many potent voices deny it. And, whoever does not hear, God

hears. Faithful words may seem lost, but they and every faithful act

are written in His remembrance and will be recompensed one day. If our

names and acts are written there, we may well be content to accept

scanty measures of earthly good, and not be envious of the foolish' in

their prosperity.

Malachi's answer to the doubters leaves all other considerations which

might remove the difficulty unmentioned, and fixes on the one, the

prophecy of a future which will show that it is not all the same

whether a man is good or bad. It was said of an English statesman that

he called a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old,

and that is what the Prophet does. Christianity has taught us many

other ways of meeting the doubters' difficulty, but the sheet anchor of

faith in that storm is the unconquerable assurance that a day comes

when the righteousness of providence will be vindicated, and the

eternal difference between good and evil manifested in the fates of

men. The Prophet is declaring what will be a fact one day, but he does

not know when. Probably he never asked himself whether the day of the

Lord' was near or far off, to dawn on earth or to lie beyond mortal

life. But this he knew--that God was righteous, and that sometime and

somewhere character would settle destiny, and even outwardly it would

be good to be good. He first declares this conviction in general terms,

and then passes on to a magnificent and terrible picture of that great

day.

The promise, which lay at the foundation of Israel's national

existence, included the recognition of it as a peculiar treasure unto

Me above all people,' and Malachi looks forward to that day as the

epoch when God will show by His acts how precious the righteous are in

His sight. Not the whole Israel, but the righteous among them, are the

heirs of the old promise. It is an anticipation of the teaching that

they are not all Israel which are of Israel,' And it bids us look for

the fulfilment of every promise of God's to that great day of the Lord

which lies still before us all, when the gulf between the righteous and

the wicked shall be solemnly visible, wide, and profound. There have

been many days which I make' in the world's history, and in a measure

each of them has re-established the apparently tottering truth that

there is a God who judgeth in the earth, but the day of days is yet to

come.

No grander vision of judgment exists than Malachi's picture of the

day,' lurid, on the one hand, with the fierce flame, before which the

wicked are as stubble that crackles for a moment and then is grey

ashes, or as a tree in a forest fire, which stands for a little while,

a pillar of flame, and then falls with a crash, shaking the woods; and

on the otherhand, radiant with the early beams of healing sunshine, in

whose sweet morning light the cattle, let out from their pent-up

stalls, gambol in glee. But let us not forget while we admire the noble

poetry of its form that this is God's oracle, nor that we have each to

settle for ourselves whether that day shall be for us a furnace to

destroy or a sun to cheer and enlighten.

We can only note in a sentence the recurrence in verse 1 of the phrases

the proud' and they that work wickedness,' from verse 15 of chapter

iii. The end of those whom the world called happy, and who seemed

stable and elevated, is to be as stubble before the fire. We must also

point out that the sun of righteousness' means the sun which is

righteousness, and is not a designation of the Messiah. Nor can we

dwell on the picture of the righteous treading down the wicked, which

seems to prolong the previous metaphor of the leaping young cattle.

Then shall the upright have dominion over them in the morning.'

III. The final exhortation and promise point backwards and forwards,

summing up duty in obedience to the law, and fixing hope on a future

reappearance of the leader of the prophets. Moses and Elijah are the

two giant figures which dominate the history of Israel. Law and

prophecy are the two forms in which God spoke to the fathers. The

former is of perpetual obligation, the latter will flash up again in

power on the threshold of the day. Jesus has interpreted this closing

word for us. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah,' and the

purpose of his coming was to turn the hearts of the fathers to the

children' (Luke i. 16, 17); that is, to bring back the devout

dispositions of the patriarchs to the existing generations, and so to

bring the hearts of the children to their fathers,' as united with them

in devout obedience. If John's mission had succeeded, the curse' which

smote Israel would have been stayed. God has done all that He can do to

keep us from being consumed by the fire of that day. The Incarnation,

Life, and Death of Jesus Christ made a day of the Lord which has the

twofold character of that in Malachi's vision, for He is a saviour of

life unto life' or of death unto death,' and must be one or other to

us. But another day of the Lord is still to come, and for each of us it

will come burning as a furnace or bright as sunrise. Then the universe

shall discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that

serveth God and him that serveth Him not.'

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THE LAST WORDS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.'--MALACHI iv. 6.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.'--REVELATION

xxii. 21.

It is of course only an accident that these words close the Old and the

New Testaments. In the Hebrew Bible Malachi's prophecies do not stand

at the end; but he was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and

after him there were four centuries of silence.' We seem to hear in his

words the dying echoes of the rolling thunders of Sinai. They gather up

the whole burden of the Law and of the prophets; of the former in their

declaration of a coming retribution, of the latter in the hope that

that retribution may be averted.

Then, in regard to John's words, of course as they stand they are

simply the parting benediction with which he takes leave of his

readers; but it is fitting that the Book of which they are the close

should seal up the canon, because it stands as the one prophetic book

of the New Testament, and so reaches forward into the coming ages, even

to the consummation of all things. And just as Christ in His Ascension

was taken from them whilst His hands were lifted up in the act of

blessing, so it is fitting that the revelation of which He is the

centre and the theme should part from us as He did, shedding with its

final words the dew of benediction on our upturned heads.

I venture, then, to look at these significant closing words of the two

Testaments as conveying the spirit of each, and suggesting some

thoughts about the contrast and the harmony and the order that subsist

between them.

I. I ask you, first, to notice the apparent contrast and the real

harmony and unity of these two texts.

Lest I come and smite the land with a curse.' That last awful word does

not convey, in the original, quite the idea of our English word curse.'

It refers to a somewhat singular institution in the Mosaic Law

according to which things devoted, in a certain sense, to God were

deprived of life. And the reference historically is to the judgments

that were inflicted upon the nations that occupied the land before the

Israelitish invasion, those Canaanites and others who were put under

the ban' and devoted to utter destruction. So, says my text, Israel,

which has stepped into their places, may bring down upon its head the

same devastation; and as they were swept off the face of the land that

they had polluted with their iniquities, so an apostate and

God-forgetting Judah may again experience the same utter destruction

falling upon them. If instead of the word curse' we were to substitute

the word destruction,' we should get the true idea of the passage.

And the thought that I want to insist upon is this, that here we have

distinctly gathered up the whole spirit of millenniums of divine

revelation, all of which declare this one thing, that as certainly as

there is a God, every transgression and disobedience receives, and must

receive, its just recompense of reward.

That is the spirit of law, for law has nothing to say, except, Do this,

and thou shalt live; do not this, and thou shalt die.'

And then turn to the other. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with

you all.' What has become of the thunder? All melted into dewy rain of

love and pity and compassion. Grace is love that stoops; grace is love

that foregoes its claims, and forgives sins against itself. Grace is

love that imparts, and this grace, thus stooping, thus pardoning, thus

bestowing, is a universal gift. The Apostolic benediction is the

declaration of the divine purpose, and the inmost heart and loftiest

meaning of all the words which from the beginning God hath spoken is

that His condescending, pardoning, self-bestowing mercy may fall upon

all hearts, and gladden every soul.

So there seems to emerge, and there is, a very real and a very

significant contrast. I come and smite the earth with a curse' sounds

strangely unlike The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.'

And, of course, in this generation there is a strong tendency to dwell

upon that contrast and to exaggerate it, and to assert that the more

recent has antiquated the more ancient, and that now the day when we

have to think of and to dread the curse that smites the earth is past,

because the true Light now shineth.'

So I ask you to notice that beneath this apparent contrast there is a

real harmony, and that these two utterances, though they seem to be so

diverse, are quite consistent at bottom, and must both be taken into

account if we would grasp the whole truth. For, as a matter of fact,

nowhere are there more tender utterances and sweeter revelations of a

divine mercy than in that ancient law with its attendant prophets. And

as a matter of fact, nowhere, through all the thunderings and

lightnings of Sinai, are there such solemn words of retribution as

dropped from the lips of the Incarnate Love. There is nothing anywhere

so dreadful as Christ's own words about what comes, and must come, to

sinful men. Is there any depth of darkness in the Old Testament

teaching of retribution half as deep, half as black, and as terrible,

as the gulf that Christ opens at your feet and mine? Is there anything

so awful as the threatenings of Infinite Love?

And the same blending of the widest proclamation of, and the most

perfect rejoicing confidence in, the universal and all-forgiving love

of God, with the teaching of the sharpest retribution, lies in the

writings of this very Apostle about whose words I am speaking. There

are nowhere in Scripture more solemn pictures than those in that book

of the Apocalypse, of the inevitable consequences of departure from the

love and the faith of God, and John, the Apostle of love, is the

preacher of judgment as none of the other writers of the New Testament

are.

Such is the fact, and there is a necessity for it. There must be this

blending; for if you take away from your conception of God the absolute

holiness which hates sin, and the rigid righteousness which apportions

to all evil its bitter fruits, you have left a maimed God that has not

power to love but is nothing but weak, good-natured indulgence.

Impunity is not mercy, and punishment is never the negation of perfect

love, but rather, if you destroy the one you hopelessly maim the other.

The two halves are needed in order to give full emphasis to either.

Each note alone is untrue; blended, they make the perfect chord.

II. And now, let me ask you to look with me at another point, and that

is, the relation of the grace to the punishment.

Is it not love which proclaims judgment? Are not the words of my first

text, if you take them all, merciful, however they wear a surface of

threatening? Lest I come.' Then He speaks that He may not come, and

declares the issue of sin in order that that issue may never need to be

experienced by us that listen to Him. Brethren! both in regard to the

Bible and in regard to human ministrations of the Gospel, it is

all-important, as it seems to me at present, to insist that it is the

cruellest kindness to keep back the threatenings for fear of darkening

the grace; and that, on the other hand, it is the truest tenderness to

warn and to proclaim them. It is love that threatens; tis mercy to tell

us that the wrath will come.

And just as one relation between the grace and the retribution is that

the proclamation of the retribution is the work of the grace, so there

is another relation--the grace is manifested in bearing the punishment,

and in bearing it away by bearing it. Oh! there is no adequate measure

of what the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is except the measure of the

smiting destruction from which He frees us. It is because every

transgression receives its just recompense of reward, because the wages

of sin is death, because God cannot but hate and punish the evil, that

we get our truest standard of what Christ's love is to every soul of

us. For on Him have met all the converging rays of the divine

retribution, and burnt the penal fire into His very heart. He has come

between every one of us, if we will, and that certain incidence of

retribution for our evil, taking upon Himself the whole burden of our

sin and of our guilt, and bearing that awful death which consists not

in the mere dissolution of the tie between soul and body, but in the

separation of the conscious spirit from God, in order that we may stand

peaceful, serene, untouched, when the hail and the fire of the divine

judgment are falling from the heavens and running along the earth. The

grace depends for all our conceptions of its glory, its tenderness, and

its depth, on our estimate of the wrath from which it delivers.

So, dear brethren, remember, if you tamper with the one you destroy the

other; if there be no fearful judgment from which men need to be

delivered, Christ has borne nothing for us that entitles Him to demand

our hearts; and all the ascriptions of praise and adoration to Him, and

all the surrender of loving hearts, in utter self-abandonment, to Him

that has borne the curse for us, fade and are silent. If you strike out

the truth of Christ's bearing the results of sin from your theology,

you do not thereby exalt, but you fatally lower the love; and in the

interests of the loftiest conceptions of a divine loving-kindness and

mercy that ever have blessed the world, I beseech you, be on your guard

against all teachings that diminish the sinfulness of sin, and that ask

again the question which first of all came from lips that do not

commend it to us--Hath God said?' or advance to the assertion--Ye shall

not surely die.' If I come to smite the earth with a curse' ceases to

be a truth to you, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' will fade away

for you likewise.

III. Now, still further, let me ask you to consider, lastly, the

alternative which these texts open for us.

I believe that the order in which they stand in Scripture is the order

in which men generally come to believe them, and to feel them. I am

old-fashioned enough and narrow enough to believe in conversion; and to

believe further that, as a rule, the course through which the soul

passes from darkness into light is the course which divine revelation

took: first, the unveiling of sin and its issues, and then the glad

leaping up of the trustful heart to the conception of redeeming grace.

But what I seek briefly to suggest now is, not only the order of

manifestation as brought out in these words, but also the alternative

which they present to us, one branch or other of which every soul of

you will have to experience. You must have either the destruction or

the grace. And, more wonderful still, the same coming of the same Lord

will be to one man the destruction, and to another the manifestation

and reception of His perfect grace. As it was in the Lord's first

coming, He is set for the rise and the fall of many in Israel.' The

same heat softens some substances and bakes others into hardness. A bit

of wax and a bit of clay put into the same fire--one becomes liquefied

and the other solidified. The same light is joy to one eye and torture

to another. The same pillar of cloud was light to the hosts of Israel,

and darkness and dismay to the armies of Egypt. The same Gospel is a

savour of life unto life, or of death unto death,' by the giving forth

of the same influences killing the one and reviving the other; the same

Christ is a Stone to build upon or a Stone of stumbling; and when He

cometh at the last, Prince, King, Judge, to you and me, His coming

shall be prepared as the morning; and ye shall have a song as when one

cometh with a pipe to the mountain of the Lord'; or else it shall be a

day of darkness and not of light. He comes to me, to you; He comes to

smite or He comes to glorify.

Oh, brethren! do not believe that God's threatenings are wind and

words; do not let teachings that sap the very foundations of morality

and eat all the power out of the Gospel persuade you that the solemn

words, The soul that sinneth it shall die,' are not simple verity.

And then, my brethren, oh! then, do you turn yourselves to that dear

Lord whose grace is magnified in this most chiefly, that He hath borne

our sins and carried our sorrows'; and taking Him for your Saviour,

your King, your Shield, your All, when He cometh it will be life to

you; and the grace that He imparts will be heaven for ever more.

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ST. MATTHEW

Chaps. I to VIII

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MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son

of Abraham. 2. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob

begat Judas and his brethren; 3. And Judas begat Phares and Zara of

Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; 4. And Aram begat

Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; 5. And

Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed

begat Jesse; 6. And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king

begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; 7. And Solomon

begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; 8. And Asa

begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; 9. And

Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;

10. And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat

Josias; 11. And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time

they were carried away to Babylon: 12. And after they were brought to

Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; 13.

And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat

Azor; 14. And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat

Eliud; 15. And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and

Matthan begat Jacob; 16. And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of

whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.'--MATT. i. 1-16.

To begin a Gospel with a genealogy strikes us modern Westerns as

singular, to say the least of it. To preface the Life of Jesus with an

elaborate table of descents through forty-one generations, and then to

show that the forty-second had no real connection with the forty-first,

strikes us as irrelevant. Clause after clause comes the monotonous

begat,' till the very last, when it fails, and we read instead: Jacob

begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus.' So, then,

whoever drew up this genealogy knew that Jesus was not Joseph's son.

Why, then, was he at the pains to compile it, and why did the writer of

the Gospel, if he was not the compiler, think it important enough to

open his narrative? The answer lies in two considerations: the ruling

idea of the whole Gospel, that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah,

David's son and Israel's king; and the characteristic ancient idea that

the full rights of sonship were given by adoption as completely as by

actual descent. Joseph was of the house and lineage of David,' and

Joseph took Mary's first-born as his own child, thereby giving Him

inheritance of all his own status and claims. Incidentally we may

remark that this presentation of Jesus as Joseph's heir seems to favour

the probability that He was regarded as His reputed father's first-born

child, and so disfavours the contention that the brethren' of Jesus

were Joseph's children by an earlier marriage. But, apart from that,

the place of this table of descent at the beginning of the Gospel makes

it clear that the prophecies of the Messiah as David's son were by the

Hebrew mind regarded as adequately fulfilled by Jesus being by adoption

the son of Joseph, and that such fulfilment was regarded as important

by the evangelist, not only for strengthening his own faith, but for

urging his Lord's claims on his fellow-countrymen, whom he had chiefly

in view in writing. Such external fulfilment' goes but for little with

us, who rest Jesus' claims to be our King on more inward and spiritual

grounds, but it stands on the same level as other similar fulfilments

of prophecy which meet us in the Gospels; such as the royal entry into

Jerusalem, riding upon an ass,' in which the outward, literal

correspondence is but a finger-post, pointing to far deeper and truer

realisation of the prophetic ideal in Jesus.

What, then, did the evangelist desire to make prominent by the

genealogy? The first verse answers the question. We need not discuss

whether the title, The book of the generations of Jesus Christ,'

applies to the table of descent only, or to the whole chapter. The

former seems the more probable conclusion, but the point to note is

that two facts are made prominent in the title; viz. that Jesus was a

true Jew, forasmuch as He also is a son of Abraham,' and was the true

king of Israel, being the Son of David,' of whom prophets had spoken

such great things. If we would take in the full significance of

Matthew's starting-point, we must set by the side of it those of the

other three evangelists. Mark plunges at once, without preface or

allusion to earlier days, into the stir and stress of Christ's work,

slightly touching on the preliminaries of John's mission, the baptism

and temptation, and hurrying on to the call of the fishermen, and the

busy scenes on the Sabbath in Capernaum. Luke has his genealogy as well

as Matthew, but, in accordance with his universalistic, humanist tone,

he traces the descent from far behind Abraham, even to Adam, which was

the son of God,' and he works in the reverse order to Matthew, going

upwards from Joseph instead of downwards to him. John soars high above

all earthly birth, and begins away back in the Eternities before the

world was, for his theme is not so much the son of Joseph who was the

son of David and the son of Abraham, or the son of Adam who was the son

of God, as the Eternal Word' who was with God,' and entered into

history and time when He became flesh.' We must take all these points

of view together if we would understand any of them, for they are not

contradictory, but complementary.

The purpose of Matthew's genealogy is further brought out by its

symmetrical arrangement into three groups of fourteen generations

each--an arrangement not arrived at without some free manipulating of

the links. The sacred number is doubled in each case, which implies

eminent completeness. Each of the three groups makes a whole in which a

tendency runs out to its goal, and becomes, as it were, the

starting-point for a new epoch. So the first group is pre-monarchical,

and culminates in David the King. Israel's history is regarded as all

tending towards that consummation. He is thought of as the first King,

for Saul was a Benjamite, and had been deposed by divine authority. The

second group is monarchical, and it, too, has a drift, as it were,

which is tragically marked by the way in which its last stage is

described: Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time that

they were carried away to Babylon.' Josiah had four successors, all of

them phantom kings;--Jehoahaz, who reigned for three months and was

taken captive to Egypt; his brother Jehoiakim, a puppet set up by

Egypt, knocked down by Babylon; his son Jehoiachin, who reigned eleven

years and was carried captive to Babylon; and last, Zedekiah, Josiah's

son, under whom the ruin of the kingdom was completed. The genealogy

does not mention the names of these ill-starred brethren,' partly

because it traces the line of descent through Jeconias' or Jehoiachin,

partly because it despises them too much. A line that begins with David

and ends with such a quartet! This was what the monarchy had run out

to: David at the one end and Zedekiah at the other, a bright fountain

pouring out a stream that darkened as it flowed through the ages, and

crept at last into a stagnant pond, foul and evil-smelling. Then comes

the third group, and it too has a drift. Unknown as the names in it

are, it is the epoch of restoration, and its bright consummate flower'

is Jesus who is called the Christ.' He will be a better David, will

burnish again the tarnished lustre of the monarchy, will be all that

earlier kings were meant to be and failed of being, and will more than

bring the day which Abraham desired to see, and realise the ideal to

which prophets and righteous men' unconsciously were tending, when as

yet there was no king in Israel.

A very significant feature of this genealogical table is the insertion

in it, in four cases, of the names of the mothers. The four women

mentioned are Thamar a harlot, Rachab another, Ruth the Moabitess, and

Bathsheba; three of them tainted in regard to womanly purity, and the

fourth, though morally sweet and noble, yet mingling alien blood in the

stream. Why are pains taken to show these blots in the scutcheon'? May

we not reasonably answer--in order to suggest Christ's relation to the

stained and sinful, and to all who are strangers from the covenants of

promise.' He is to be a King with pity and pardon for harlots, with a

heart and arms open to welcome all those who were afar off among the

Gentiles. The shadowy forms of these four dead women beckon, as it

were, to all their sisters, be they stained however darkly or distant

however remotely, and assure them of welcome into the kingdom of the

king who, by Jewish custom, could claim to be their descendant.

The ruling idea of the genealogy is clearly though unostentatiously

shown by the employment of the names Jesus Christ' and Christ,' while

throughout the rest of this Gospel the name used habitually is Jesus.

In verse 1 we have the full title proclaimed at the very beginning;

then in verse 16, Jesus who is called Christ' repeats the proclamation

at the end of the genealogy proper, while verse 17 again presents the

three names with which it began as towering like mountain peaks,

Abraham, David, and--supreme above the other two, the dominant summit

to which they led up, we have once more Christ.' Similarly the

narrative that follows is of the birth of Jesus Christ.' That name is

never used again in this Gospel, except in one case where the reading

is doubtful; and as for the form Jesus who is called Christ,' by which

He is designated in the genealogy itself, the only other instance of it

is on the mocking lips of Pilate, while the uniform use of Jesus in the

body of this Gospel is broken only by Peter in his great confession,

and in, at most, four other instances. Could the purpose to assert and

establish, at the very outset, His Messianic, regal dignity, as the

necessary pre-supposition to all that follows, be more clearly shown?

We must begin our study of His life and works with the knowledge that

He, of whom these things are about to be told, is the King of Israel.

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THE NATIVITY

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as His mother Mary

was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with

child of the Holy Ghost. 19. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man,

and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her

away privily. 20. But while he thought on these things, behold, the

angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou

son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which

is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. 21. And she shall bring forth

a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people

from their sins. 22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled

which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23. Behold, a

virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall

call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. 24.

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had

bidden him, and took unto him his wife: 25. And knew her not till she

had brought forth her first-born son: and he called His name

JESUS.'--MATT. i. 18-25.

Matthew's account of the Nativity sets Joseph in the foreground. His

pain and hesitation, his consideration for Mary, the divine

communication to him, and his obedience to it, embarrassing as his

position must have been, take up larger space than the miracle of the

birth itself. Probably in all this we have an unconscious disclosure of

the source of the evangelist's information. At all events, he speaks as

if from Joseph's point of view. Luke, on the other hand, has most to

say about Mary's maidenly wonder and meek submission, her swift

hurrying to find help from a woman's sympathy, as soon as the Angel of

the Annunciation had spoken, and the hymn of exultation which

Elisabeth's salutation heartened her to pour forth. Surely that

narrative could have come from none but her meek and faithful lips? The

two accounts beautifully supplement each other, and give two vivid

pictures of these two devout souls, each sharply tried in a different

fashion, each richly blessed by variously moulded obedience. Joseph

took up his burden, and Mary hers, because God had spoken and they

believed.

The shock to Joseph of the sudden discovery, crashing in on him after

he was bound to Mary, and in what would else have been the sweet

interval of love and longing before they came together,' is delicately

and unconsciously brought out in verse 18. She was found'--how the

remembrance of the sudden disclosure, blinding and startling as a

lightning flash, lives in that word! And how the agony of perplexity as

to the right thing to do in such a cruel dilemma is hinted at in the

two clauses that pull in opposite directions! As a just man' and her

husband,' Joseph owed it to righteousness and to himself not to ignore

his betrothed's condition; but as her lover and her husband, how could

he put her, who was still so dear to him, to public shame, some of

which would cloud his own name? To put her away' was the only course

possible, though it racked his soul, and to do it privily' was the last

gift that his wounded love could give her. No wonder that these things'

kept him brooding sadly on them, nor that his day's troubled thinkings

coloured his sleeping hours! The divine guidance, which is ever given

to waiting minds, was given to him by the way of a dream, which is one

of the Old Testament media of divine communications, and occurs with

striking frequency in this and the following chapter, there being three

recorded as sent to Joseph and one to the Magi. It is observable,

however, that to Joseph it is always the'or an angel of the Lord' who

appears in the dream, whereas the dream only is mentioned in the case

of the Magi. The difference of expression may imply a difference in the

manner of communication. But in any case, we need not wonder that

divine communications were abundant at such an hour, nor shall we be

startled, if we believe in the great miracle of the Word's becoming

flesh, that a flight of subsidiary miracles, like a bevy of attendant

angels, clustered round it.

The most stupendous fact in history is announced by the angel chiefly

as the reason for Joseph's going on with his marriage. Surely that

strange inversion of the apparent importance of the two things speaks

for the historical reliableness of the narrative. The purpose in hand

is mainly to remove his hesitation and point his course, and he is to

take Mary as his wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the

Holy Ghost.' Could the superstitious veneration of a later age', which

is supposed to have originated the story of a supernatural birth, have

spoken so? As addressed to Joseph, tortured with doubts of Mary and

hesitations as to his duty, the sequence of the two things is

beautifully appropriate, otherwise it is monstrous. The great mystery,

which lies at the foundation of Christianity, is declared in the fewest

and simplest words. That He who is to show God to men, and to save them

from their sins, must be born of a woman, is plainly necessary. Because

the children are partakers of flesh and blood,' He also must take part

of the same.' That He must be free from the taint in nature, which

passes down to all who are born of the will of the flesh or of man,' is

no less obviously requisite. Both requirements are met in the

supernatural birth of Jesus, and unless both have been met, He is not,

and cannot be, the world's saviour. Nor is that supernatural birth less

needful to explain His manifestly sinless character than it is to

qualify Him for His unique office. The world acknowledges that in Him

it finds a man without blemish and without spot. How comes He to be

free from the flaws which, like black streaks in Parian marble, spoil

the noblest characters? Surely if, after millions of links in the

chain, which have all been of mingled metal, there comes one of pure

gold, it cannot have had the same origin as the others. It is part of

the chain, the Word was made flesh'; but it has been cast and moulded

in another forge, for it is that which is conceived in her is of the

Holy Ghost.'

She shall bring forth a son.' The angel does not say, a son to thee,'

but yet Joseph was to assume the position of father, and by naming the

child to acknowledge it as his. The name of Jesus or Joshua was borne

by many a Jewish child then. There was a Jesus among Paul's entourage.

It recalled the warrior leader, and, no doubt, was often given to

children in these days of foreign dominion by fathers who hoped that

Israel might again fight for freedom. But holier thoughts were to be

Joseph's, and the salvation from God which was expressed by the name

was to be of another kind than Joshua had brought. It was to be

salvation from sin and from sins. This child was to be a leader too, a

conqueror and a king, and the mention of His people,' taken in

connection with Joseph's having been addressed as the son of David,' is

most significant. He, too, is to have a subject people, and the

deliverance which He is to bring is not political or to be wrested from

Rome by the sword, but inward, moral, and spiritual, and therefore to

be effected by moral and spiritual weapons.

It is the evangelist, not the angel, who points to Isaiah's prophecy.

He does so with a certain awe, as he thinks of the greatness of all

these things'. Undoubtedly the Hebrew word rendered in Matthew, after

the Septuagint, virgin', does not necessarily imply the full meaning of

that word; and as undoubtedly the prophecy, as it stands in Isaiah,

pointed to an event to occur in the immediate future; yet it is clear,

from the further development of the prophecy by Isaiah, and especially

from the fourfold name given to the child in Isaiah ix. 6, and the

glorious dominion there foretold for Him, that Isaiah conceives of Him

as the Messiah. And, since any fulfilment' of the glowing prophecies

attached to the Child were, in Isaiah's time, but poor and partial, the

great Messianic hope was necessarily trained to look further down the

stream of time. He who should fill the r�le set forth was yet to come.

Matthew believed that it was completely filled by Jesus, and we know

that he was right. The fulfilment does not depend on the question

whether or not the idea of Virginity is contained in the Hebrew word,

but on the correspondence between the figure seen by the prophet in the

golden haze of his divinely quickened imagination, and the person to be

described in the gospel, and we know that the correspondence is

complete. The name Immanuel, to be given to the prophetic child,

breathed the certainty that in God with us' Israel would find the

secret of its charmed existence, even while an Ahaz was on the throne.

The name takes on a deeper meaning when applied to Him to whom alone it

in fullest truth belongs. It proclaims that in Jesus God dwells among

us, and it lays bare the ground of the historical name Jesus, for only

by a man who is one of ourselves, and in whom God is with us, can we be

saved from our sins. The one Name is the deep, solid foundation, the

other is the fortress refuge built upon it. He is Jesus, because He is

Immanuel.

How different the world and his own life looked to Joseph when he woke!

Hesitations and agonising doubts of his betrothed's purity had vanished

with the night, and, instead of the dread that her child would be the

offspring of shame, had come a divinely given certainty that it was a

holy thing.' In the rush of the sudden revulsion, all that was involved

would not be clear, but the duty that lay nearest him was clear, and

his obedience was as swift as it was glad. He believed, and his faith

took the burden off him, and brought back the sweet relations which had

seemed to be rent for ever. The Birth was foretold by the angel in a

single clause, it is recorded by the evangelist in another. In both

cases, Mary's part and Joseph's are set side by side (she shall bring

forth . . . and thou shalt call: she had brought forth . . . and he

called'), and the birth itself is in verse 25 recorded mainly in its

bearing on Joseph's marital relations. Could such a perspective in the

narrative be conceived of from any other point of view than Joseph's?

We do not enter on the controversy as to whether that till' and the

expression first-born' shut us up to the conclusion that Joseph and

Mary had children. The words are not decisive, and probably opinions

will always differ on the point. Medi�vally-minded persons will reject

with horror the notion that Jesus had brethren in the proper sense of

the word, while those who believe that the perfect woman is a happy

wife and mother, will not feel that it detracts from Mary's sacredness,

nor from her purity, to believe that she had other children than her

first-born Son'.

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THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME

. . . Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from

their sins.'--MATT. i. 21.

I. THE historical associations of the name.

It was a very common Jewish name, and of course was given in memory of

the great leader who brought the hosts of Israel to rest in the

promised land.

There is no sharper contrast conceivable than between Joshua and Jesus.

The contrast and the parallel are both most significant.

(a) The contrast.

Joshua is perhaps one of the least interesting of the Old Testament

men; a mere soldier, fit for the fierce work which he had to do, rough

and hard, ready and prompt, of an iron will and a brave heart. The one

exhortation given him when he comes to the leadership is be strong and

of a good courage,' and that seems to have been the main virtue of his

character. The task he had to do was a bloody one, and thoroughly he

did it. The difficulties that have been found in the extermination of

the Canaanites may be met by considerations of the changed atmosphere

between then and now, and of their moral putrescence. But no

explanation can make the deed other than terrible, or the man that did

it other than fierce and stern. No traits of chivalrous generosity are

told of him, nothing that softens the dreadfulness of war. He showed no

touch of pity or compunction, no lofty, statesmanlike qualities,

nothing constructive; he was simply a rough soldier, with an iron hand

and an iron heel, who burned and slew and settled down his men in the

land they had devastated.

The very sharpness of the contrast in character is intended to be felt

by us. Put by the side of this man the image of Jesus Christ, in all

His meekness and gentleness.

Does not this speak to us of the profound change which He comes to

establish among men?

The highest ideal of character is no longer the rough soldier, the

strong man, but the man of meekness, and gentleness, and patience.

How far the world yet is from understanding all that is meant in the

contrast between the first and the second bearers of the name!

We have done with force, and are come into the region of love. There is

no place in Christ's kingdom for arms and vulgar warfare.

The strongest thing is love, armed with celestial armour. Truth and

meekness and righteousness' are our keenest-edged weapons--this is true

for Christian morals; and for politics in a measure which the world has

not yet learned.

Put up thy sword into its sheath,'

(b) The parallel.

It is not to be forgotten that the work which the soldier did in type

is the work which Christ does. He is the true Moses who leads us

through the wilderness. But also He is the Captain who will bring us

into the mountain of His inheritance.

But besides this, we too often forget the soldier-like virtues in the

character of Christ.

We have lost sight of these very much, but certainly they are present

and most conspicuous. If only we will look at our Lord's life as a real

human one, and apply the same tests and terms to it which we do to

others, we shall see these characteristics plainly enough.

What do we call persistence which, in spite of all opposition, goes

right on to the end, and is true to conscience and duty, even to death?

What do we call the calmness which forgets self even in the agonies of

pain on the cross? What do we call the virtue which rebukes evil in

high places and never blanches nor falters in the utterance of

unwelcome truths?

Daring courage.

Promptness of action.

All conspicuous in Jesus.

Iron will.

It has become a commonplace thing now to say that the bravery which

dares to do right in the face of all opposition is higher than that of

the soldier who flings away his life on the battlefield. The soldiers

of peace are known now to deserve the laurel no less than the heroes of

war.

But who can tell how much of the modern world's estimate of the

superiority of moral courage to mere brute force is owing to the

history of the life of Christ?

We find a further parallel in the warfare through which He conquers for

us the land.

His own struggle (I have overcome'), and the lesson that we too must

fight, and that all our religious life is to be a conflict. It is easy

to run off into mere rhetorical metaphor, but it is a very solemn and a

very practical truth which is taught us, if we ponder that name of the

warrior Leader borne by our Master as explained to us by Himself in His

words, In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I

have overcome the world.'

Ps. cx. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the

beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of

thy youth.'

II. The significance of the name.

Joshua means God is Saviour. As borne by the Israelitish leader, it

pointed both him and the people away from him to the unseen and

omnipotent source of their victory, and was in one word an explanation

of their whole history, with all its miracles of deliverance and

preservation of that handful of people against the powerful nations

around. It taught the leader that he was only the lieutenant of an

unseen Captain. It taught the soldiers that they got not the land in

possession by their own arms, but because He had a favour unto them.'

1. God as Saviour appears in highest manifestation in Jesus.

I do not now mean in regard to the nature of the salvation, but in

regard to the relation between the human and the divine. Joshua was the

human agent through which the divine will effected deliverance, but, as

in all helpers and teachers, he was but the instrument. He could not

have said, I lead you, I give you victory.' His name taught him that he

was not to come in his own name. But he shall save'--not merely God

shall save through him. And his people'--not the people of God'

All this but points to the broad distinction between Christ and all

others, in that God, the Saviour, is manifest in Him as in none other.

We are not detracting from the glory of God when we say that Christ

saves us.

Christ's consciousness of being Himself Salvation is expressed in many

of His words. He makes claims and puts forward His own personality in a

fashion that would be blasphemy in any other man, and yet all the while

is true to His name, God is the Saviour.'

The paradox which lies in these earliest words, the great gulf between

the name and the interpretation on the angel's lips, is only solved

when we accept the teaching which tells us that in that Word made flesh

and dwelling among us, we behold God manifest in the flesh,' and in

Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.'

The name guards us, too, from that very common error of thinking of

Christ as if He were more our Saviour than God is. We are not without

need of this warning. Christ does not bend the divine will to love, is

not more tender than our Father God.

2. The Salvation brought by Jesus is in its nature the loftiest.

It is with strong emphasis that the angel defines the sphere of

salvation as being their sins.' The Messianic expectation had been

degraded as it flowed through the generations, as some pure stream

loses its early sparkle, and gathers scum on its surface from filth

flung into it by men. Mere deliverance from the Roman yoke was all the

salvation that the mass wanted or expected, and the tragedy of the

Cross was foreshadowed in this prophecy which declares an inward

emancipation from sin as the true work of Mary's unborn Son.

We can discern the Jewish error in externalising and materialising the

conception of salvation, but many of us repeat it in essence. What is

the difference between the Jew who thought that salvation was

deliverance from Rome, and the Christian' who thinks that it is

deliverance not from sin but from its punishment?

We have to think of a liberation from sin itself, not merely from its

penalties. This thought has been often obscured by preachers, and often

neglected by Christians, in whom selfishness and an imperfect

understanding of the gospel have too often made salvation appear as

merely a means of escape from impending suffering. All deep knowledge

of what Sin is teaches us that it is its own punishment, and that the

hell of hell is to be under the dominion of evil.

3. God's people are His people.

Israel was God's portion--and Joshua was but their leader for a time.

But the people of God are the people of Christ.

The way by which we become the people of Jesus is simply by faith in

Him.

III. The usage of the name.

It was a common Jewish name, but seems to have been almost abandoned

since then by Jews from abhorrence, by Christians from reverence.

The Jewish fanatic who during the siege stalked through Jerusalem

shrieking, Woe to the city', and, as he fell mortally wounded, added,

and to myself also,' was a Jesus. There is a Jesus in Colossians.

We find it as the usual appellation in the Gospels, as is natural. But

in the Epistles it is comparatively rare alone.

The reason, of course, is that it brings mainly before us the human

personality of Jesus. So when used alone in later books it emphasises

this: This same Jesus shall so come'. We see Jesus, made a little,

etc.'

Found in frequent use by two classes of religionists-- Unitarian and

Sentimental.

We should seek to get all the blessing out of it, and to dwell, taught

by it, on the thoughts of His true manhood, tempted, our brother, bone

of our bone.

We should beware of confining our thoughts to what is taught us by that

name. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Even with thoughts of His

lovely human character let us blend thoughts of His Messianic office

and of His divine nature. We shall not see all the beauty of Jesus

unless we know Him as the Christ, the Son of the Highest.

And besides the name written on His vesture and his thigh, He bears a

name which no man knoweth but Himself. Beyond our grasp is His

uncommunicable name, His deep character, but near to us for our love

and for our faith is all we need to know. That name which He bore in

His humiliation He bears still in His glory, and the name which is

above every name, and at which every knee shall bow, is the name by

which Jewish mothers called their children, and through eternity we

shall call His name Jesus because He hath finally and fully saved us

from our sins.

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THE FIRST-FRUITS OF THE GENTILES

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Jud�� in the days of Herod the

king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 2.

Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His

star in the east, and are come to worship Him. 3. When Herod the king

had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the

people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. 5.

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Jud桺 for thus it is written

by the prophet, 6. And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the

least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor,

that shall rule my people Israel. 7. Then Herod, when he had privily

called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star

appeared. 8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search

diligently for the young child; and when ye have found Him, bring me

word again, that I may come and worship Him also. 9. When they had

heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the

east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young

child was. 10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding

great joy. 11. And when they were come into the house, they saw the

young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him:

and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him

gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. 31. And being warned of God

in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into

their own country another way.'--MATT. ii. 1-12.

Matthew's Gospel is the gospel of the King. It has a distinctly Jewish

colouring. All the more remarkable, therefore, is this narrative, which

we should rather have looked for in Luke, the evangelist who delights

to emphasise the universality of Christ's work. But the gathering of

the Gentiles to the light of Israel was an essential part of true

Judaism, and could not but be represented in the Gospel which set forth

the glories of the King. There is something extremely striking and

stimulating to the imagination in the vagueness of the description of

these Eastern pilgrims. Where they came from, how long they had been in

travelling, how many they were, what was their rank, whither they

went,--all these questions are left unsolved. They glide into the

story, present their silent adoration, and as silently steal away.' The

tasteless medi涡l tradition knows all about them: they were three;

they were kings. It knows their names; and, if we choose to pay the

fee, we can see their bones to-day in the shrine behind the high altar

in Cologne Cathedral. How much more impressive is the indefiniteness of

our narrative! How much more the half sometimes is than the whole!

I. We see here heathen wisdom led by God to the cradle of Christ. It is

futile to attempt to determine the nationality of the wise men.

Possibly they were Persian magi, whose astronomy was half astrology and

wholly observation, or they may have travelled from some place even

deeper in the mysterious East; but, in any case, they were led by God

through their science, such as it was. The great lesson which they

teach remains the same, however subordinate questions about the nature

of the star and the like may be settled. The sign in the heavens and

its explanation were both of God, whether the one was a natural

astronomical phenomenon or a supernatural light, and the other the

conclusions of their science or the inbreathing of His wisdom. So they

stand as representatives of the great truth, that, outside the limits

of the people of revelation, God moved on hearts and led seeking souls

to the light in divers manners. These silent strangers at the cradle

carry on the line of recipients of divine messages outside of Israel

which is headed by the mysterious Melchizedek, and includes that seer

who saw a star arise out of Jacob, and which, in a wider sense,

includes many a poet of their own' and many a patient seeker after

truth. Human wisdom, as it is called, is God's gift. In itself, it is

incomplete. It raises more questions than it solves. Its highest

function is to lead to Jesus. He is Lord of the sciences, as of all

that belongs to man; and notwithstanding all the appearances to the

contrary at present, we may be sure that the true scope of all

knowledge, and its certain end, is to lead to the recognition of Him.

May we not see in these Magi, too, a type of the inmost meaning of

heathen religions? These faiths have in them points of contact with

Christianity. Besides their falsehoods and abhorrent dark cruelties and

lustfulnesses, they enshrine confessions of wants which the King in the

cradle alone can supply. Modern unbelieving teachers tell us that

Christianity and they are alike products of man's own religious

faculty. But the truth is that they are confessions of need, and

Christianity is the supply of the need. At bottom, their language is

the question of the wise men, Where is He?' Their sacrifices proclaim

man's need of reconciliation. Their stories of the gods coming down in

the likeness of men, speak of his longing for a manifestation of God in

the flesh. The cradle and the cross are Heaven's answer to their sad

questions.

II. The contrast of these Gentiles' joyful eagerness to worship the

King of Israel, with the alarm of his own people at the whisper of his

name, is a prelude of the tragedy of his rejection, and the passing

over of the kingdom to the Gentiles. Notice the bitter and scornful

emphasis of that Herod the king' coming twice in the story in immediate

connection with the mention of the true King. He was a usurper,

caricaturing the true Monarch. Like most kings who have had great'

tacked to their names, his greatness consisted mainly in supreme

wickedness. Fierce, lustful, cunning, he had ruled without mercy; and

now he was passing through the last stages of an old age without love,

and ringed round by the fears born of his misdeeds. He trembles for his

throne, as well he may, when he hears of these strangers. Probably he

does not suppose them mixed up with any attempt to unseat him, or he

would have made short work of them; unless, indeed, his craft led him

to dissemble until he had sucked them dry and had used them to lead him

to the infant rival, after which he may have meant to murder them too.

But he recognises in their question the familiar tones of the Messianic

hope, which he knew was ever lying like glowing embers in the breast of

the nation, ready to be blown into a flame. His creatures in the

capital might disown it, but he knew in his secret heart that he was a

usurper, and that at any moment that smouldering hatred and hope might

burn up him and his upstart monarchy. An evil conscience is full of

fears, and shrinks from the good news that the King of all is at hand.

His coming should be joy, as is that of the bursting spring or the rosy

dawn; but our own sin makes the day of the Lord darkness and not light,

and sends us cowering into our corners to escape these searching eyes.

Nor less tragic and perverted is the trouble which all Jerusalem'

shared with Herod. The Magi had naturally made straight for the

capital, expecting to find the new-born King there, and His city

jubilant at His birth. But they traverse its streets only to meet none

who know anything about Him. They must have felt like men who see,

gleaming from far on some hill-side, a brightness which has all

vanished when they reach the spot, or like some of our mission converts

brought to our Christian country,' and seeing how little our people

care for the Christ whom they have learned to know. Their question

indicates utter bewilderment at the contrast between what they had seen

in the East and what they found in Jerusalem. They must have been still

more perplexed if they observed the effect of their question. Nobody in

Jerusalem knew anything about their King. That was strange enough. But

nobody wanted Him. That was stranger still. A prophet had long ago

called on Zion' to rejoice greatly' because thy King cometh'; but now

anxiety and terror cloud all faces. It was partly because self-interest

bound many to Herod, and partly because they all feared that any

outburst of Messianic hopes would lead to fresh cruelties inflicted by

the relentless, trembling tyrant. So the Magi, who represented the

eagerness of Gentile hearts grasping the new hopes, and claiming some

share in Israel's Messiah, saw His own people careless, and, if moved

from their apathy, alarmed at the unwelcome tidings that the promise

which had shone as a great light through dreary centuries was at last

on the eve of fulfilment. So the first page on the gospel history

anticipates the sad issue: They shall come from the east, and from the

west,' and you yourselves shall be thrust out.

III. Then followed the council of the theologians, with its solemn

illustration of the difference between orthodoxy and life, and of the

utter hollowness of mere knowledge, however accurate, of the letter of

Scripture. The questions as to the composition of this gathering of

authorities, and of the variations between the quotation of Micah in

the text and its form in the Hebrew, do not concern us now. We may

remark on the evident purpose of God to draw forth the distinct

testimony of the ecclesiastical rulers to the place of Messiah's birth,

and on the fact that this, the most ancient interpretation of the

prophecy, is vouched to us by existing Jewish sources as having been

the traditional one until the exigencies of controversy with Christians

pushed it aside Notice the different conduct of Herod, the Magi, and

the scribes. The first is entangled in a ludicrous contradiction. He

believes that Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, and yet he determines

to set himself against the carrying out of what he must, in some sense,

believe to be God's purpose. If this infant is God's Messiah, I will

kill Him,' is surely as strange a piece of policy gone mad as ever the

world heard of. But it is perhaps not more insane than much of our own

action, when we set ourselves against what we know to be God's will,

and consciously seek to thwart it. A child trying to stop a train by

pushing against the locomotive has as much chance of success. The

scribes, again, are quite sure where Messiah is to be born; but they do

not care to go and see if He is born. These strangers, to whom the hope

of Israel is new, may rush away, in their enthusiasm, to Bethlehem; but

they, to whom it had lost all gloss, and become a commonplace, would

take no such trouble. Does not familiarity with the gospel produce much

the same effect on many of us? Might not the joy and the devotion,

however ignorant if compared with our better knowledge of the letter,

which mark converts from heathenism, shame the tepid zeal and unruffled

composure of us, who have heard all about Christ, till it has become

wearisome? Here on the very threshold of the gospel story is the first

instance of the lesson taught over and over again in it, namely, the

worthlessness of head knowledge, and the constant temptation of

substituting it for that submission of the will and that trust of the

heart, which alone make religion. The most impenetrable armour against

the gospel is the familiar and lifelong knowledge of the gospel.

The Magi, on their part, accept with implici confidence the

information. They have followed the star; they have now a more sure

word, and they will follow that. They were led by their science to

contact with the true guide. He that is faithful in his use of the

dimmest light will find his light brighten. The office of science is

not to lead to Christ by a road discovered by itself, but to lead to

the Word of God which guides to Him. Not by accident, nor without

profound meaning, did both methods of direction unite to point these

earnest seekers, who were ready to follow every form of guidance, to

the Monarch whom they sought.

IV. Herod's crafty counsel need not detain us. We have already remarked

on its absurdity. If the child were not Messiah, he need not have been

alarmed; if it were, his efforts were fruitless. But he does not see

this, and so plots and works underground in the approved fashion of

kingcraft. His reason for questioning the Magi as to the time was, of

course, to get an approximate age of the infant, that he might know how

widely to fling his net. He did it privately, so as to keep any inkling

of his plot secret till he had secured the further information which he

hoped to delude them into bringing. Like other students and recluses

fed upon great thoughts, the Magi were very easily deceived. Good,

simple people, they were no match for Herod, and told him all without

suspicion, and set off to look for the child, quite convinced of his

good faith; while he, no doubt, breathed more freely when he had got

them out of Jerusalem, and congratulated himself on having done a good

stroke of business in making them his spies. He was probably within a

few months of his death. The world was already beginning to slip from

him. But before he passed to his account, he too was brought within

sight of the Christ, and summoned to yield his usurped dominion to the

true King How different this old man's reception of the tidings of the

nativity from Simeon's! His hostility, in its cruelty, its blundering

cunning and its impotence, is a type of the relations of the

world-power to Christ. The rulers take counsel together, . . . against

His anointed. . . . He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.'

V. We have next the discovery of the King. The reappearing star becomes

the guide to the humble house. It cannot have been an ordinary star,

for no such could have pointed the precise house among all the homes of

Bethlehem. The burst of joy at its reappearance vividly suggests the

perplexity of the recent days, and the support given by its welcome

beam to the faith which had accepted, not perhaps without some

misgivings caused by the indifference of the teachers, the teaching of

the prophecy. Surely that faith would be more than ever tried by the

humble poverty in which they found the King. The great paradox of

Christianity, the manifestation of divinest power in uttermost

weakness, was forced upon them in its most startling form. This child

on His mother's lap, with none to do Him homage, and in poverty which

makes our costly gifts seem out of place,--this is the King, whose

coming set stars ablaze and drew us hither. Is this all?' Their Eastern

religions were not unfamiliar with the idea of incarnation. Their

Eastern monarchies were splendid. They must have felt a shock at the

contrast between what they expected and what they found. They learned

the lesson which all have to learn, that Christ disappoints as well as

fulfils the expectations of men, that the mightiest power is robed in

lowliness, and the highest manifestation of God begins with a helpless

infant on His mother's knee. These wise men were not repelled. Our

modern wise men are not all as wise as they.

VI. Adoration and offering follow discovery. The worship' of the Magi

cannot have been adoration in the strict sense. We attribute too much

to them if we suppose them aware of Christ's divinity. But it was

clearly more than mere reverence for an earthly King. It hovered on the

border-line, and meant an indefinite submission and homage to a

partially discerned superiority, in which the presence of God was in

some sort special. The old medi涡l interpretation of the offered gold

as signifying recognition of His kingship, the frankincense of His

deity, and the myrrh of His death, is so beautiful that one would fain

wish it true. But it cannot pretend to be more than a fancy. We are on

surer ground when we see in the gifts the choicest products of the land

of the Magi, and learn the lesson that the true recognition of Christ

will ever be attended by the spontaneous surrender to Him of our best.

These gifts would not be of much use to Mary. If there had been a

practical man' among the Magi, he might have said, What is the use of

giving such things to such a household?' And it would have been

difficult to have answered. But love does not calculate, and the

impulse which leads to consecrate the best we have to Him is acceptable

in His sight.

This earliest page in the gospel history is a prophecy of the latest.

These are the first-fruits of the Gentiles unto Christ. They bear in

their hands a glass which showeth many more,' who at last will come

like them to the King of the whole earth. They shall bring gold and

incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord.' There were

Gentiles at the cradle and at the cross. The Magi learned the lessons

which the East especially needed, of power in weakness, royalty in

lowliness. Incarnation not in monstrous forms or with destructive

attributes, but in feeble infancy which passes through the ordinary

stages of development. The Greeks who sought to see Jesus when near the

hour of His death, learned the lesson for want of which their nation's

culture rotted away, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and

die, it abideth alone' So these two groups, one at the beginning, the

other at the end, one from the mysterious East, the other from the

progressive and cultured West, received each a half of the completed

truth, the gospel of Incarnation and Sacrifice, and witness to the

sufficiency of Christ for all human needs, and to the coming of the

time when all the races of men shall gather round the throne to which

cradle and cross have exalted Him, and shall recognise in Him the

Prince of all the kings of the earth, and the Lamb slain for the sins

of the world.

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THE KING IN EXILE

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to

Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and His

mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word:

for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him. 14. When he arose,

he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into

Egypt; 15. And was there until the death of Herod; that it might be

fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of

Egypt have I called My son. 16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was

mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew

all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof,

from two years old and under, according to the time which he had

diligently enquired of the wise men. 17. Then was fulfilled that which

was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, 18. In Rama was there a voice

heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for

her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. 19. But

when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth to a dream

to Joseph in Egypt, 20. Saying, Arise, and take the young child and His

mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought

the young child's life. 21. And he arose, and took the young child and

His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22. But when he heard

that Archelaus did reign in Jud�� in the room of his father Herod, he

was afraid to go thither; notwithstanding, being warned of God in a

dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: 23. And he came and

dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was

spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.'--MATT. ii.

13-23.

Delitzsch, in his New Investigations into the Origin and Plan of the

Canonical Gospels, tries to show that Matthew is constructed on the

plan of the Pentateuch. The analogy is somewhat strained, but there are

some striking points of correspondence. He regards Matthew i. to ii. 15

as answering to Genesis. It begins with the genesis of Jesus,' and, as

the Old Testament book ends with the migration of Israel to Egypt, so

this section of the Gospel ends with the flight of the Holy Family to

the same land. The section from ii. 15 to the end of the Sermon on the

Mount answers to Exodus, and here the parallels are striking. The

murder of the innocents at Bethlehem by Herod answers to Pharaoh's

slaughter of Hebrew children; the Exodus, to the return to Nazareth;

the call of Moses at the bush, to the baptism of Jesus; the forty years

in the wilderness, to the forty days' desert hunger and temptation; and

the giving of the law from Sinai, to the Sermon on the Mount, which

contains the new law for the kingdom of God. Without supposing that the

evangelist moulded his Gospel on the plan of the Pentateuch, we cannot

but see that there is a real parallel between the beginnings of the

national life of Israel and the commencement of the life of Christ. Our

present text brings this parallel into great prominence. It is divided

into three sections, each of which has for its centre an Old Testament

prophecy.

I. We have first the flight into Egypt and the prophecy fulfilled

therein. The appearance of the angel seems to have followed immediately

on the departure of the Magi. They were succeeded by a loftier visitor

from a more distant land, coming to lay richer gifts and a more

absolute homage at the infant's feet. The angel of the Lord, who had

already eased Joseph's honest and troubled heart by disclosing the

secret of Mary's child, comes again. To Mary he had appeared waking;

her meek eyes could look on him, and her obedient ears hear his voice.

But Joseph, who stood on a lower spiritual level, needed the lower form

of revelation by dream, which betokens less susceptibility in the

recipient and less importance in the communication. It is the only form

appropriate to his power of receiving, and four times it is mentioned

as granted to him. The warning to the wise men was also conveyed in a

dream. We can scarcely help recalling the similar prominence of dreams

in the history of the earlier Joseph, whose life was moulded in order

to bring Israel into Egypt.

The angel speaks of the young child and His mother,' reversing the

order of nature, as if he bowed before the infant, Lord of men as well

as angels,' and would deepen the lesson which so many signs gathering

round the cradle were teaching the silent Joseph,--that Mary and he

were but humble ministers of the child's. The partial instruction

given, and the darkness left lying over the future, are in accordance

with the methods of God's leading, which always gives light enough for

the next duty, and never for the one after that. The prompt and precise

obedience of Joseph to the heavenly vision is emphatically expressed by

the verbal repetition of the command in the account of its fulfilment.

There was no hesitation, no reluctance, no delay. On the very night, as

it appears, of the dream, he rose up; the simple preparations were

quickly made; the wise men's gifts would help to sustain their modest

wants, and before the day broke they were on their road. How strangely

blended in our Lord's life, from the very dawning, are dignity and

lowliness, glory and reproach! How soon His brows are crowned with

thorns! The adoration of the Magi witnesses to Him as the King of

Israel and the hope of the world. The flight of which that adoration

was the direct cause witnesses no less clearly to Him as despised and

rejected, tasting sorrow in His earliest food, and not having where to

lay His head.

But the most important part of the story is the connection which

Matthew discerns between it and Hosea's words. In their original place

they are not a prophecy at all, but simply a part of a tender

historical r�sum� of God's dealings with Israel, by which the prophet

would touch his contemporaries' hearts into penitence and trust. How,

then, is the evangelist justified in regarding them as prophetic, and

in looking on Christ's flight as their fulfilment? The answer is to be

found in that analogy between the national and the personal Israel

which runs through all the Old Testament, and reaches its greatest

clearness in the second part of Isaiah's prophecies. Jesus Christ was

what Israel was destined and failed to be, the true Servant of God, His

Anointed, His Son, the medium of conveying His name to the world. The

ideal of the nation was realised in Him. His brief stay in Egypt served

the very same purpose in His life which their four hundred years there

did in theirs,--it sheltered Him from enemies, and gave Him room to

grow. Just as the infant nation was unawares fostered in the very lap

of the country which was the symbol of the world hostile to God, so the

infant Christ was guarded and grew there. The prophecy is a prophecy

just because it is history; for the history was all a shadow of the

future, and He is the true Israel and the Son of God. It would have

been fulfilled quite as really, that is to say, the parallel between

Christ and the nation would have been as fully carried out, if His

place of refuge had been in some other land; but the precise outward

identity helps to point the parallel to unobservant eyes. The great

truth taught by it of the typical relation between the nation and the

Person is the key to large regions of Old Testament history and

prophecy. Rightly, therefore, does Matthew call our attention to this

pregnant fact, and bid us see in the divine selection of the place

where the young life of God manifest in the flesh was sheltered, a

fulfilment of prophecy. Egypt was the natural asylum of every fugitive

from Palestine, but a deeper reason bent the steps of the Holy Family

to the shelter of its palms and temples.

II. The slaughter of the innocents, and the prophecy fulfilled

therein.--Herod's fierce rage, enflamed by the dim suspicion that these

wily Easterns have gone away laughing in their sleeves at having

tricked him, and by the dread that they may be stirring up armed

defenders of the infant King, is in full accord with all that we know

of him. The critics who find the story of the massacre unhistorical,'

because Josephus does not mention it, must surely be very anxious to

discredit the evangelist, and very hard pressed for grounds to do so,

or they would not commit themselves to the extraordinary assumption

that nothing is to be believed outside of the pages of Josephus. A

splash or two of blood of poor innocents,' more or less, found on the

Idumean tyrant's bloody skirts, could be of little consequence in the

eyes of those who knew what a long saturnalia of horrors his reign had

been; and the number of the infants under two years old in such a tiny

place as Bethlehem would be small, so that their feeble wail might well

fail to reach the ears even of contemporaries. But there is no reason

for questioning the simple truth of a story so like the frantic cruelty

and sleepless suspicion of the grey-headed tyrant, who was stirred to

more ferocity as the shades of death gathered about him, and power

slipped from his rotting hands. Of all the tragic pictures which

Scripture gives of a godless old age, burning with unquenchable hatred

to goodness and condemned to failure in all its antagonism, none is

touched with more lurid hues than this. What a contrast between the

king de jure, the cradled infant; and the king de facto, going down to

his loathsome death, which all but he longed for! He may well stand as

a symbol of the futility of all opposition to Christ the King.

The fate of these few infants is a strange one. In their brief lives

they have won immortal fame. They died for the Christ whom they never

knew. These lambs were slain for the sake of the Lamb who lived while

Little flowers of martyrdom,

Roses by the whirlwind shorn,'

That quotation, from Jeremiah xxxi. 16, requires a brief consideration.

The original is still less a prophecy than was the passage in Hosea. It

is a highly imaginative and grandly weird personification of the mighty

mother of three of the tribes, stirring in her tomb, and lifting up the

shrill lamentation of Eastern grief over her children carried away to

captivity. That hopeless wail from the grave by Bethlehem is heard as

far north as Ramah, beyond Jerusalem. Once again, says Matthew, the

same grief might have been imaginatively heard from the long-silent

tomb so near the scene of this pitiful tragedy. And the second

ancestral weeping was fuller of woe than the bitterness of that first

lament; for this bewailed the actual slaughter of innocents, and wept

the miseries that so soon gathered round the coming of the King, so

long waited for. Seeing that the prophet's words do not describe a

fact, but are a poetical personification to convey simply the idea of

calamity, which might make the dead mother weep, the word fulfilled'

can obviously be applied to them only in a modified and somewhat

elastic sense, and is sufficiently defended if we recognise in the

slaughter of these children a woe which, though small in itself, yet,

when considered in reference to its inflicter, a usurping king of the

Jews, and in reference to its occasion, the desire to slay the God-sent

King, and in reference to its innocent victims, and in reference to its

place as first of the tragic series of martyrdoms for Messiah, was

heavy with a sorer burden of national disaster, when seen by eyes made

wise by death, than even the captivity which seemed to falsify the

promises of God and the hopes of a thousand years.

III. The return to Nazareth, and the prophecy fulfilled therein.--They

who patiently wait for guidance, and move not till the cloud moves, are

never disappointed, nor left undirected. Joseph is a pattern of

self-abnegating submission, and an example of its rewards. The angel

ever comes again to those who have once obeyed him and continue to

wait. This third appearance is described in the same words as the

former. His coming was the appearance of a familiar presence His

command begins by a verbal repetition of the former summons, Arise and

take the young child and His mother, and go,' and then passes to a

singular allusion to that command to Moses which was the first step

towards the former calling of God's son--the nation--out of Egypt. All

the men are dead which sought thy life,' was the encouragement to Moses

to go back. They are dead that sought the young child's life,' is the

encouragement to Joseph. It sums up in one sentence the failure of the

first attempt, and is like an epitaph cut on a tombstone for a man yet

living,--a prophecy of the end of all succeeding efforts to crush

Christ and thwart His work. The dreaded infant's hand' is mightier than

all mailed fists, or fingers that hold a pen. Christ lives and grows;

Herod rots and dies.

Apparently Joseph's intention was to return to Bethlehem. He may have

thought that Nazareth would scarcely satisfy the angel's injunction to

go to the Land of Israel,' or that David's city was the right home for

David's heir. At all events, his perplexity appeals to Heaven for

direction; and, for the fourth time, his course is marked for him by a

dream, whether through the instrumentality of the angel who knew the

way to his couch so well, we are not told, Archelaus, Herod's son, who

had received Jud�� on the partition at his father's death, was a

smaller Herod, as cruel and less able. There was more security in the

obscurity of Nazareth, under the less sanguinary sway of Antipas, whose

share of his father's vices was his lust, rather than his ferocity. So,

after so many wanderings, and with such strange new experience and

thoughts, the silent, steadfast Joseph and the meek mother bring back

their mysterious charge and secret to the humble old home. Matthew does

not seem to have known that it had formerly been their home, but his

account is no contradiction of Luke's.

Again he is reminded of a prophecy, or perhaps, rather, of many

prophecies, for he uses the plural prophets,' as if he were summing up

the tenor of more than one utterance. The words which he gives are not

found in any prophet. But we know that to call a man a Nazarene' was

the same thing as to call him lowly and despised. The scoff of the

Pharisee to Nicodemus's timid appeal on Christ's behalf, and the

guileless Nathaniel's quest ion, show that. The fact that Christ by His

residence in Nazareth became known as the Nazarene,' and so shared in

the contempt attaching to all Galileans, and especially to the

inhabitants of that village, is a kind of concentration of all the

obscurity and ignominy of His lot. The name was nailed over His head on

the cross as a scornful reductio ad absurdum of His claims to be King

of Israel This explanation of the evangelist's meaning does not exclude

a reference in his mind to the prophecy in Isaiah xi. 1, where Messiah

is called a branch' or more properly, a shoot' for which the Hebrew

word is netzer. The name Nazareth is probably etymologically connected

with that word, and may have been given to the little village

contemptuously to express its insignificance. The meaning of the

prophecy is that the offspring of David, who should come when the

Davidic house was in the lowest depths of obscurity, like a tree of

which only the stump is left, should not appear in royal pomp, or in a

lofty condition, but as insignificant, feeble, and of no account. Such

prophecy was fulfilled in the very fact that He was all His life known

as of Nazareth' and the verbal assonance between that name, the shoot'

and the word Nazarene' is a finger-post pointing to the meaning of the

place of abode chosen for Him. The mere fact of residence there, and

the consequent contempt, do not exhaust the prophecies to which

reference is made. These might have been fulfilled without such a

literal and external fulfilment. But it serves, like the literal riding

upon an ass, and many other instances in Christ's life, to lead dull

apprehensions to perceive more plainly that He is the theme of all

prophecy, and that in His life the trivial is significant and nothing

is accidental.

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THE HERALD OF THE KING

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of

Jud桬 2. And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3. For this is He that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The

voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,

make His paths straight. 4. And the same John had his raiment of

camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was

locusts and wild honey. 5. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all

Jud桬 and all the region round about Jordan, 6. And were baptized of

him in Jordan, confessing their sins. 7. But when he saw many of the

Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O

generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to

come? 8. Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 9. And think

not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say

unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto

Abraham. 10. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees:

therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down,

and cast into the flre, 11. I indeed baptize you with water unto

repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes

I am not worthy to clean he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and

with fire: 12. Whose fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge

His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up

the chaff with unquenchable fire.'--MATT. iii. 1-12.

Matthew's Gospel is emphatically the Gospel of the kingdom. The keynote

sounded in the story of the Magi dominates the whole. We have stood by

the cradle of the King, and seen the homage and the dread which

surrounded it. We have seen the usurper's hatred and the divine

guardianship. Now we hear the voice of the herald of the King. This

section may be conveniently treated as falling into two parts: the

first, from verse 1 to verse 6, a general outline of the Baptist's

person and work; the second, from verse 7 to end, a more detailed

account of his preaching.

I. We have an outline sketch of the herald and of his work. The voice

of prophecy had fallen silent for four hundred years. Now, when it is

once more heard, it sounds in exactly the same key as when it ceased.

Its last word had been the prediction of the day of the Lord, and of

the coming of Elijah once more. John was Elijah over again. There were

the same garb, the same isolation, the same fearlessness, the same

grim, gaunt strength, the same fiery energy of rebuke which bearded

kings in the full fury of their self-will. Elijah, Ahab, and Jezebel

have their doubles in John, Herod, and Herodias. The closing words of

Malachi, which Matthew, singularly enough, does not quote, are the best

explication of the character and work of the Baptist. His portrait is

flung on the canvas with the same startling abruptness with which

Elijah is introduced. Matthew makes no allusion to his relationship to

Jesus, has nothing to say about his birth or long seclusion in the

desert. He gives no hint that his vague expression in these days'

covers thirty years. John leaps, as it were, into the arena full grown

and full armed. His work is described by one word--preaching'; out of

which all modern associations, which have too often made it a synonym

for long-winded tediousness and toothless platitudes, must be removed.

It means proclaiming, or acting as a herald, and implies the uplifted

voice and the brief, urgent message of one who runs before the chariot,

and shouts, The king! the king!'

His message is summed up in two sentences, two blasts of the trumpet:

the call to repentance, and the rousing proclamation that the kingdom

of heaven is at hand. In the former he but reproduces the tone of

earlier prophecy, when he insists on a thorough change of disposition

and a true sorrow for sin. But he advances far beyond his precursors in

the latter, which is the reason for repentance. They had seen the

vision of the kingdom and the King, but not nigh.' He has to peal into

the drowsy ears of a generation which had almost forgotten the ancient

hope, that it was at the very threshold. Like some solitary stern crag

which catches the light of the sun yet unrisen but hastening upwards,

long before the shadowed valleys, John flamed above his generation all

aglow with the light, as the witness that in another moment it would

spring above the eastern horizon. But he sees that this is no joyful

message to them. Nothing is more remarkable in his preaching than the

sombre hues with which his expectation of the day of the Lord is

coloured. To what purpose is the day of the Lord to you? It is darkness

and not light'; it is to be judgment, therefore repentance is the

preparation.

The gleam and purity of lofty spiritual ideas are soon darkened, as a

film forms on quicksilver after short exposure. John's contemporaries

thought that the kingdom of heaven meant exclusive privileges, and

their rule over the heathen. They had all but lost the thought that it

meant first God's rule over their wills, and their harmony with the

glad obedience of heaven. They had to be rudely shaken out of their

self-complacency and taught that the livery of the King was purity, and

the preparation for His coming, penitence.

The next touch in this outline sketch is John's fulfilment of prophecy.

Matthew probably knew that wonderfully touching and lowly answer of his

to the deputation from the ecclesiastical authorities, which at once

claimed prophetic authority and disclaimed personal importance, I am

the voice of one crying in the wilderness.' The prophecy in its

original application refers to the preparation of a path in the desert,

for Jehovah coming to redeem His people from captivity. The use made of

it by Matthew, and endorsed by all the evangelists, rests on the

principle, without which we have no clue to the significance of the Old

Testament, that the history of Israel is prophetic, and that the

bondage and deliverance are types of the sorer captivity from which

Christ redeems, and of the grander deliverance which He effects.

Our evangelist gives a vivid picture of the asceticism of John, which

was one secret, as our Lord pointed out, of his hold on the people. The

more luxuriously self-indulgent men are, the more are they fascinated

by religious self-denial. A man clothed in soft raiment' would have

drawn no crowds. A religious teacher must be clearly free from sensual

appetites and love of ease, if he is to stir the multitude. John's

rough garb and coarse food were not assumed by him to create an

impression. He was no mere imitator of the old prophets, though he wore

a robe like Elijah's. His asceticism was the expression of his severe,

solitary spirit, detached from the delights of sense, and even from the

softer play of loves, because the coming kingdom flamed ever before

him, and the age seemed to him to be rotting and ready for the fire.

There is no need to bring in irrelevant learning about Essenes to

account for his mode of life. The thoughts which burned in him drove

him into the wilderness. He who was possessed with them could not come

eating and drinking,' and might well seem to sense-bound wonderers as

if some demonic force, other than ordinary motives, tyrannised over

him.

The last point in this brief r�sum� of John's work is the universal

excitement which it produced. He did not come out of the desert with

his message. If men would hear it, they must go to him. And they went.

All the southern portion of the country seemed to empty itself into the

wilderness. Sleeping national hopes revived, the awe of the coming

judgment seized all classes. It was so long since a fiery soul had

scattered flaming words, and religious teachers had for so many

centuries been mumbling the old well-worn formulas, and splitting

hairs, that it was an apocalypse to hear once more the accent of

conviction from a man who really believed every word he said, and

himself thrilled with the solemn truths which he thundered. Wherever a

religious teacher shows that he has John's qualities, as our Lord in

His eulogium analysed them--namely, unalterable resolution, like an

iron pillar, and not like a reed shaken with the wind, conspicuous

superiority to considerations of ease and comfort, a direct vision of

the unseen, and a message from God, the crowds will go out to see him;

and even if the enthusiasm be shallow and transient, some spasm of

conviction will pass across many a conscience, and some will be pointed

by him to the King.

II. The second portion of this section is a more detailed account of

John's preaching, which Matthew gives as addressed to the Pharisees and

Sadducees. We are not to suppose that at any time John had a

congregation exclusively made up of such; nor that these words were

addressed to them only. What is emphasised is the fact that among the

crowds were many of both these parties, the religious aristocrats who

represented two tendencies of mind bitterly antagonistic, and each

unlikely to be drawn to the prophet. Self-righteous pedants who had

turned religion into a jumble of petty precepts, and very superior

persons who keenly appreciated the good things of this world, and were

too enlightened to have much belief in anything, and too comfortable to

be enthusiasts, were not hopeful material. If they were drawn into the

current, it must have run strong indeed. These representatives of the

highest and coldest classes of the nation had the very same red-hot

words flung at them as the mob had. Luke tells us that the first words

in this summary were spoken to the people. Both representations are

true. All fared alike. So they should, and so they always will, if a

real prophet has to talk to them. John's salutation is excessively

rough and rude. Honeyed words were not in his line; he had not lived in

the desert for all these years, and held converse with God and his own

heart, without having learned that his business was to smite on

conscience with a strong hand, and to tear away the masks which hid men

from themselves. The whole spirit of the old prophets was revived in

his brusque, almost fierce, address to such very learned, religious,

and distinguished personages. Isaiah in his day had called their

predecessors rulers of Sodom'; John was not scolding when he called his

hearers ye offspring of vipers' but charging them with moral corruption

and creeping earthliness.

The summary of his preaching is like a succession of lightning flashes.

We can but note in a word or two each flash as it flames and strikes.

The remarkable thing about his teaching is that, in his hands, the

great hope of Israel became a message of terror, the proclamation of

the impending kingdom passed into a denunciation of the wrath to come,'

set forth with a tremendous wealth of imagery as the axe lying at the

root of the trees, the fan winnowing the wheat from the chaff, the

destroying fire. That wrath was inseparable from the coming of the

King; for His righteous reign necessarily meant punishment of

unrighteousness. So all the older prophets had said, and John was but

carrying on their testimony. So Christ has said. No more terrible

warnings of the certain judgment of evil which is involved in His

merciful work, have ever been given, than fell from the lips into which

grace was poured. We need to-day a clearer discernment of the truth

which flamed before John's eyes, that the full proclamation of the

kingdom of heaven must include the plain teaching of the wrath to

come.'

Next comes the urgent demand for reformation of life as the sign of

real repentance. John's exhortation does not touch the deepest ground

for repentance which is laid in the heart-softening love of God

manifested in the sacrifice of His Son, but is based wholly on the

certainty of judgment. So far, it is incomplete; but the demand for

righteous living as the only test of religious emotion is fully

Christian, and needed in this generation as much as it ever was. All

preachers and others concerned in revivals' may well learn a lesson,

and while they follow John in seeking to arouse torpid consciences by

the terrors which are a part of the gospel, should not forget to

demand, not merely an emotional repentance, but the solid fruits which

alone guarantee the worth of the emotion.

The next flash strikes the lofty structure of confidence in their

descent. John knows that every man in that listening crowd believes

that his birth secured him joy and dominion when Messiah came. So he

wrenches away this shield against which his sharpest arrows were

blunted. What a murmur of angry denial must have met his contemptuous,

audacious denial of their trusted privilege! The pebbles on the Jordan

beach, or the loose rocks scattered so plentifully over the desert,

could be made as good sons of Abraham as they. A glimpse of the

transference of the kingdom to the despised Gentiles passed across his

vision. And in these far-reaching words lay the anticipation, not only

of the destruction of all Jewish exclusiveness, but of the miracles of

quickening to be wrought on the stony hearts of those beyond its pale.

Once more with a new emblem the immediate beginning of the judgment is

proclaimed, and its principles and issues are declared. The sharp axe

lies at the roots of the tree, ready to be lifted and buried in its

bark. The woodman's eye is looking over the forest; he marks with the

fatal red line the worthless trees, and at once the swinging blows come

down, and the timber is carted away to be burned. The trees are men.

The judgment is an individualising one, and all-embracing. Nothing but

actual righteousness of life will endure. All else will be destroyed.

The coming of the kingdom implied the coming of the King. John knew

that the King was a man, and that He was at the door. So his sermon

reaches its climax in the ringing proclamation of His advent. The first

noticeable feature in it is the utter humility of the dauntless prophet

before the yet veiled Sovereign. All the fiery force, the righteous

scorn and anger, the unflinching bravery, melt into meek submission. He

knows the limits of his own power, and gladly recognises the infinite

superiority of the coming One. He never moved from that lowly attitude.

Even when his followers tried to stir up base jealousy in him at being

distanced by the Christ, who, as they suggested, owed His first

recognition to him, all that his immovable self-abnegation cared to

answer was, He must increase, but I must decrease.' He was glad to fade

in the light of the Sun that he loved.' What a wealth of suppressed

emotion and lowly love there is in the words so pathetic from the lips

of the lonely ascetic, whom no home joys had ever cheered: He that hath

the bride is the bridegroom. . . . My joy is fulfilled'!

Note, too, the grand conception of the gifts of the King. John knew

that his baptism was, like the water in which he immersed, cold, and

incapable of giving life. It symbolised, but did not effect, cleansing,

any more than his preaching righteousness could produce righteousness.

But the King would come, bringing with Him the gift of a mighty Spirit,

whose quick energy, transforming dead matter into its own likeness,

burning out the foul stains from character, and melting cold hearts

into radiant warmth, should do all that his poor, cold, outward baptism

only shadowed. Form and substance of this great promise gather up many

Old Testament utterances. From of old, fire had been the emblem of the

divine nature, not only, nor chiefly, as destructive, but rather as

life-giving, cleansing, gladdening, fructifying, transforming. From of

old, the promise of a divine Spirit poured out on all flesh had been

connected with the kingdom of Messiah; and John but reiterates the

uniform voice of prophecy, even as he anticipates the crowning gift of

the gospel, in this saying.

Note, further, the renewed prophecy of judgment. There is something

very solemn in the stern refrain at the end of each of three

consecutive verses,--with fire.' The first and the third refer to the

destructive fire; the second, to the cleansing Spirit. But the fire

that destroys is not unconnected with that which purifies. And the very

same divine flame, if welcomed and yielded to, works purity, and if

repelled and scorned, consumes. The rustic simplicity of the figures of

the husbandman with his winnowing-shovel, the threshing-floor exposed

to every wind, the stored wheat, the rootless, lifeless, worthless

chaff, and the fierce fire in some corner of the autumn field where it

is utterly burned up--needs no comment. They add nothing but another

vivid picture to the thoughts already dealt with. But the question

arises as to the whole of the representation of judgment here: Does it

look beyond the present world? I see no reason for supposing that John

was speaking about anything but the sifting and destroying which would

attend the coming of the looked-for kingdom on earth. The principles

which he laid down are, no doubt, true for both worlds; but the

application of them which his prophetic mission embraced, lies on this

side of the grave.

Note, further, the limitations in John's knowledge of the King. His

prophecy unites, as contemporaneous, events which, in fact, are widely

separate,--the coming of Christ, and the judgments which He executes,

whether on Israel or in the final great day of the Lord.' There is no

perspective in prophecy. The future is foreshortened, and great gulfs

of centuries are passed over, as, standing on a plain, we see it as

continuous, though it may really be cleft by deep ravines. He did not

know what manner of time' the spirit which was in him did signify.' No

doubt his expectations were correct, in so far as Christ's coming

really sifted and separated, and was the rising and the falling of

many; but it was not attended by such tokens as John inferred. Hence we

can understand his doubts when in prison, and learn that a prophet was

often mistaken as to the meaning of his message.

Again, while we have here a clear prediction of the Spirit as bestowed

by Christ, we find no hint of His work as the sacrifice for sin,

through whom the guilt which no repentance and no outward baptism could

touch was taken away. The Gospel of John gives us later utterances of

the Baptist's, by which we learn that he advanced beyond the point at

which he stood here. Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin

of the world,' was his message after Christ's baptism. It is the last,

highest voice of prophecy. The proclamation of a kingdom of heaven, of

a king mighty and righteous, whose coming kindled a fire of judgment,

and a blessed fire of purifying, into one or other of which all men

must be plunged, contained elements of terror, as well as of hope. It

needed completion by that later word.

When John stretched out his forefinger, and with awe-struck voice bade

his hearers look at Jesus coming to him, prophecy had done its work.

The promise had been gradually concentrated on the nation, the tribe,

the house, and now it falls on the person. The dove narrows its

circling flight till it lights on His head. The goal has been reached,

too, in the clear declaration of Messiah's work. He is King, Giver of

the Spirit, Judge, but He is before all else the Sacrifice for the

world's sins. Therefore he to whom it was given to utter that great

saying was a prophet, and more than a prophet; and when he had spoken

it, there was nothing more for him to do but to decrease. He was like

the breeze before sunrise, which springs up, as crying The dawn! the

dawn!' and dies away.

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THE BAPTISM IN FIRE

He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.'--MATT. iii.

11.

There is no more pathetic figure in Scripture than that of the

forerunner of our Lord. Lonely and ascetic, charged to light against

all the social order of which he was a part, seeing many of his

disciples leave him for another master; then changing the free

wilderness for a prison cell, and tortured by morbid doubts; finally

murdered as the victim of a profligate woman's hate and a profligate

man's perverse sense of honour: he had indeed to bear the burden of the

Lord.' But perhaps most pathetic of all is the combination in his

character of gaunt strength and absolute humility. How he confronts

these people whom he had to rebuke, and yet how, in a moment, the

flashing eye sinks in lowest self-abasement before Him that cometh

after me'! How true, amidst many temptations, he was to his own

description of himself: I am a voice'--nothing more. His sinewy arm was

ever pointed to the Lamb of God.' It is given to very few to know so

clearly their limits, and to still fewer--and these, men who keep very

near God--to abide so contentedly within them, and to acquiesce so

thankfully in the brightening glories of One whom self-importance and

ambition would prompt to take for a rival and an enemy.

The words before us signalise at once John's lofty conception of the

worth of his work, and his humble consciousness of its worthlessness as

compared with Christ's. I indeed baptize you with water, but He with

fire.' As is the difference between the two elements, so is the

difference between His ministry and mine--the one effecting an outward

cleansing, the other being an inward penetrating power, which shall

search men through and through, and, burning, shall purge away dross

and filth. The text comes in the midst of a triple representation of

our Lord's work in its relation to his, each portion of which ends with

the refrain, the fire.' But these three fires have not the same

effects. The first and last destroy, the second cleanses. These are

threatenings, but this is altogether a promise. There is a fire that

consumes the barren tree and the light chaff that is whirled from the

threshing-floor by the wind of His fan; but there is also a fire that,

like the genial heat in some greenhouse, makes even the barren tree

glow with blossom and loads its branches with precious fruit. His

coming may kindle fire that will destroy, but its merciful purpose is

to plunge us into that fiery baptism of the Holy Ghost, whereof the

result is cleansing and life. Looking at the words before us, then,

they lead us to think of that emblem of the Spirit of God, of Christ as

bestowing it, and of its effects on us. I venture to offer a few

considerations now on each of these points.

I. The Holy Spirit is fire.

It would scarcely be necessary to spend any time in illustrating that

truth, but for the strange misapprehension of the words of our text

which I believe to be not uncommon. People sometimes read them as if

the first portion referred to those who trust in Christ, and who

therefore receive the blessings of His sanctifying energy, whilst the

latter words, on the other hand, were a threatening against

unbelievers. Now, whatever may be the meaning of the emblem in the

preceding and subsequent clauses, it can have but one meaning in our

text itself--and that is, the purifying influence of the Spirit of God.

Baptism with the Holy Ghost is not one thing and baptism with fire

another, but the former is the reality of which the latter is the

symbol.

It may be worth while to dwell briefly on the force of the emblem,

which is often misunderstood. Fire, then, all over the world has been

taken to represent the divine energy. Even in heathendom, side by side

with the worship of light was the worship of fire. Even that cruel

Moloch-worship, with all its abominations rested upon the notion that

the swift power and ruddy blaze of fire were symbols of glorious

attributes. Though the thought was darkened and marred, wrongly

apprehended and ferociously worked out in ritual, it was a true thought

for all that. And Scripture has from the beginning used it. It would

carry us too far to enumerate the instances which might be adduced. But

we may quote a few. When the covenant was made between God and Abraham,

upon which all the subsequent revelation reposed, the divine presence

was represented by a smoking furnace, and a lamp of fire that passed

between the divided pieces of the sacrifice. When the great revelation

of the divine Name was given to Moses, which prepared for the great

deliverance from Egypt, the sign of it was a thorn-bush--one of the

many dotted over the desert--burning and unconsumed. Surely the

ordinary interpretation, which sees, in that undying flame, an emblem

of Israel undestroyed in the furnace of bondage, is less natural than

that which sees in it a sign having the same purpose and the same

meaning as the deep words, I am that I am.' The Name, the revelation

proper, is accompanied by the sign which expresses in figure the very

same truth--the unwearied power, the undecaying life of the great

self-existent God, who wills and does not change, who acts and does not

faint, who gives and is none the poorer, who fills the universe and is

Himself the same, who burns and is not consumed--the I am.' Further, we

remember how to Israel the pledge and sacramental seal of God's

guardianship and guidance was the pillar which, in the fervid light of

the noonday sun, seemed to be but a column of wavering smoke, but

which, when the darkness fell, glowed at the heart and blazed across

the sleeping camp, a fiery guard. Who among us,' says the prophet,

shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' The answer is a parallel to the

description given in one of the Psalms in reply to the question, Lord,

who shall abide in Thy tabernacle?' From which parallelism, as well as

from the whole tone of the passage, the conclusion is unavoidable that

to Isaiah everlasting burnings' was a symbolic designation of God. And,

passing by all other references, we remember that our Lord Himself used

the same emblem, as John does, with apparently the same meaning, when,

yearning for the fulfilment of His work, He said,' I am come to send

fire on earth--oh that it were already kindled!' The day of Pentecost

teaches the same lesson by its fiery tongues; and the Seer in Patmos

beheld, burning before the throne, the sevenfold lamps of fire which

are the seven spirits of God.'

Thus, then, there is a continuous chain of symbolism according to which

some aspect of the divine nature, and especially of the Spirit of God,

is set forth for us by fire. The question, then, comes to be--what is

that aspect? In answer, I would remind you that the attributes and

offices of the Spirit of God are never in Scripture represented as

being destructive, and are only punitive, in so far as the convictions

of sin, which He works in the heart, may be regarded as being

punishments. The fire of God's Spirit, at all events, is not a wrathful

energy, working pain and death, but a merciful omnipotence, bringing

light and joy and peace. The Spirit which is fire is a Spirit which

giveth life. So the symbol, in the special reference in the text, has

nothing of terror or destruction but is full of hope and bright with

promise.

Even in its more general application to the divine nature, the same

thing is to a large extent true. The common impression is the reverse

of this. The interpretation which most readers unconsciously supply to

the passages of Scripture where God is spoken of as flaming fire, is

that God's terrible wrath is revealed in them. I am very far from

denying that the punitive and destructive side of the divine character

is in the symbol, but certainly that is not its exclusive meaning, nor

does it seem to me to be its principal one. The emblem is employed over

and over again, in connections where it must mean chiefly the blessed

and joyous aspect of God's Name to men. It is unquestionably part of

the felicity of the symbol that there should be in it this double

force--for so is it the fitter to show forth Him who, by the very same

attributes, is the life of those who love Him and the death of those

who turn from Him. But, still, though it is true that the bright and

the awful aspects of that Name are in themselves one, and that their

difference arises from the difference of the eyes which behold them,

yet we are justified, I think, in saying that this emblem of fire

regards mainly the former of these and not the latter. The principal

ideas in it seem to be swift energy and penetrating power, which

cleanses and transforms. It is fire as the source of light and heat; it

is fire, not so much as burning up what it seizes into ashes, but

rather as laying hold upon cold dead matter, making it sparkle and

blaze, and turning it into the likeness of its own leaping brightness;

it is fire as springing heavenwards, and bearing up earthly particles

in its shooting spires; it is fire, as least gross of visible

things;--in a word, it is fire as life, and not as death, that is the

symbol of God. It speaks of the might of His transforming power, the

melting, cleansing, vitalising influence of His communicated grace, the

warmth of His conquering love. It has, indeed, an under side of

possible judgment, punishment, and destruction, but it has a face of

blessing, of life-giving, of sanctifying power. And therefore the

Baptist spake glad tidings when he said, He shall baptize you with the

Holy Ghost, and with fire.'

II. Christ plunges us into this divine fire.

I presume that scarcely any one will deny that our version weakens the

force of John's words by translating with water, with the Holy Ghost,'

instead of in water, in the Holy Ghost.' One of the most accurate of

recent commentators, [2] for instance, in his remarks on this verse,

says that the preposition here is to be understood in accordance with

the idea of baptism that is immersion, not as expressing the instrument

with which, but as meaning "in," and expressing the element in which

the immersion takes place.' I suppose that very few persons would

hesitate to agree with that statement. If it is correct, what a grand

idea is conveyed by that metaphor of the completeness of the contact

with the Spirit of God into which we are brought! How it represents all

our being as flooded with that transforming power! But, apart from the

intensity communicated to the promise by such a figure, there is

another important matter brought distinctly before us by the words, and

that is Christ's personal agency in effecting this saturating of man's

coldness with the fire from God. This testimony of John's is in full

accord with Christ's claims for Himself, and with the whole tenor of

Scripture on the subject. He is the Lord of the Spirit. He is come to

scatter that fire on the earth. He brings the ruddy gift from heaven to

mortals, carrying it in the bruised reed of His humanity; and, in

pursuance of His merciful design, He is bound and suffers for our

sakes, but, loosed at last from the bands by which it was not possible

that He should be holden, and being by the right hand of God exalted,

He hath shed forth this.' His mighty work opens the way for the

life-giving power of the Spirit to dwell as an habitual principle, and

not as a mere occasional gift, among men, sanctifying their characters

from the foundation, and not merely, as of old, bestowing special

powers for special functions. He claims to send us the Comforter. We

know but little of such high themes, but we can clearly see that, while

there may be many other reasons for the full bestowment of the Spirit

of God having to be preceded by the gift of Christ, one reason must be

that the measure of individual and subjective inspiration varies

according to the amount of objective revelation. The truth revealed is

the condition and the instrument of the Spirit's working. The sharper

that sword of the Spirit is, the mightier will be His power. Hence,

only when the revelation of God is complete by the message of His Son,

His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, was the full, permanent

gift of the Spirit possible, not to make new revelations, but to unfold

all that lay in the Word spoken once for all, in whom the whole Name of

God is contained.

However that may be, the main thing for us, dear friends, is this--that

Christ gives the Spirit. In and by Jesus, you and I are brought into

real contact with this cleansing fire. Without His work, it would never

have burned on earth; without our faith in His work it will never

purify our souls. The Spirit of God is not a synonym for the moral

influence which the principles of Christianity exert on men who believe

them; but these principles, the truths revealed in Jesus Christ, are

the means by which the Spirit works its noblest work. Our acceptance of

these truths, then, our faith in Him whom these truths reveal, is

absolutely essential to our possession of that cleansing power. The

promise is of that Spirit which they that believe on Him should

receive.' If we have no faith in Jesus, then, however we may fancy that

the gift of God can be ours by other means, the stern answer comes to

our fond delusions and mistaken efforts, Thou hast neither part nor lot

in this matter.' Oh! you who are seeking for spiritual elevation, for

intellectual enlightenment, for the fire of a noble enthusiasm, for the

consecration of pure hearts, anywhere but in Christ your Lord, will you

not listen to the majestic and yet lowly voice, which blends in its

tones grave and loving rebuke, gentle pity, wonder and sorrow at our

blindness, earnest entreaty, and divine authority--If thou knewest the

gift of God, and who it is that speaketh to thee, thou wouldst have

asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water'?

Here are we cold, foul, dark, dead: there is that fire of God able to

cleanse, to enlighten, to give life. How is true contact to be effected

between our great need and His all-sufficient energy? One voice brings

the answer for every Christian soul, I will send the Comforter.'

Brethren, let us cleave to Him, and in humble faith ask Him to plunge

us into that fiery stream which, for all its fire, is yet a river of

water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. He

shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and in fire.'

III. That fiery baptism quickens and cleanses.

In John's mind, the difference between the two baptisms, his and the

Christ's, expresses accurately the difference between the two

ministries and their effects. As has been truly and beautifully said,

he is conscious of something cold and negative' in his own teaching, of

which the water of his baptism is a fit representation. His message is

divine and true, but it is hard: Repent, do what you ought, wait for

the Kingdom and its King.' And, when his command has been obeyed, his

disciples come up out of Jordan, at the best but superficially

cleansed, and needing that the process begun in them should be

perfected by mightier powers than any which his message wields. They

need more than that outward washing--they need an inward cleansing;

they need more than the preaching of repentance and morality--they need

a gift of life; they need a new power poured into their souls, the

fiery steam of which, as it rolls along, like a lava current through

mountain forests, shall seize and burn every growth of evil in their

natures. They need not water, but Spirit; not water, but Fire. They

need what shall be life to their truest life, and death to all the

death within, that separates them from the life of God.

So the two main effects expressed here are these: quickening and

cleansing.

Fire gives warmth. We talk about ardent desires, warm hearts, the glow

of love, the fire of enthusiasm, and even the flame of life. We draw

the contrast with cold natures, which are loveless and unemotional,

hard to stir and quicken; we talk about thawing reserve, about an icy

torpor, and so on. The same general strain of allusion is undoubtedly

to be traced in our text. Whatever more it means, it surely means this,

that Christ comes to kindle in men's souls a blaze of enthusiastic,

divine love, such as the world never saw, and to set them aflame with

fervent earnestness, which shall melt all their icy hardness of heart,

and turn cold self-regard into self-forgetting consecration.

Here, then, our text touches upon one of the very profoundest

characteristics of Christianity considered as a power in human life.

The contrast between it and all other religions and systems of ethics

lies, amongst other things, in the stress which it lays upon love and

on the earnestness which comes from love; whereas these are scarcely

regarded as elements in virtue according to the world, and have

certainly no place at all in the world's notion of temperate religion.'

Christ gives fervour by giving His Spirit. Christ gives fervour by

bringing the warmth of His own love to bear upon our hearts through the

Spirit, and that kindles ours. Where His great work for men is believed

and trusted in, there, and there only, is there excited an intensity of

consequent affection to Him which glows throughout the life. It is not

enough to say that Christianity is singular among religious and moral

systems in exalting fervour into a virtue. Its peculiarity lies

deeper--in its method of producing that fervour. It is kindled by that

Spirit using as His means the truth of the dying love of Christ. The

secret of the Gospel is not solved by saying that Christ excites love

in our souls. The question yet remains--how? There is but one answer to

that. He loved us to the death. That truth laid on hearts by the

Spirit, who takes of Christ's and shows them to us, and that truth

alone, makes fire burst from their coldness.

Here is the power that produces that inner fervour without which virtue

is a name and religion a yoke. Here is the contrast, not only to John's

baptism, but to all worldly religion, to all formalism and decent

deadness of external propriety. Here is the consecration of

enthusiasm--not a lurid, sullen heat of ignorant fanaticism, but a

living glow of an enkindled nature, which flames because kindled by the

inextinguishable blaze of His love who gave Himself for us. He shall

baptize you in fire.'

Then, dear brethren, if we profess to have come into personal contact

with Jesus Christ, here is a sharp test for us, and a solemn rebuke to

much of our lives. For a Christian to be cold is sin. Our coldness can

only come from our neglecting to stir up the gift that is in us. People

reproach us with extravagant emotion: let us confess that we have never

deserved that reproach half as much as we ought. The world's ideal of

religion is decorous coldness--has not the world's ideal been our

practice? We are afraid to be fervent, but our true danger is icy

torpor. We sit frost-bitten and almost dead among the snows, and all

the while the gracious sunshine is pouring down, that is able to melt

the white death that covers us, and to free us from the bonds that hold

us prisoned in their benumbing clasp.

No evil is more marked among the Christian Churches of this day than

precisely the absence of this spirit of burning.' There is plenty of

liberality and effort, there is much interest in religious questions,

there is genial tolerance and wide culture, there is a high standard of

morality, and, on the whole, a tolerable adherence to it--but there is

little love, and little fervour. I have somewhat against thee, that

thou hast left thy first love.'

Where is that Spirit which was poured out on Pentecost? Where are the

cloven tongues of fire, where the flame which Christ died to light up?

Has it burned down to grey ashes, or, like some house-fire, lit and

left untended, has it gone out after a little ineffectual crackling

among the lighter pieces of wood and paper, without ever reaching the

solid mass of obstinate coal? Where? The question is not difficult to

answer. His promise remains faithful. He does send the Spirit, who is

fire. But our sin, our negligence, our eager absorption with worldly

cares, and our withdrawal of mind and heart from the patient

contemplation of His truth, have gone far to quench the Spirit. Is it

not so? Are our souls on fire with the love of God, aglow with the

ardour caught from Christ's love? Does that love which fills our hearts

coruscate and flame in our lives, making us lights in the darkness, as

some firebrand caught up from the hearth will serve for a torch and

blaze out into the night? He shall baptize with fire.'

O Thou that earnest from above,

The pure celestial fire to impart,

Kindle a flame of sacred love

On the mean altar of my heart.'

Then there is another thought expressed by this symbol, namely, that

this baptism gives cleansing as well as warmth, or rather gives

cleansing by warmth. Fire purifies. That Spirit, which is fire,

produces holiness in heart and character, by this most chiefly among

all His manifold operations, that He excites the flame of love to God,

which burns our souls clear with its white fervours. This is the

Christian method of making men good,--first, know His love, then

believe it, then love Him back again, and then let that genial heat

permeate all your life, and it will woo forth everywhere blossoms of

beauty and fruits of holiness, that shall clothe the pastures of the

wilderness with gladness. Did you ever see a blast-furnace? How long

would it take a man, think you, with hammer and chisel, or by chemical

means, to get the bits of ore out from the stony matrix? But fling them

into the great cylinder, and pile the fire and let the strong draught

roar through the burning mass, and by evening you can run off a golden

stream of pure and fluid metal, from which all the dross and rubbish is

parted, which has been charmed out of all its sullen hardness, and will

take the shape of any mould into which you like to run it. The fire has

conquered, has melted, has purified. So with us. Love shed abroad in

our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us,' love that answers to

Christ's, love that is fixed upon Him who is pure and separate from

sinners, will purify us and sever us from our sins. Nothing else will.

All other cleansing is superficial, like the water of John's baptism.

Moralities and the externals of religion will wash away the foulness

which lies on the surface, but stains that have sunk deep into the very

substance of the soul, and have dyed every thread in warp and woof to

its centre, are not to be got rid of so. The awful words which our

great dramatist puts into the mouth of the queenly murderess are heavy

with the weight of most solemn truth. After all vain attempts to

cleanse away the stains, we, like her, have to say, There's the smell

of the blood still--will these hands ne'er be clean?' No, never; unless

there be something mightier, more inward in its power, than the water

with which we can wash them, some better gospel than Repent and

reform.' God be thanked, there is a mightier detergent than all

these--even that divine Spirit which Christ gives, and that divine

forgiveness which Christ brings. There, and there alone, dear brethren,

we can lose all the guilt of our faultful past, and receive a new and

better life which will mould our future into growing likeness to His

great purity. Oh do not resist that merciful searching fire, which is

ready to penetrate our very bones and marrow, and burn up the seeds of

death which lurk in the inmost intents of the heart! Let Him plunge you

into that gracious baptism, as we put some poor piece of foul clay into

the fire, and like it, as you glow you will whiten, and all the spots

will melt away before the conquering tongues of the cleansing flame. In

that furnace, heated seven times hotter than any earthly power could

achieve, they who walk live by the presence of the Son of Man, and

nothing is consumed but the bonds that held them. His Spirit is fire,

and that Spirit of fire is, therefore, the Spirit of holiness.

But take one warning word in conclusion. The alternative for every man

is to be baptized in the fire or to be consumed by it. The symbol of

which we have been speaking sets forth the double thought of purifying

and destruction. Nothing which we have said as to the former in the

least weakens the completing truth that there is in it an under side of

possible terror. One of the felicities of the emblem is its capacity to

set forth this twofold idea. There is that in the divine nature which

the Bible calls wrath, the necessary displeasure and aversion of holy

love from sin and wrong-doers. There is in the divine procedure even

now and here, the manifestation of that aversion in punishment. The

light of Israel becomes a flaming fire.'

I have no panorama of hell to exhibit, and I would speak with all

reticence on matters so awful; but this much, at any rate, is clear,

that the very same revelation of God, thankfully accepted and submitted

to, is the medium of cleansing and the source of joyful life, and,

rejected, becomes the source of sorrow and the occasion of death. Every

man sees that aspect of God's face which he has made himself fit to

see. Every gift of God is to men either a savour of life unto life, or

a savour of death unto death. Most chiefly is this so in regard to

Christ and His gospel, who, though He came not to judge but to save,

yet by reason of that very universal purpose of salvation, becomes a

judge in the act of saving, and a condemnation to those in whom, by

their own faults, that purpose is not fulfilled.

The same pillar of fire which gladdened the ranks of Israel as they

camped by the Red Sea, shone baleful and terrible to the Egyptian

hosts. The same Ark of the Covenant whose presence blessed the house of

Obed-edom, and hallowed Zion, and saved Jerusalem, smote the

Philistines, and struck down their bestial gods. Christ and His gospel

even here hurt the men whom they do not save.

And we have only to carry that process onwards into another world, and

suppose it made more energetic there, as it will be, to feel dimly in

how awful a sense it may be that the same fire which gives life may be

the occasion of death--and how profound a truth lies in the words--

What maketh Heaven, that maketh Hell.'

Yes, verily; to be salted with fire or to be consumed by it, to be

baptized in it or to be cast into it, is the choice offered to us all;

to thee, my brother, and to me. Israel made its choice, and in seventy

years, the Roman standards on Zion and the flames leaping round the

Temple, interpreted John's words in one of their halves, while the

growing energy of the fire that was lit on Pentecost fulfilled them in

the other. Many a nation and Church has made its choice since then. You

have to make yours. The fire shall try every man's work, of what sort

it is.' Shall our work be gold, and silver, and precious stones which

shall gleam and flash in the light, or wood, hay, and stubble which

shall writhe for a moment in the blaze and perish? Our God is a

consuming fire.' Shall that be the ground of my confidence that I shall

one day be pure from all my sins, or shall it be the parent of my

ghastliest fear that I may be, like the chaff, destroyed by contact

with a holy love rejected, with a Saviour disbelieved, with a Spirit

grieved and quenched? Choose which.

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[2] Meyer.

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THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of

him. 14. But John forbad Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of

Thee, and comest Thou to me? 15. And Jesus answering said unto him,

Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all

righteousness. Then he suffered Him. 16. And Jesus, when He was

baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens

were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a

dove, and lighting upon Him: 17. And lo a voice from heaven, saying,

This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'--MATT. iii. 13-17.

When Jesus set out from Galilee to seek baptism from John, He took the

first step on His path of public work; and it is noteworthy that He

took it, apparently, from self-originated impulse, and not, as in the

case of the prophets of old, from obedience to a prophetic call.' The

Word of the Lord came to' them; His Messianic consciousness needed no

external stimulus to kindle it into flame. What did He mean by seeking

baptism? John recognised the incongruity of His submitting to a rite

which professed repentance and promised cleansing. It does not follow

that John recognised His Messianic character, but only that he knew His

blameless life. The remonstrance witnesses at once to John's humble

consciousness of sin and to Jesus' acknowledged purity. Christ's answer

has a sound of authority, even in its gentle lowliness, and it confirms

the belief in His sinlessness by the absence of any reference to

repentance, and by regarding His baptism, not as a token of repented

transgression to be washed away, but as an act which completed the

perfect circle of righteousness, which His life had hitherto drawn. He

submitted to the appointed rite, because He would be one with His

brethren in all obedience. So, then, the principle underlying His

baptism is the principle underlying His incarnation, His life of

obedience and identification of Himself with us, and His death. He also

Himself likewise took part of' whatsoever His brethren were partakers

of, and therefore He was numbered with the transgressors' in that,

needing no repentance, He submitted to the baptism of repentance, and

cleansed the cleansing water by being plunged in it.

What was the significance of the descent of the Spirit on Him?

Matthew's account implies that the appearance of the descending dove

was to Jesus. John i. 32 states that it was also visible to John. The

accompanying voice is as if principally directed to John, according to

Matthew, while Mark and Luke represent it as addressed to Jesus. Both

appearance and voice were the tokens of the Father's approval, and

acceptance of the Son's consecration of Himself to the Messianic work.

The dove descending on Him was the token that henceforward His manhood

should be anointed with the unbroken influences of the divine Spirit,

and possess the unbroken consciousness of the Father's good pleasure,

lying like sunshine on the stormy sea on which He had launched. How

different the conception of the Spirit as a dove, which was Jesus'

experience of it, from the Baptist's, which was that of fire! Jesus is

in this incident, as in all, our pattern and example, teaching us that

we too must yield ourselves to do the Father's will, and must identify

ourselves with sinners, if we are to help them and to have the Father's

approval sounding in our hearts, and the dove of God nestling there,

and teaching us, too, that gentleness is the divinest and strongest

power to win men from evil and for God.

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THE DOVE OF GOD

He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon

Him.'--MATT. iii. 16.

This Gospel of Matthew is emphatically the gospel of the Kingdom. It

sets forth Jesus as the long-promised Messiah, the Son of David. And

this conception of Him and of His work, whilst it runs through the

whole of the Gospel, is more obviously influential in shaping the

selection of incidents and colouring the cast of the language, in the

early portion. Hence the genealogy with which the Gospel begins dwells

with emphasis on His royal descent from David. Hence the story of the

wise men of the East is given, who came to do their homage to the

new-born King of the Jews, whose innocent poverty and infancy are set

in contrast with the court and character of the cruel Herod who had for

an hour usurped the title. Hence, also, the mission of John the Baptist

is all summed up in his proclamation: The Kingdom of Heaven is at

hand.' He is the herald that runs before the chariot of the advancing

Monarch, and shouts to a slumbering nation, The King! the King!'

Preserving the same reference to the royal dignity of Jesus, we may

look at His baptism as being His public assumption of His Messianic

office, and at this descent of the Holy Spirit as the anointing or

coronation of the King. As His meek head rose, glistening from the

waters of the baptism, there fluttered down upon Him the gentle token

of the manifest designation from the Heavens, which solemnly declared

Him to be the Son of God, anointed Messias, King of Israel and of the

world.

So in looking at this incident, I take simply two points of view, and

consider its bearing on Jesus, and on us.

I. As to the former, we have here the Coronation of the King.

We need not spend time upon the question which we have no materials for

answering, viz.--What was the objective material reality' here? We do

not know enough about what constitutes objective material reality,' nor

about what are the laws of prophetic ecstasy and vision, to discuss

such a question as that. Nor is there any need to moot it. It does not

matter one rush whether bystanders would have seen anything or not. It

does not matter in the least whether there was any actual excitation of

auditory or visual nerves. It does not matter whether there was

anything which people are contented to call material--a word which

covers a depth of ignorance. Enough for us that this was no fancy, born

in a man's brain, but an actual manifestation, whether through sense or

apart from sense, to consciousness, of a divine outpouring and

communication. Enough for us that the voice which spoke was God's, and

that that which descended was the Spirit of God. As to all other

questions, they may be amusing and interesting, but they are insoluble,

and therefore unimportant.

Well, then, taking that point of view, the next question that arises is

as to the purpose of this descent of the Spirit. Plainly, as I have

said, it was the coronation and anointing of the Monarch. But a man is

king before he is crowned. Coronation is the consequence and not the

cause of his royalty. It is but the official and solemn announcement of

a previous fact. No additional power, no fresh authority, comes of the

crowning. And so the first purpose of this great fact is distinctly

stated, in John's Gospel, as having been the solemn, divine pointing

out of Messiah to the Baptist primarily, but in order that he might

bear witness of Him to others. The words which follow are a commentary

on, and part of the explanation of, the descent of the Holy Spirit.

They are God's finger, pointing to Jesus and saying, Arise, anoint Him,

for this is He.'

But it must be remembered always that this was neither the beginning of

that divine Spirit's operation upon Jesus, nor the beginning of His

Messianic nature and consciousness; nor the beginning of His Sonship.

That day was not in deepest truth the day' on which the Son was

begotten.' Before the baptism there was the consciousness of

Messiahship witnessed in these words, so singularly compacted of

humility and authority: Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us

to fulfil all righteousness'; and before His baptism, and even before

His birth, that divine Spirit wrought His manhood, and ere the heavens

opened, or the dove fluttered down upon His head, He from everlasting

was the Son in the bosom of the Father.

So we see here, I think, if we follow the lead of the Scriptural

teaching, not the beginning of powers or communications, but an advance

in these. Christ's baptism was an epoch in His human development,

inasmuch as it was the public official assumption of His Messianic

office. He came from out of the sheltering obscurity of the Galilean

village nestling among its hills. He had now put His foot upon the

path, set with knives and hot ploughshares, along which He had to walk

to the Cross. Inasmuch as it was an epoch in His development (for His

manhood was capable of growth and maturing), and inasmuch as new tasks

needed increase of gifts, and inasmuch as His man's nature was subject

to the conditions of time, and capable of expansion and increase of

capacity, therefore, I believe that when Christ rose from the waters of

baptism, no new gift indeed was His, but such an advance in the

communication to His manhood of the sustaining Spirit, as fully

equipped Him for the new calls of His Messianic work.

His manhood needed, as ours does, the continual communication of the

divine Spirit, and His manhood, because it was sinless, was capable of

a complete reception of that Spirit. Sinless though He knew Himself to

be, as His own words declare, He yet bowed His head to the baptism of

repentance, which He needed not for Himself, just as He afterwards

bowed His head to a darker, a sadder baptism, which He had to be

baptized with, though it likewise He needed not for Himself, because in

both the one and the other He would make Himself one with His brethren.

The Spirit of God had shaped His manhood ere His birth. The Spirit of

God had been abiding in His holy infancy and growing youth, but now it

came in larger measure for new needs and His Messiah's work.

So, dear friends, we see in Christ, baptized with the Spirit of God,

the realised ideal of manhood, ever dependent, ever needing for its

purity that holy influence, and receiving at every pore that divine

gift. What a contrast to our limited partial reception, broken and

interrupted so often! All the doors that are barred in our hearts by

sin, all the windows that are darkened in our souls by vice and self,

in Him stood open to the day, and brilliantly receptive of the

illumination. And so the Father giveth not the Spirit by measure unto

Him.'

Notice, too, the meaning of the symbol. Think of what John, with his

incomplete though not inaccurate conceptions, expected in the Messiah

whom he proclaimed. To him the coming of the King was first and chiefly

a coming to judgment. There is nothing more remarkable than the aspect

of terror which drapes the old hope of Israel as it comes from John's

lips. He believes that the King is coming, that His coming is to be an

awful thing. Judgment is to go before Him, He bears His fan in His

hand,' and kindles unquenchable fire,' into which the leafy trees that

have no fruit upon them are to be flung, there to shrivel and crackle

and disappear. This is what he expects at the worst, and at the best a

baptism in the Holy Ghost, from Messiah's hands, which, however, is

likewise to be fiery even whilst it quickens, and searching and

destructive even whilst it gladdens. When, then, his carpenter cousin

is designated as Messiah, John sees two wonders: that this is the

Christ, and that the Spirit which he had thought of as searching and

consuming, should come fluttering down upon His head in the likeness of

a dove. Old Testament symbols and natural poetry unite in giving

felicity to that emblem. The Spirit of God brooded on the face of the

deep,' says Genesis; and the word employed describes accurately the

action of the mother-bird, with her soft breast and outstretched wings

quickening the life that lies beneath. The dove was pure and allowed

for sacrifice. All nations have made it the symbol of meekness,

gentleness, faithfulness. All these associations determined the form

which the descending Benediction took.

What then does it proclaim as to the character of the King? Purity is

the very foundation of His royalty. Meekness and gentleness are the

very weapons of His conquest and the sceptre of His rule. The dove will

outfly all Rome's eagles and all rapacious, unclean feeders, with their

strong wings, and curved talons, and sharp beaks. The lesson as to the

true nature of the true Kingdom, which was taught of old when the

prophet said Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, thy King cometh unto

thee, meek, riding on an ass,' and not upon the warhorse of secular

force; the lesson which was taught unwittingly, as to the true nature

of the true Kingdom, when the scoffers, speaking a deeper truth than

they understood, put upon His brow the crown of thorns, and forced into

His hand the sceptre of reed, was taught here--the lesson that meekness

conquers, and that His kingdom is founded in suffering, and wielded in

gentleness. The lesson of the ancient psalm, which in rapture of

prophetic vision beheld the coming of the Bridegroom, and said with

strange blending of images of war and of peace: Thine arrows are sharp

in the heart of the King's enemies; in Thy majesty ride prosperously,

because of meekness; and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible

things';--that same lesson was taught when the King was crowned, and in

the day of His coronation, that which fell upon His bowed, glistening

head, was the Dove from Heaven, the proclamation that meekness and

gentleness are the garment of Omnipotence.

II. Consider this incident as showing us the gifts of the King to His

subjects.

Christ has nothing which He keeps to Himself. Christ received the

Spirit that He might diffuse it through the whole world. Whatsoever He

has received of the Father He gives unto us. This conception of the

gift that Christ has to bestow upon men, as being the very life-spirit

that dwelt in His manhood, and made and kept it pure, is the highest

thought that we can have of what the gospel does for us. You do not

understand its meaning if you content yourself with thinking of it as

simply the means of escape from wrath. You do not understand its

meaning--though, blessed be God! that is the first part of its mercy to

us--if you think of Christ's gift as only pardon by means of His

sacrifice on the Cross. We must rise higher than that; we must feel, if

we would understand the unspeakable gift,' that it is the gift of

Himself to dwell within us by His Spirit as the very spirit of our

lives. Assimilation by reception of a supernatural life from Him, is

the teaching of Pentecost. Christ is our life; the law of the Spirit of

life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death.'

Therefore, all Christian men are spoken of in the New Testament in the

same language which is used in reference to their Master. Is He the Son

of God? They are sons through Him. Is He the High Priest? They are

priests unto God. Is He the Light of the World? They are, in their

places, kindled and derived lights. Is He the Christ, the Messias, the

Anointed? Ye have an unction from the Holy One,' and He hath anointed

us in Him. So that it is no arrogance, though it may be a questionably

wise form of expression, when we say that the object of Christ's coming

is to make us all Christs, God's anointed, and to make us so because He

Himself in His Spirit dwells in us.

Christ can do that. He can give this Spirit. That is the very thing

that all other teachers cannot do. They can teach tricks of imitation,

they can galvanise men, for a little while, into some kind of copy of

their characteristics. They can give them the principles which they

themselves have been living on, but to repeat and to continue the

spirit of the Teacher is the very thing that cannot be done. Let a

double portion fall upon me,' said Elisha; and Elijah, knowing the

limits of the human relationship between master and disciple, could

only shake his head in doubt and say, Thou askest a hard thing; perhaps

thou wilt get it, perhaps thou wilt not, but it will not be I that will

give it you.' But Christ says: I give My Spirit to you all.'

And let us remember, too, how full of blessed teaching, of rebuke, and

of instruction that symbol is, in reference to ourselves. To all of us

there is offered, if we like to have it, this dove-like Spirit. What

does that mean? Let us for a moment dwell upon the various uses of the

emblem, for they all carry important lessons. Our hearts are like that

wild chaos which preceded the present ordered state of things. And over

the seething darkness, full of all formless horrors and half-discerned

dead monstrosities, over all the chaos of disordered wills, rebellious

appetites, stinging conscience, darkened perceptions, there will come,

if we will (and we may will by His help, which is never far away from

us), gently, but quickening us into life and reducing confusion into

order, and flooding our cloudy night with light, that divine Spirit.

The dove that brooded over Chaos and made it Cosmos, will brood over

your nature, and re-create the whole. If any man be in Christ, he is a

new creation.' The old things are passed away.' Creator Spirit! create

a clean heart in me.

And then again let me remind you that this emblem brings to us another

cognate and yet distinct hope, inasmuch as the dove was the emblem of

purity and clean for sacrifice. This is the characteristic of the

scriptural doctrine of inspiration, by which it is distinguished from

all heathen and secular conceptions of a similar sort, viz., that it

puts the moral in the foreground, and that the Spirit, which is the

Spirit of truth, and of wisdom and of power, is first and foremost the

Spirit of holiness. So that if a man is not clean, no matter what his

gifts, no matter what his wisdom, no matter what his intellectual

force, no matter what his supernatural and miraculous power, he has not

the Spirit of God in him. The Dove comes, and where it comes there is

peace, there is purity, there is sacrifice. If any man have not the

Spirit of holiness he is none of Christ's.

So, brethren, remember that not in shining faculty, not in piercing

vision into mystery, not in the eloquence of honeyed tongue, nor the

power of a swift hand, not in any of the lesser and subordinate gifts

which the world exclusively honours as inspiration, is the power of the

indwelling Spirit to be manifested. If the Spirit of God is in you, it

is making you clean.

Still further, remember how, as for the King so for His subjects, the

Dove that crowns Him and that dwells in them is the Spirit of meekness

and of gentleness. That is the true force. Light, which is silent, is

mightier than all lightnings. The Spirit, which is the Spirit of love,'

is therefore the Spirit of power.' The true type of Christian

character, which the gospel has brought into being, looks modest,

inconspicuous and humdrum, by the side of the more brilliant and vulgar

beauties of the world's ideals. Just as the iridescent hues on a dove's

neck, and the quiet blue of its plumage, look modest and Quaker-like

beside gaudy parroquets and other bedizened birds, so the Christian

type of character, patient, meek, gentle, not self-asserting, seems

pale and sober-tinted beside the world's heroes. But gentleness is the

mightiest and will conquer at last. For Christ and Christ's followers

go forth, through universal love to universal power.

And the last suggestion that I offer to you about the significance of

this symbol is one that I freely admit to be fanciful, and yet it

strikes me as being very beautiful. Noah's dove came back to the ark

with one leaf in his beak. That was the prophecy and the foretaste of a

whole world of beauty and of verdure. The dove that comes to us,

bearing with it some leaf plucked from the tree of life, which is in

the midst of the paradise of God, is the earnest of our inheritance

until the day of redemption. All the gifts of that divine Spirit, gifts

of holiness, of gentleness, of wisdom, of truth--all these are

forecasts and anticipations of the perfectness of the heavens. To us,

sailing over a dismal sea, the Spirit comes bearing with it a message

that tells us of the far-off land and the fair garden of God in which

the blessed shall walk.

Dear friends, remember the one condition on which is suspended our

possession of the Spirit of God. It is that we shall have Christ for

our very own by our humble faith. If we are trusting in Him, He will

come and put His Spirit within our hearts. Without Him these hearts are

cages of unclean and hateful birds. But the meek presence of the dove

of God will drive out the obscene, twilight-loving creatures that build

and scream there, and will fill our hearts with the tranquillity, the

purity, the gentleness, the hope, which are the fruit of the Spirit.'

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THE VICTORY OF THE KING

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted

of the devil. 2. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He

was afterward an hungred. 3. And when the tempter came to Him, he said,

If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. 4.

But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread

alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. 5.

Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a

pinnacle of the temple, 6. And saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of

God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels

charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up,

lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. 7. Jesus said unto

him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. 8.

Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and

sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; 9.

And saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt

fall down and worship me. 10. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee

hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God,

and Him only shalt thou serve. 11. Then the devil leaveth Him, and,

behold, angels came and ministered unto Him.'--MATT. iv. 1-11.

Every word of the first verses of this narrative is full of meaning.

Then' marks the immediate connection, not only in time but in

causation, between the baptism and the temptation. The latter followed

necessarily on the former. Of the Spirit'--then God does lead His Son

into temptation. For us all, as for Christ, it is true that, though God

does not tempt as wishing us to fall, He does so order our lives that

they carry us into places where the metal of our religion is tried. To

be tempted'--then a pure, sinless human nature is capable of

temptation, and the King has to begin his career by a battle. Of the

devil'--then there is a dark kingdom of evil, and a personal head of

it, the prince of darkness. He knows His rival, and yet He knows him

but partially. He strides out to meet him in desperate duel, as Goliath

did the stripling whom he despised; and both hosts pause and gaze. To a

sinless nature no temptation can arise from within, but must be

presented from without.

We leave untouched the question as to the manner of this temptation,

which remains equally real, whether we conceive that the tempter

appeared in bodily form, and actually carried the body of our Lord from

place to place, or whether we suppose that, during it all, Christ sat

silent, and apparently alone in the wilderness. We only divert

attention from the true importance of the incident by giving prominence

to picturesque or questionable externals of it.

I. The first assault and repulse, in the desert.

Unlike John the Baptist, whose austere spirit was unfolded in the

desert, Jesus grew up among men, passing through and sanctifying

childhood and youth, home duties, and innocent pleasures. But ere He

enters on His work, the need which every soul appointed to high and

hard tasks has felt, namely, the need for seclusion and communion with

God in solitude, was felt by Him. As it had been for Moses and Elijah,

the wilderness was His school; and as the collective Israel, so the

personal Son of God, has to be led into the wilderness, that there God

may speak to His heart.' So deep and rapt was the communion, that, for

forty days, spirit so mastered flesh that the need and desire for food

were suspended. But when He touched earth again, the pinch of hunger

began. Analogous cases of the power of high emotion to hold physical

wants in abeyance are sufficiently familiar to make so extreme an

instance explicable.

We have to distinguish in the first temptation between the sphere in

which it moves, the act suggested, and the true nature of the act as

dragged to light in Christ's answer. The sphere is that of the physical

nature. Hunger has nothing to do with right or wrong. It asserts itself

independent of all considerations. In itself neutral, it may, like all

physical cravings, lead to sin. Most men are most tempted by fleshly

desires. Satan had tried the same bait before on the first Adam. It had

answered so well then, that he thinks himself wise in bringing it out

once more. Adam, in his garden, surrounded by all that sense needed,

had yielded, and thereby had turned the garden into desert; Christ, in

the desert, pressed by hunger, does not yield, and thereby turns the

desert into a garden again. At the beginning of His course He is

tempted by the innocent desire to secure physical support; at its close

He is tempted by the innocent desire to avoid physical pain. He

overcomes both, and by His victories in the wilderness so unlike the

garden, and in Gethsemane, another garden, so unlike the first, He

brings a statelier Eden back to man.'

The act suggested seems not only innocent, but in accordance with His

dignity. It was a strange anomaly for the Son of God,' on whose head

the dove had descended, and in whose ears the voice had sounded, to be

at the point of starving. What more unbecoming than that one possessed

of His mysterious closeness to God should be suffering from such

ignoble necessities? What more foolish than to continue to hunger, when

a word could spread a table in the wilderness? John had said that God

could make children of Abraham out of these stones. Could He not make

bread out of them? The suggestion sounds benevolent, sensible, almost

religious. The need is real, the remedy possible and easy; the result

desirable as preserving valuable life, and putting an end to an

anomaly, and the objections apparently nil. The bait is skilfully wound

over the barbed hook.

Christ's answer tears it away, and discloses the sharp points. He will

not discuss with Satan whether He is Son of God or no. To the Jews He

was wont to answer, I say unto you'; to Satan He answers, It is

written.' He puts honour on the sword of the Spirit, which is the word

of God,' and sets us an example of how to wield it. The words quoted

are found in the account of Israel's miraculous sustenance in the

desert by the manna, and are applied by Christ to Himself, not as Son

of God, but as simple man. They contain the great truth that God can

feed men, in their physical life, by bread or without bread. When He

does it by bread or other ordinary means, it is even then not the

material substance in itself, but His will operating through it, which

feeds. He can abolish all the outward means, and still keep a man

alive. There is no reference to the truth which is sometimes forcibly

inserted into this saying, that man has a higher than bodily life, and

needs more than material bread to feed the hunger of the soul. The

whole scope of the words is to state the law of physical nourishment as

dependent at last on the divine will, and therefore equally capable of

being accomplished with or without bread, by ordinary means or apart

from these.

The bearing of the words on Christ's hunger is twofold: First, He will

not use His miraculous powers to provide food, for that would be to

distrust God, and so to cast off His filial dependence; second, He will

not separate Himself from His brethren, and provide for Himself by a

way not open to them, for that would really be to reverse the very

purpose of His incarnation and to defeat His whole work. He has come to

bear all man's burdens, and shall He begin by separating Himself from

them? Therefore He answers in words which declare the law for man,' and

thereby merges all that was distinctive in His position in a loving

participation in our lot. If the Captain of our Salvation had begun by

refusing to share the privations of the rank and file, and had provided

dainties for Himself, what would have become of His making common cause

with them? The temptation addressed to Christ's physical nature was, to

put it roughly, Look out for yourself.' His answer was, As Son of God,

I hold by My filial dependence. As man, I share My brethren's lot, and

am content to live as they live.'

II. The second assault and repulse, on the temple.

We need not touch on the questions as to whether our Lord's body was

really transported to the temple, and, if so, to what part of it. But

we may point out that there is nothing in the narrative to warrant the

usual interpretation of this temptation, as being addressed to the

desire of recognition, and as equivalent to the suggestion that our

Lord should show Himself, by a stupendous miracle before the multitude,

as the Messiah. There is nothing about spectators, and no sign that the

dread solitude wrapping these two was broken by others. We must seek

for the point of the second temptation in another direction.

The very locality chosen for it helps us to the right understanding of

it. There were plenty of cliffs in the desert, down which a fall would

have been fatal. Why not choose one of them? The temple was God's

house, the fitting scene for an attempt to work disaster by the abuse

of religious ideas. The former temptation underlies this. That had

sought to move Jesus to cast off His filial confidence; this seeks to

pervert that confidence, and through it to lead Him to cast off filial

obedience. Therefore the Devil quotes Scripture for his purpose.' What

could be more religious than an act of daring based upon faith, which

again was based on a word which proceeded out of the mouth of God'? It

is not in the suppression of certain words in the quotation that

Satan's error lies. The omitted words are not material. What did he

hope to accomplish by this suggestion? If Jesus was, in bodily reality,

standing on the summit of the temple, the tempter, profoundly

disbelieving the promise, may have thought that the leap would end his

anxieties by the death of his rival. But, at any rate, he sought to

lead His faith into wrong paths, and to incite to what was really

sinful self-will under the guise of absolute trust.

Our Lord's answer, again drawn from Deuteronomy, strips off the

disguise from the action which seemed so trustful. He changes the

plural verb of the original passage into the singular, thus at once

taking as His own personal obligation the general command, and pointing

a sharp arrow at His foe, who was now knowingly or unknowingly so

flagrantly breaking that law. If God had bidden Jesus cast Himself

down, to do it would have been right. As He had not, to do it was not

faith, but self-will. To cast Himself into dangers needlessly, and then

to trust God (whom He had not consulted about going into them) to get

Him out, was to tempt God.' True faith is ever accompanied with true

docility. He had come to do His Father's will. A divine must' ruled His

life. Was He to begin His career by throwing off His allegiance on

pretext of trust? If the Captain of our Salvation commences the

campaign by rebellion, how can He lead the rank and file to that

surrender of their own wills which is victory?

The lessons for us from the second temptation are weighty. Faith may be

perverted. It may even lead to abandoning filial submission. God's

promised protection is available, not in paths of our own choosing, but

only where He has sent us. If we take the leap without His command, we

shall fall mangled on the very temple pavement. It is when we are in

the way' which He has prescribed that the angels of God' whom He has

promised meet' us. How many scandals in the falls of good men would

have been avoided, and how many mad enterprises would have been

unattempted, and how much more clearly would the relations of filial

faith and filial obedience have been understood, if the teaching of

this second temptation had been laid to heart!

III. The final assault and repulse, on the mountain.

Again the scene changes, because the stress of the temptation is

different. The exceeding high mountain' is not to be looked for in our

atlases. The manner in which all the glories of the world's kingdoms

were flashed in one dazzling panorama, like an instantaneous

photograph, before Christ's eyes, is beyond our knowledge. We note that

Satan has no more to say about the Son of God.' He has been foiled in

both his assaults on Christ in that character. If He stood firm in

filial trust and in filial submission, there was no more to be done. So

the tempter tries new weapons, and seeks to pervert the desire for that

dominion over the world which was to be a consequence of the sonship.

He has not been able to touch Him as Son; can he not spoil Him as King?

They are rivals: can they not strike up a treaty? Jesus thinks that He

is going to reign as God's viceroy; can He not be induced, as a much

quicker way of getting to His end, to become Satan's? Such a scheme

sounds very stupid; but Satan is very stupid, for all his wisdom, and

the hopeless folly of his proposal is typical of the absurdities which

lie in all sins. There is an old play, the title of which would be

coarse if it were not so true, The Devil is an Ass.'

His boast, like all his wiles, is a little truth and a great lie. It is

true that his servants do often manage to climb into thrones and other

high places. It is true that beggars and worse than beggars on

horseback, and princes and better than princes walking, is often the

rule. It is true that the crowned saints of the world might be counted

on the fingers. But, for all that, the Father of lies was like himself

in this promise. He did not say that, if he gives a kingdom to one of

his servants, he takes it from another. He did not say that his gifts

are shams, and fade away when the daylight comes. He did not say that

he and his are, after all, tools in God's hands.

What was it that he thought he was appealing to in Christ? Ambition? He

knew that Jesus was destined to be King of the earth, and he blunders

to the conclusion that His reign is to be such as he could help Him to.

How impossible it is for Satan to penetrate the depths of that loving

heart! How mole-blind evil is to the radiant light of goodness! How

hate fails when it tries to fathom love! If all that Satan meant by the

glory' of the world had been Christ's, He would have been no nearer His

heart's desire.

The temptation was not only to fling away the ideal of His kingdom, but

to reverse the means for its establishment. Neither temptation could

originate within Christ's heart, but both beset Him all His life. The

cravings of His followers, the expectations of His race, the certainty

of an enthusiastic response if He would put Himself at their head, and

the equal certainty of death if He would not, were always urging Him to

the very same thing.

There is nothing weaker,' says an old school-man, than the Devil

stripped naked.' The mask is thrown off at last, and swift and smiting

comes the gesture and the word of abhorrence, Get thee hence,

Satan,'--now revealed in thy true colours. Jesus still couches His

refusal in Scripture words, as if sheltering Himself behind their broad

shield. It is safest to meet temptation, not by our own reasonings and

thoughts, but by the words which cannot lie. As He had held unmoved, by

His filial trust and His filial submission, now He clings to the

foundation principle of all religion,--the exclusive worship and

service of God. His kingdom is to be a kingdom of priests; therefore to

begin it by such an act would be suicide. It is to be the victorious

antagonist of Satan's kingdom, because it is to lead all men to worship

God alone; therefore enmity, not alliance, is to be between these two.

Christ's last words are not only His final refusal of all the baits,

but the ringing proclamation of war to the death, and that a war which

will end in victory. The enemy's quiver is empty. He feels that he has

met more than his match, so he skulks from the field, beaten for the

first time by having encountered a heart which all his fiery darts

failed to inflame, and dimly foreseeing yet more utter defeat.

The last temptation teaches us both the nature of Christ's kingdom and

the means of its establishment. It is a rule over men's hearts and

wills, swaying them to goodness and the exclusive worship and service

of God. That being so, the way to found it follows of course. It can

only be set up by suffering, utter self-sacrifice, gentleness, and

goodness. Christ is King of all because He is servant of all. His cross

is His throne. His realm is of hearts softened, cleansed, made gladly

obedient, and growingly like Himself. For such a king, weapons of force

are impossible, and for His subjects the same law holds. They have

often tried to fight for Christ with the Devil's weapons, to make

compliance with him for ends which they thought good, to keep terms

with evil, or to adopt worldly policy, craft, or force. They have never

succeeded, and, thank God! they never will.

That duel was fought for us. There we all conquered, if we will hold

fast by Him who conquered then, and thereby taught our hands to war'

and our fingers to fight.' The strong man is bound. The spoiling of his

house follows of course, and is but a question of time.

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THE SPRINGING OF THE GREAT LIGHT

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, He departed

into Galilee; 13. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum,

which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim:

14. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet,

saying, 15. The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way

of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; 16. The people

which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the

region and shadow of death light is sprung up.'--MATT. iv. 12-16.

Though the narrative of the Temptation is immediately followed by the

notice of Jesus' return to Galilee, there was a space between wide

enough to hold all that John's Gospel tells of the gathering of the

first disciples, the brief stay in Galilee, the Jerusalem ministry, and

the journey through Samaria. John i. 43 refers to the same point of

time as verses 12-16 of this chapter. It is rash to conclude Matthew's

ignorance from his silence, and it is plain, from his own words, that

he did not suppose that the return to Galilee followed the Temptation

as closely in time as it does in his narrative. For he does link the

Temptation to the Baptism immediately, by Then was Jesus led up of the

Spirit' (verse 1), and so some interval of time must be allowed, during

which Jesus left the wilderness, and went to some place where He could

hear of John's imprisonment. A gap is necessary. Its extent is not

indicated, nor are the reasons for silence as to its contents. But we

may as reasonably conjecture that Matthew's eagerness to get to his

main subject, the Galilean ministry, led him to regard the short visit

to Jerusalem as an episode from which little came, as put his silence

down to a very improbable ignorance. The same explanation may account

for the slight mention made of His leaving Nazareth,' of which Luke has

given the memorable story.

John was silenced, and that moved Jesus to go back to Galilee and take

up His ministry there. His reason has been thought to have been the

wish to avoid a similar fate, but He was safer from Herod in Jerusalem

than in Capernaum, within reach of the tyrant's arm, stretched out from

Tiberias close by, and the supposition is more probable, as well as

more worthy, that a directly opposite motive impelled Him. The voice

that had cried, After me cometh a greater than I,' was stifled in a

dungeon. It was fitting that He, of whom John had spoken, should at

once stand forth. There must be no interval between the ringing

proclamation by the herald and the appearance of the king, lest men

should say that one more hope had been dashed, and one more prophet

proved a dreamer. And is there not a lesson for all times in the fact

that when John is silenced, Jesus begins to speak? Is not the quenching

of a light kindled to bear witness to the true Light, ever the occasion

for that unkindled and unquenchable Light to burn the more brightly,

though tear-dimmed eyes often fail to see it?

The choice of Capernaum as a residence suggested to Matthew Isaiah's

prophecy, which he quotes freely, fusing into one sentence the

geographical terms, in verse 15, which, in the Hebrew, are the close of

one paragraph, and the prophecy in verse 16 which, in the Hebrew,

begins another. The territory of Zabulon lay in what is now called

Lower Galilee, stretching right across from the northern end of the Sea

of Gennesaret to the coast of the Mediterranean, while that of Naphtali

lay further north. The way of the sea' is here not the designation of

another district, but a specification of those named in the preceding

clauses, and may be rendered towards the sea,' while beyond Jordan' is

the almost heathen territory on the east bank of the river, and Galilee

of the Gentiles' is the general name for all three, the two tribal

territories and the trans-Jordanic district. These are all smelted into

one designation, the people which sat in darkness,' and thus the whole

of verse 15 and the first clause of verse 16 make the nominative of the

verb saw.' There is something very impressive in that long-drawn-out

accumulation of geographical names, and in their being all massed in

the one sad description of their inert darkness, and then equally

massed as seeing the great light that springs up. The intense pathos of

that description and its sad truth to experience should not be

unnoticed. They sit in the dark--the attitude of listless languor and

constrained inaction, too true an emblem of the paralysis which falls

on all the highest activities of the spirit, if the light from God has

been quenched. It is only wild beasts that are active in the night. The

lower parts of man's nature may work energetically in that darkness,

but all that makes his glory is torpid in it. Christ's light has been

the great impulse to progress. Races without it sit and do not march.

But that is not all, for the sad picture is sketched again with blacker

shadows in the next clause, which substitutes for darkness' the still

more tragic words, the region and shadow of death.' The realm of

darkness is the region of death. That dread figure is the lord of it,

and, grimly enough, its very intensity of blackness has power to throw

a shadow even there where there is no light, and to deepen the gloom.

The second clause advances on the first in another respect, for while

the former spoke only of seeing' the light, the latter tells of the

blessed suddenness with which it sprung up.' The one clause speaks of

the human perception, the other of the divine revelation which precedes

it and makes it possible.

But had Matthew any right to see in Jesus' Galilean ministry the

fulfilment of a prophecy which, as spoken, was simply a promise that

the northern parts of Israel which, by geographical position, had to

bear the first and worst brunt of Assyrian invasion, should have

deliverance from the oppressor? Yes; for Isaiah's vision of the light

rising on Israel, crushed beneath foreign oppression, was based on a

distinctly Messianic prediction. It was because Messiah should come

that he expected Assyria to be flung off and Israel to be set free, and

he was right in the expectation, for though the Messiah did not come

visibly then, His coming was the guarantee, and in some sense the

cause, of Israel's deliverance. Nor was Matthew less right in seeing in

that earlier deliverance but a germinant accomplishment of the

prophecy, which, by its very transiency, outwardness, and

incompleteness, pointed onwards to a better spring of the Light, and a

fuller deliverance from a murkier darkness and a more mortal death. The

life was the light of men,' the teacher of all knowledge of God, the

source of all light of true joy, the giver of all light of white

purity, and He has risen on a world sitting in darkness that all men

may walk in the light, and be children of the light.

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THE EARLY WELCOME AND THE FIRST MINISTERS OF THE KING

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the

kingdom of heaven is at hand. 18. And Jesus, walking by the sea of

Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother,

casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. 19. And He saith

unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. 20. And they

straightway left their nets, and followed Him. 21. And going on from

thence, He saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John

his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets:

and He called them. 22. And they immediately left the ship and their

father, and followed Him. 23. And Jesus went about all Galilee,

teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom,

and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the

people. 24. And His fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought

unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and

torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which

were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them. 25.

And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and

from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Jud桬 and from beyond

Jordan.'--MATT. iv. 17-25.

In these verses we have a summary of our Lord's early Galilean

ministry. The events are so presented and combined as to give an

impression as of a triumphal progress of the newly anointed monarch. He

sweeps through the northern regions, everywhere exercising the twofold

office of teaching and healing, and everywhere followed by eager

crowds. This joyous burst of the new power, like some strong fountain

leaping into the sunshine, and this rush of popular enthusiasm, are

meant to heighten the impression of the subsequent hostility of the

people. The King welcomed at first is crucified at last. It was roses,

roses, all the way' in these early days, but they withered soon. There

are three points in these verses: the King acting as His own herald;

the King calling His first servants; and the King wielding His power

and welcomed by His subjects.

I. In verse 17 we have a striking picture of the King as His own

herald. The word rendered preach' of course means, literally, to

proclaim as a herald does. It is remarkable that this earliest phase of

our Lord's teaching is described in the same words as John's preaching.

The stern voice was silenced. Instead of the free wilderness, John had

now the gloomy walls of Mach浳 for the bound of his activity. But

Jesus takes up his message, though with a difference. The severe

imagery of the axe, the fan, the fire, is not repeated, as it would

seem. Sterner words than John's could fall hot from the lips into which

grace was poured; but the time for these was not yet come. It may seem

singular that Christ should have spoken of the kingdom, and been silent

concerning the King. But such silence was only of a piece with the

reticence which marked His whole teaching, and was a sign of His wise

adaptation of His words to the capacity of His hearers, as well as of

His lowliness. He veiled His royalty by deigning to be His own herald;

by substituting the proclamation of the abstract, the kingdom, for the

concrete, the King; by seeming to careless hearers to be but the

continuer of the forerunner's message; by the simple, remote region

which He chose for His earliest work. The belief that the kingdom was

at hand was equally necessary, and repentance equally indispensable as

preparation for it, whoever the King might be. The same law of

congruity between message and hearers, which He enjoined on His

followers, when He bade them be careful where they flung their pearls,

and which governed His own fullest final revelations to His truest

friends, when He said, I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye

cannot carry them now,' moulded His first words to the excited but

ignorant crowds.

II. The King's mandate summoning His servants. The call of the first

four disciples is so told as to make prominent these points: the

brotherhood of the two pairs; their occupation at the moment of their

call; the brief, authoritative word of Christ; His investiture of them

with new functions, which yet in some sense were the prolongation of

the old; their unhesitating, instantaneous obedience and willing

abandonment of their all. These points all help the impression of regal

power, and do something to explain the nature of the kingdom and the

heart of the King. Matthew does not seem to have known of the previous

intercourse of the four with Jesus, as recorded In John 1. His

narrative, taken alone, would lay stress on the strange influence

wielded by Jesus over these busy fishermen. But that influence is no

less remarkable, and becomes more explicable, on taking John's

supplemental account into consideration. It tells us that one brother

of each pair--namely Andrew, and probably John--had sought Jesus on the

Baptist's testimony, and in that never-to-be-forgotten night had

acquired the conviction that He was the King of Israel. It tells us,

too, that Andrew first found his own brother, Simon; from which we may

infer that the other one of the two next found his brother James, and

that each brought his own brother to Jesus. The bond of discipleship

was then riveted. But apparently, when Jesus went up to Jerusalem on

that first journey recorded only in John's Gospel, the four went back

to their fishing, and waited for His further call. It came in the

manner which Matthew describes. The background, which John enables us

to fill in, shows us that their following was no sudden blind impulse,

but the deliberate surrender of men who knew well what they were doing,

though they had not fathomed the whole truth as to His kingdom and

their place in it. They knew, at any rate, that He was the Messiah and

that they were called by a voice, which they ought to obey, to be His

soldiers and partisans. They could not but know that the call meant

danger, hardship, conflict. They rallied to the call, as soldiers might

when the commander honours them by reading out their names, as picked

for leaders of the storming-party.

Was this the same incident which St. Luke narrates as following the

first miraculous draught of fishes? That is one of the difficulties in

harmonising the synoptic narratives which will always divide opinions.

On the whole, I incline to think it most natural to answer no.' The

reasons would take us too far afield. But accepting that view, we may

note through how many stages Jesus led this group of His disciples

before they were fully recognised as apostles. First there was their

attachment to Him as disciples, which in no degree interfered with

their trade. Then came this call to more close attendance on Him,

which, however, was probably still somewhat intermittent. Then followed

the call recorded by Luke, which finally tore them from their homes;

and, last of all, their appointment as apostles. At each stage they

might have had opportunity to have returned.' Their vocation in the

kingdom dawns on them slowly. They and we are led on, by little and

little and little, to posts and tasks of which we do not dream at the

beginning. Duty opens before the docile heart bit by bit. Abram is led

to Harran, and only there learns his ultimate destination. Obedience is

rewarded by the summons to more complete surrender, which is also

fuller possession of Him for whom the surrender is made.

The word of a king is with power.' Christ's call is authoritative in

its brevity. All duty lies in Come ye after Me.' He does not need to

use arguments. From the very first this meek and lowly man assumes a

tone which on other lips we call arrogant. His style is royal. His

mouth is autocratic. He knows that He has the right to command. And,

strangely enough, the world admits the right, and finds nothing

unworthy of His meekness--a meekness of which He was fully conscious,

which is another paradox--in this unconditional claim of absolute

submission to his curt orders. What is the explanation of this tone of

authority? How comes it that the kingdom which is liberty is, from its

very foundation, an absolute despotism? That same peremptory summons

reaches beyond these four fishermen to us all. They were the first to

hear it, and continued to hold pre-eminence among the disciples, for

they make up the first group of the three quaternions into which the

list of the apostles is always divided. But the very same voice speaks

to us, and we are as truly summoned by the King to be His servants and

soldiers as were they.

Their prompt self-surrendering response is the witness of the power

over their hearts which Jesus had won. The one pair of brothers left

their nets floating in the water; the other left their father with the

mesh and the twine in his old hands. It was not much wealth to leave.

But he surrenders much who surrenders all, however little that all may

be; and he surrenders nothing who keeps back anything. One sweet

portion of their earthly happiness He left them to enjoy, heightened by

discipleship, for each had his brother by his side, and natural

affection was ennobled by common faith and service. If Zebedee was

left, John still had James. True, Herod's sword cut their union

asunder, and James died first, and John last, of the twelve; but years

of happy brotherhood were to come before then. So both the surrender

which outwardly gives up possessions or friends, and that which keeps

them, sanctified by being held and used as for and from Him, were

exemplified in the swift obedience of these four to the call of the

King.

I will make you fishers of men.' That shows a kindly wish to make as

little as may be of the change of occupation. Their old craft is to be

theirs still, only in nobler form. The patience, the brave facing of

the storm and the night, the observance of the indications which taught

where to cast, the perseverance which toiled all night though not a fin

glistened in the net, would all find place in their new career. Nor are

these words less royal than was the call. They contain profound hints

as to the nature of the kingdom which could scarcely be apprehended at

first. But this at least would be clear, that Jesus summoned them to

service, to gather in men out of the dreary waves of worldly care and

toil into a kingdom of stable rest, and that by summoning them to

service He endowed them with power. So He does still. All whom He

summons to follow Him are meant by Him to be fishers of men. It was not

as apostles, but as simple disciples, that these four received this

charge and ability. The same command and fitness are given to all

Christians. Following Christ, surrender, the obligation of effort to

win others, capacity to do so, belong to all the subjects of Christ's

kingdom.

III. The triumphal progress of the King. Our evangelist evidently

masses together without regard to chronological order the broad

features of the early Galilean ministry. He paints it as a time of

joyful activity, of universal recognition, of swift and far-spreading

fame. We do not exaggerate the impression of victorious publicity which

they give, when we call these closing verses the record of the King's

triumphal progress through His dominions. Observe the reiterated use of

all,'--all Galilee, all manner of sickness and all manner of disease,

all Syria, all that were sick. Matthew labours to convey the feeling of

universal stir and wide-reaching, full-throated' welcome. Observe, too,

that the activity of Christ is confined to Galilee, but the fame of Him

crosses the border into heathendom. The King stays on His own

territory, but He conquers beyond the frontier. Syria and the mostly

heathen Decapolis, and Per�� (beyond Jordan'), are moved. The odour of

the ointment not only fills the house, but enriches the scentless

outside air. The prophecy contained in the coming of the Magi is

beginning to be fulfilled. From its first preaching, the kingdom is

diffusive. Note, too, the contrast between John's ministry and

Christ's, in that the former stayed in one spot, and the crowds had to

go out to him, while the very genius of Christ's mission expressed

itself in that this shepherd king sought the sad and sick, and went

about in all Galilee.' Observe, too, that He teaches and preaches the

good news of the kingdom, before He heals. John's proclamation of the

kingdom had been so charged with threatenings and mingled with fire

that it could scarcely be called a gospel'; but here that joyous word,

used for the first time, is in place. As the tidings came from Christ's

lips, they were good tidings, and to proclaim them was His first task.

The miracles of healing came second. They were not the bell before the

sermon,' but the benediction after it. They flowed from Christ in rich

abundance. The eager receptiveness of the people, ignorant as it was,

was greater then than ever afterwards. Therefore the flow of miraculous

power was more unimpeded. But it may be questioned whether we generally

have an adequate notion of the immense number of Christ's miracles.

Those recorded are but a small proportion of those done. There were

more grapes in the vineyards of Eshcol than the messengers brought in

evidence to the camp. Our Lord's miracles are told by units; they seem

to have been wrought by scores. These early ones were not only

attestations of His claim to be the King, but illustrations of the

nature of His kingdom He had conquered and bound the strong man, and

now He was spoiling his house.' They were parables of His higher work

on men's souls, which He comes to cleanse from the oppression of

demons, from the foamings of epilepsy, from impotence as to doing

right. They were tokens of the inexhaustible fountain of power, and of

the swift and equally inexhaustible treasures of sympathy, which dwelt

in Him. They were His first trophies in His holy war, His first gifts

to His subjects.

Thus compassed with enthusiasm, and shedding on the wearied new hopes,

and on the sick unwonted health, and stirring in sluggish souls some

aspirations that greatened and inspired, the King appeared. But no

illusions deceived His calm prescience. From the beginning He knew the

path which stretched before Him; and while the transient loyalty of the

ignorant shouted hosannas around His steps, He saw the cross at the

end, and the sight did not make Him falter.

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THE NEW SINAI

And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was

set, His disciples came unto Him: 2. And He opened his mouth, and

taught them, saying, 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is

the kingdom of heaven. 4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall

be comforted. 5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the

earth. 6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after

righteousness: for they shall be filled. 7. Blessed are the merciful:

for they shall obtain mercy. 8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they

shall see God. 9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called

the children of God, 10. Blessed are they which are persecuted for

righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11. Blessed

are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all

manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. 12. Rejoice, and be

exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted

they the prophets which were before you. 13. Ye are the salt of the

earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be

salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be oast out, and to

be trodden under foot of men. 14. Ye are the light of the world. A city

that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15. Neither do men light a

candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth

light unto all that are in the house. 16. Let your light so shine

before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father

which is in heaven.'--MATT. v. 1-16.

An unnamed mountain somewhere on the Sea of Galilee is the Sinai of the

new covenant. The contrast between the savage desolation of the

wilderness and the smiling beauty of the sunny slope near the haunts of

men symbolises the contrast in the genius of the two codes, given from

each. There God came down in majesty, and the cloud hid Him from the

people's gaze; here Jesus sits amidst His followers, God with us. The

King proclaims the fundamental laws of His kingdom, and reveals much of

its nature by the fact that He begins by describing the characteristics

of its subjects, as well as by the fact that the description is cast in

the form of beatitudes.

We must leave unsettled the question as to the relation between the

Sermon on the Mount and the shorter edition of part of it given by

Luke, only pointing out that in this first part of Matthew's Gospel we

are evidently presented with general summaries; as, for example, the

summary of the Galilean ministry in the previous verses, and the grand

procession of miracles which follows in chapters viii. and ix. It is

therefore no violent supposition that here too the evangelist has

brought together, as specimens of our Lord's preaching, words which

were not all spoken at the same time. His description of the Galilean

ministry in ch. iv. 23, as teaching' and healing,' governs the

arrangement of his materials from chapter v. to the end of chapter ix.

First comes the sermon, then the miracles follow.

The Beatitudes, as a whole, are a set of paradoxes to the mind of the

flesh.' They were meant to tear away the foolish illusions of the

multitude as to the nature of the kingdom; and they must have disgusted

and turned back many would-be sharers in it. They are like a dash of

cold water on the fiery, impure enthusiasms which were eager for a

kingdom of gross delights and vulgar conquest. And, no doubt, Jesus

intended them to act like Gideon's test, and to sift out those whose

appetite for carnal good was uppermost. But they were tests simply

because they embodied everlasting truths as to the characters of His

subjects. Our narrow space allows of only the most superficial

treatment of these deep words.

I. The foundation of all is laid in poverty of spirit. The word

rendered poor' does not only signify one in a condition of want, but

rather one who is aware of the condition, and seeks relief. If we may

refer to Latin words here, it is mendicus rather than pauper, a beggar

rather than a poor man, who is meant. So that to be poor in spirit is

to be in inmost reality conscious of need, of emptiness, of dependence

on God, of demerit; the true estimate of self, as blind, evil, weak, is

intended; the characteristic tone of feeling pointed to is

self-abnegation, like that of the publican smiting his breast, or that

of the disease-weakened, hunger-tortured prodigal, or that of the once

self-righteous Paul, O wretched man that I am!' People who do not like

evangelical teaching sometimes say, Give me the Sermon on the Mount.'

So say I. Only let us take all of it; and if we do, we shall come, as

we shall have frequent occasion to point out, in subsequent passages,

to something uncommonly like the evangelical theology to which it is

sometimes set up as antithetic. For Christ begins His portraiture of a

citizen of the kingdom with the consciousness of want and sin. All the

rest of the morality of the Sermon is founded on this. It is the root

of all that is heavenly and divine in character. So this teaching is

dead against the modern pagan doctrine of self-reliance, and really

embodies the very principle for the supposed omission of which some

folk like this Sermon; namely, that our proud self-confidence must be

broken down before God can do any good with us, or we can enter His

kingdom.

The promises attached to the Beatitudes are in each case the results

which flow from the quality, rather than the rewards arbitrarily given

for it. So here, the possession of the kingdom comes by consequence

from poverty of spirit. Of course, such a kingdom as could be so

inherited was the opposite of that which the narrow and fleshly

nationalism of the Jews wanted, and these first words must have cooled

many incipient disciples. The kingdom of heaven' is the rule of God

through Christ. It is present wherever wills bow to Him; it is future,

as to complete realisation, in the heaven from which it comes, and to

which, like its King, it belongs even while on earth. Obviously, its

subjects can only be those who feel their dependence, and in poverty of

spirit have cast off self-will and self-reliance. Theirs is the

kingdom' does not mean they shall rule,' but of them shall be its

subjects.' True, they shall rule in the perfected form of it; but the

first, and in a real sense the only, blessedness is to obey God; and

that blessedness can only come when we have learned poverty of spirit,

because we see ourselves as in need of all things.

II. Each Beatitude springs from the preceding, and all twined together

make an ornament of grace upon the neck, a chain of jewels. The second

sounds a more violent paradox than even the first. Sorrowing is

blessed. This, of course, cannot mean mere sorrow as such. That may or

may not be a blessing. Grief makes men worse quite as often as it makes

them better. Its waves often flow over us like the sea over marshes,

leaving them as salt and barren as it found them. Nor is sorrow always

sure of comfort. We must necessarily understand the word here so as to

bring it into harmony with the context, and link it with the former

Beatitude as flowing from it, as well as with the succeeding. The only

intelligible explanation is that this sorrow arises from the

contemplation of the same facts concerning self as lead to poverty of

spirit, and is, in fact, the emotional side of the same disposition. He

who takes the true measure of himself cannot but sorrow over the

frightful gulf between what he should and might be and what he is, for

he knows that there is more than misfortune or unavoidable creatural

weakness at work. The grim reality of sin has to be reckoned in.

Personal responsibility and guilt are facts. The soul that has once

seen its own past as it is, and looked steadily down into the depths of

its own being, cannot choose but mourn.' Such contrition underlies all

moral progress. The ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount puts

these two, poverty of spirit and tears for sin, at the foundation. Do

its admirers lay that fact to heart? This is Christ's account of

discipleship. We have to creep through a narrow gate, which we shall

not pass but on our knees and leaving all our treasures outside. But

once through, we are in a great temple with far-reaching aisles and

lofty roof. Such sorrow is sure of comfort. Other sorrow is not. The

comfort it needs is the assurance of forgiveness and cleansing, and

that assurance has never been sought from the King in vain. The comfort

is filtered to us in drops here; it pours in a flood hereafter. Blessed

the sorrow which leads to experience of the tender touch of the hand

that wipes away tears from the face, and plucks evil from the heart!

Blessed the mourning, which prepares for the festal garland and the oil

of gladness and the robe of praise, instead of ashes on the head and

sackcloth on the spirit!

III. Meekness here seems to be considered principally as exercised to

men, and it thus constitutes the first of the social virtues, which

henceforward alternate with those having exclusive reference to God. It

is the grace which opposes patient gentleness to hatred, injury, or

antagonism. The prominence given to it in Christ's teaching is one of

the peculiarities of Christian morals, and is a standing condemnation

of much so-called Christianity. Pride and anger and self-assertion and

retaliation flaunt in fine names, and are called manly virtues.

Meekness is smiled at, or trampled on, and the men who exercise it are

called Quakers' and poor-spirited' and chicken-hearted' and the like.

Social life among us is in flagrant contradiction of this Beatitude;

and as for national life, all Christian nations' agree that to apply

Christ's precept to it would be absurd and suicidal. He said that the

meek should inherit the earth; statesmen say that the only way to keep

a country is to be armed to the teeth, and let no man insult its flag

with impunity. There does not seem much room for a spirited foreign

policy' or for proper regard to one's own dignity' inside this

Beatitude, does there? But notice that this meekness naturally follows

the preceding dispositions. He who knows himself and has learned the

depth of his own evil will not be swift to blaze up at slights or

wrongs. The true meekness is not mere natural disposition, but the

direct outcome of poverty of spirit and the consequent sorrow. So, it

is a test of their reality. Many a man will indulge in confessions of

sin, and crackle up in sputtering heat of indignation at some slight or

offence. If he does, his lowly words have had little meaning, and the

benediction of these promises will come scantily to his heart.

Does Christ mean merely to say that meek men will acquire landed

properly? Is there not a present inheritance of the earth by them,

though they may not own a foot of it? They have the world who enjoy it,

whom it helps nearer God, who see Him in it, to whom it is the field

for service and the means for growing character. But in the future the

kingdom of heaven will be a kingdom of the earth, and the meek saints

shall reign with the King who is meek and lowly of heart.

IV. Righteousness is conformity to the will of God, or moral

perfection. Hunger and thirst are energetic metaphors for passionate

desire, and imply that righteousness is the true nourishment of the

Spirit. Every longing of a noble spirit is blessed. Aspiration after

the unreached is the salt of all lofty life. It is better to be

conscious of want than to be content. There are hungers which are all

unblessed, greedy appetites for the swine's husks, which are misery

when unsatisfied, and disgust when satiated. But we are meant to be

righteous, and shall not in vain desire to be so. God never sends

mouths but He sends meat to fill them. Such longings prophesy their

fruition.

Notice that this hunger follows the experience of the former

Beatitudes. It is the issue of poverty of spirit and of that blessed

sorrow. Observe, too, that the desire after, and not the possession or

achievement of, righteousness is blessed. Is not this the first hint of

the Christian teaching that we do not work out or win but receive it?

God gives it. Our attitude towards that gift should be earnest longing.

Such a blessed hungerer shall receive . . . righteousness from the God

of his salvation.' The certainty that he will do so rests at last on

the faithfulness of God, who cannot but respond to all desires which He

inspires. They are premonitions of His purposes, like rosy clouds that

run before the chariot of the sunrise. The desire to be righteous is

already righteousness in heart and will, and reveals the true bent of

the soul. Its realisation in life is a question of time. The

progressive fulfilment here points to completeness in heaven, when we

shall behold His face in righteousness, and be satisfied when we awake

in His likeness.

V. Again we have a grace which is exercised to men. Mercy is more than

meekness. That implied opposition, and was largely negative. This does

not regard the conduct of others at all, and is really love in exercise

to the needy, especially the unworthy. It embraces pity, charitable

forbearance, beneficence, and is revealed in acts, in words, in tears.

It is blessed in itself. A life of selfishness is hell; a life of mercy

is sweet with some savour of heaven. It is the consequence of mercy

received from God. Poverty of spirit, sorrow, hunger after

righteousness bring deep experiences of God's gentle forbearance and

bestowing love, and will make us like Him in proportion as they are

real. Our mercifulness, then, is a reflection from His. His ought to be

the measure and pattern of ours in depth, scope, extent of

self-sacrifice, and freeness of its gifts. A stringent requirement!

Our exercise of mercy is the condition of our receiving it. On the

whole, the world gives us back, as a mirror does, the reflection of our

own faces; and merciful men generally get what they give. But that is a

law with many exceptions, and Jesus means more than that. Merciful men

get mercy from God--not, of course, that we deserve mercy by being

merciful. That is a contradiction in terms; for mercy is precisely that

which we do not deserve. The place of mercy in this series shows that

Jesus regarded it as the consequence, not the cause, of our experience

of God's mercy. But He teaches over and over again that a hard,

unmerciful heart forfeits the divine mercy. It does so, because such a

disposition tends to obscure the very state of mind to which alone

God's mercy can be given. Such a man must have forgotten his poverty

and sorrow, his longings and their rich reward, and so must have, for

the time, passed from the place where he can take in God's gift. A life

inconsistent with Christian motives will rob a Christian of Christian

privileges. The hand on his brother's throat destroys the servant's own

forgiveness. He cannot be at once a rapacious creditor and a discharged

bankrupt.

VI. If detached from its connection, there is little blessedness in the

next Beatitude. What is the use of telling us how happy purity of heart

will make us? It only provokes the despairing question, And how am I to

be pure?' But when we set this word in its place here, it does bring

hope. For it teaches that purity is the result of all that has gone

before, and comes from that purifying which is the sure answer of God

to our poverty, mourning, and longing. Such purity is plainly

progressive, and as it increases, so does the vision of God grow. The

more the glasses of the telescope are cleansed, the brighter does the

great star shine to the gazer. No man hath seen God,' nor can see Him,

either amid the mists of earth or in the cloudless sky of heaven, if by

seeing we mean perceiving by sense, or full, direct comprehension by

spirit. But seeing Him is possible even now, if by it we understand the

knowledge of His character, the assurance of His presence, the sense of

communion with Him. Our earthly consciousness of God may become so

clear, direct, real, and certain, that it deserves the name of vision.

Such blessed intuition of Him is the prerogative of those whose hearts

Christ has cleansed, and whose inward eye is therefore able to behold

God, because it is like Him. Unless the eye were sunlike, how could it

see the sun?' We can blind ourselves to Him, by wallowing in filth.

Impurity unfits for seeing purity. Swedenborg profoundly said that the

wicked see only blackness where the sun is.

Like all these Beatitudes, this has a double fulfilment, as the kingdom

has two stages of here and hereafter. Purity of heart is the condition

of the vision of God in heaven. Without holiness, no man shall see the

Lord.' The sight makes us pure, and purity makes us see. Thus heaven

will be a state of ever-increasing, reciprocally acting sight and

holiness. Like Him because we see Him, we shall see Him more because we

have assimilated what we see, as the sunshine opens the petals, and

tints the flower with its own colours the more deeply, the wider it

opens.

VII. Once more we have the alternation of a grace exercised to men. If

we give due weight to the order of these Beatitudes, we shall feel that

Christ's peacemaker must be something more than a mere composer of

men's quarrels. For he has to be trained by all the preceding

experiences, and has to be emptied of self, penitent, hungering for and

filled with righteousness, and therefore pure in heart as well as, in

regard to men, meek and merciful, ere he can hope to fill this part.

That apprenticeship deepens the conception of the peace which Christ's

subjects are to diffuse. It is, first and chiefly, the peace which

enters the soul that has traversed all these stages; that is to say,

the Christian peacemaker is first to seek to bring about peace between

men and God, by beseeching them to be reconciled to Him, and then

afterwards, as a consequence of this, is to seek to diffuse through all

human relations the blessed unity and amity which flow most surely from

the common possession of the peace of God. Of course, the relation

which the subjects of the true King bear to all wars and fightings, to

all discord and strife, is not excluded, but is grounded on this deeper

meaning. The centuries that have passed since the words were spoken,

have not yet brought up the Christian conscience to the full perception

of their meaning and obligation. Too many of us still believe that

great doors and effectual' can be blown open with gunpowder, and regard

this Beatitude as a counsel of perfection, rather than as one of the

fundamental laws of the kingdom.

The Christian who moves thus among men seeking to diffuse everywhere

the peace with God which fills his own soul, and the peace with all men

which they only who have the higher peace can preserve unbroken in

their quiet, meek hearts, will be more or less recognised as God-like

by men, and will have in his own heart the witness that he is called by

God His child. He will bear visibly the image of his Father, and will

hear the voice that speaks to him too as unto a son.

VIII. The last Beatitude crowns all the paradoxes of the series with

what sounds to flesh as a stark contradiction. The persecuted are

blessed. The previous seven sayings have perfected the portraiture of

what a child of the kingdom is to be. This appends a calm prophecy,

which must have shattered many a rosy dream among the listeners, of

what his reception by the world will certainly turn out. Jesus is not

summoning men to dominion, honour, and victory; but to scorn and

suffering. His own crown, He knew, was first to be twisted of thorns,

and copies of it were to wound His followers' brows. Yet even that fate

was blessed; for to suffer for righteousness, which is to suffer for

Him, brings elevation of spirit, a solemn joy, secret supplies of

strength, and sweet intimacies of communion else unknown. The noble

army of martyrs rose before His thoughts as He spoke; and now, eighteen

hundred years after, heaven is crowded with those who by axe and stake

and gibbet have entered there. The glory dies not, and the grief is

past.' They stoop from their thrones to witness to us that Christ is

true, and that the light affliction has wrought an eternal weight of

glory.

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THE FIRST BEATITUDE

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of

Heaven.'--MATT. v. 2.

Ye are not come unto the mount that burned with fire, nor unto the

sound of a trumpet, and the voice of "awful" words.' With such

accompaniments the old law was promulgated, but here, in this Sermon on

the Mount, as it is called, the laws of the Kingdom are proclaimed by

the King Himself; and He does not lay them down with the sternness of

those written on tables of stone. No rigid thou shalt' compels, no iron

thou shalt not' forbids; but each precept is linked with a blessing,

and every characteristic that is required is enforced by the thought

that it contributes to our highest good. It fitted well Christ's

character and the lips into which grace is poured,' that He spake His

laws under the guise of these Beatitudes.

This, the first of them, is dead in the teeth of flesh and sense, a

paradox to the men who judge good and evil by things external and

visible, but deeply, everlastingly, unconditionally, and inwardly true.

All that the world commends and pats on the back, Christ condemns, and

all that the world shrinks from and dreads, Christ bids us make our

own, and assures us that in it we shall find our true blessing. The

poor in spirit,' they are the happy men.

The reason for the benediction is as foreign to law and earthly

thoughts as is the benediction of which it is the reason--for theirs is

the Kingdom of Heaven.' Poverty of spirit will not further earthly

designs, nor be an instrument for what the world calls success and

prosperity. But it will give us something better than earth, it will

give us heaven. Do you think that that is better than earth, and should

you be disposed to acquiesce in the benediction of those who may lose

the world's gifts but are sure to have heaven's felicities?

Now, I think I shall best deal with these words by considering, most

simply, the fundamental characteristic of a disciple of Jesus Christ,

and the blessed issues of that character.

I. First, then, the fundamental characteristic of Christ's disciples.

Now it is to be noticed that Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount,

which is much briefer than Matthew's, omits the words in spirit,' and

so seems at first sight to be an encomium and benediction upon the

outward condition of earthly poverty. Matthew, on the other hand, says

poor in spirit.' And the difference between the two evangelists has

given occasion to some to maintain that one or the other of them

misunderstood Christ's meaning, and modified His expression either by

omission or enlargement. But if you will notice another difference

between the two forms of the saying in the two Gospels, you will, I

think, find an explanation of the one already referred to; for

Matthew's Beatitudes are general statements, Blessed are'; and Luke's

are addressed to the circle of the disciples, Blessed are ye.' And if

we duly consider that difference, we shall see that the general

statement necessarily required the explanation which Matthew's version

appends to it, in order to prevent the misunderstanding that our Lord

was setting so much store by earthly conditions as to suppose that

virtue and blessedness were uniformly attached to any of these. Jesus

Christ was no vulgar demagogue flattering the poor and inveighing

against the rich. Luke's ye poor' shows at once that Christ was not

speaking about all the poor in outward condition, but about a certain

class of such. No doubt the bulk of His disciples were poor men who had

been drawn or driven by their sense of need to open their hearts to

Him. Outward poverty is a blessing if it drives men to God; it is not a

blessing if, as is often the case, it drives men from Him; or if, as is

still oftener the case, it leaves men negligent of Him. So that

Matthew's enlargement is identical in meaning with Luke's condensed

form, regard being had to the difference in the structure of the two

Beatitudes.

And so we come just to this question--What is this poverty of spirit? I

do not need to waste your time in saying what it is not. To me it seems

to be a lowly and just estimate of ourselves, our character, our

achievements, based upon a clear recognition of our own necessities,

weaknesses, and sins.

The poor in spirit.'--I wonder if it would be very reasonable for a

moth that flits about the light, or a gnat that dances its hour in the

sunbeam, to be proud because it had longer wings, or prettier markings

on them, than some of its fellows? Is it much more reasonable for us to

plume ourselves on, and set much store by, anything that we are or have

done? Two or three plain questions, to which the answers are quite as

plain, ought to rip up this swollen bladder of self-esteem which we are

all apt to blow. What hast thou that thou hast not received?' Where did

you get it? How came you by it? How long is it going to last? Is it

such a very big thing after all? You have written a book; you are

clever as an operator, an experimenter; you are a successful student.

You have made a pile of money; you have been prosperous in your earthly

career, and can afford to look upon men that are failures and beneath

you in social position with a smile of pity or of contempt, as the case

may be. Well! I suppose the distance to the nearest fixed star is

pretty much the same from the top of one ant-hill in a wood as from the

top of the next one, though the one may be a foot higher than the

other. I suppose that we have all come out of nothing, and are

anything, simply because God is everything. If He were to withhold His

upholding and inbreathing power from any of us for one moment, we

should shrivel into nothingness like a piece of paper calcined in the

fire, and go back into that vacuity out of which His fiat, and His fiat

alone, called us. And yet here we are, setting great store, some of us,

by our qualities or belongings, and thinking ever so much of ourselves

because we possess them, and all the while we are but great

emptinesses; and the things of which we are so proud are what God has

poured into us.

You think that is all commonplace. Bring it into your lives, brethren;

apply it to your estimate of yourselves, and your expectations from

other people, and you will be delivered from a large part of the

annoyances and the miseries of your present.

But the deepest reason for a habitual and fixed lowly opinion of

ourselves lies in a sadder fact. We are not only recipient

nothingnesses; we have something that is our own, and that is our will,

and we have lifted it up against God. And if a man's position as a

dependent creature should take all lofty looks and high spirit out of

him, his condition as a sinful man before God should lay him flat on

his face in the presence of that Majesty; and should make him put his

hand on his lips and say, from behind the covering, Unclean! unclean!'

Oh, brethren, if we would only go down into the depths of our own

hearts, every one of us would find there more than enough to make all

self-complacency and self-conceit utterly impossible, as it ought to

be, for us for ever. I have no wish, and God knows I have no need, to

exaggerate about this matter; but we all know that if we were turned

inside out, and every foul, creeping thing, and every blotch and spot

upon these hearts of ours spread in the light, we could not face one

another; we could scarcely face ourselves. If you or I were set, as

they used to set criminals, up in a pillory with a board hanging round

our necks, telling all the world what we were, and what we had done,

there would be no need for rotten eggs to be flung at us; we should

abhor ourselves. You know that is so. I know that it is so about

myself, and heart answereth to heart as in a glass.' And are we the

people to perk ourselves up amongst our fellows, and say, I am rich and

increased with goods, and have need of nothing'? Do we not know that we

are poor and miserable and blind and naked? Oh, brethren, the proud old

saying of the Greeks, Know thyself,' if it were followed out

unflinchingly and honestly by the purest saint this side heaven, would

result in this profound abnegation of all claims, in this poverty of

spirit.

So little has the world been influenced by Christ's teaching that it

uses poor-spirited creature' as a term of opprobrium and depreciation.

It ought to be the very opposite; for only the man who has been down

into the dungeons of his own character, and has cried unto God out of

the depths, will be able to make the house of his soul a fabric which

may be a temple of God, and with its shining apex may pierce the clouds

and seem almost to touch the heavens. A great poet has told us that the

things which lead life to sovereign power are self-knowledge,

self-reverence, and self-control. And in a noble sense it is true, but

the deepest self-knowledge will lead to self-abhorrence rather than to

self-reverence; and self-control is only possible when, knowing our own

inability to cope with our own evil, we cast ourselves on that Lamb of

God who beareth away the sin of the world, and ask Him to guide and to

keep us. The right attitude for us is, He did not so much as lift up

his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be

merciful to me a sinner.' And then, sweeter than angels' voices

fluttering down amid the blue, there will come that gracious word,

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

II. Turn, now, to the blessed issues of this characteristic.

Christ does not say joyful,' mirthful,' glad.' These are poor, vulgar

words by the side of the depth and calmness and permanence which are

involved in that great word blessed.' It is far more than joy, which

may be turbulent and is often impure. It is far deeper than any

gladness which has its sources in the outer world, and it abides when

joys have vanished, and all the song-birds of the spring are silent in

the winter of the soul. Blessed are the poor . . . for theirs is the

Kingdom of Heaven.'

The bulk of the remaining Beatitudes point onward to a future; this

deals with the present. It does not say shall be,' but is the Kingdom.'

It is an all-comprehensive promise, holding the succeeding ones within

itself, for they are but diverse aspects--modified according to the

necessities which they supply--of that one encyclop椩a of blessings,

the possession of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now the Kingdom of Heaven (or of God) is a state in which the will of

God is absolutely and perfectly obeyed. It is capable of partial

realisation here, and is sure of complete fulfilment hereafter. To the

early hearers of these words the phrase would necessarily suggest the

idea which bulked so large in prophecy and in Judaism, of the Messianic

Kingdom; and we may well lay hold of that thought to suggest the first

of the elements of this blessedness. That poverty of spirit is blessed

because it is an indispensable condition of becoming Christ's men and

subjects. I believe, dear friends, for my part, that the main reason

why so many of us are not out-and-out Christian men and women, having

entered really into that Kingdom which is obedience to God in Christ,

is because we have a superficial knowledge, or no knowledge at all, of

our own sinful condition, and of the gravity of that fact.

Intellectually, I take it that an under-estimate of the universality

and of the awfulness of sin has a great deal to do in shaping all the

maimed, imperfect, partial views of Christ, His character and nature,

which afflict the world. It is the mother of most of our heresies. And,

practically, if you do not feel any burden, you do not care to hear

about One who will carry it. If you have no sense of need, the message

that there is a supply will fall perfectly ineffectual upon your ears.

If you have not realised the truth that whatever else you may be, of

which you might be proud--wise, clever, beautiful, accomplished, rich,

prosperous--you have this to take all the self-conceit out of you, that

you are a sinful man--if you have not realised that, it will be no

gospel to you that Jesus Christ has died, the just for the unjust, and

lives to cleanse us.

Brethren, there is only one way into the true and full possession of

Christ's salvation, and that is through poverty of spirit. It is the

narrow door, like the mere low slits in the wall which in ancient times

were the access to some wealth-adorned palace or stately

structure--narrow openings that a man had to stoop his lofty crest in

order to enter. If you have never been down on your knees before God,

feeling what a wicked man or woman you are, I doubt hugely whether you

will ever stand with radiant face before God, and praise Him through

eternity for His mercy to you. If you wish to have Christ for yours,

you must begin, where He begins His Beatitudes, with poverty of spirit.

It is blessed because it invites the riches of God to come and make us

wealthy. It draws towards itself communication of God's infinite self,

with all His quickening and cleansing and humbling powers. Grace is

attracted by the sense of need, just as the lifted finger of the

lightning rod brings down fire from heaven. The heights are barren; it

is in the valleys that rivers run, and flowers bloom. God resisteth the

proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' If we desire to have Him, who

is the one source of all blessedness, in our hearts, as a true

possession, we must open the door for His entrance by poverty of

spirit. Desire brings fulfilment; and they who know their wants, and

only they, will truly long that they may be supplied.

This poverty of spirit is blessed because it is its own reward. All

self-esteem and self-complacency are like a hedgehog, as some one has

said, rolled up the wrong way, tormenting itself with its prickles.'

And the man that is always, or often, thinking how much above A, B, or

C he is, and how much A, B, or C ought to offer of incense to him, is

sure to get more cuffs than compliments, more enmity than affection;

and will be sore all over with wounded vanities of all sorts. But if we

have learned ourselves, and have departed from these lofty thoughts,

then to be humble in spirit is to be wise, cheerful, contented, simple,

restful in all circumstances. You remember John Bunyan's shepherd boy,

down in the valley of humiliation. Heart's-ease grew there, and his

song was, He that is low need fear no fall.' If we have this true,

deep-rooted poverty of spirit, we shall be below the tempest, which

will go clean over our heads. The oaks catch the lightnings; the grass

and the primroses are unscorched. The day of the Lord shall be upon all

high things, and the loftiness of men shall be brought low.'

So, dear brethren, blessedness is not to be found outside us. We need

not ask who shall go up into the heavens, or who shall descend into the

deep,' to bring it. It is in thee, if at all. Christ teaches us that

the sources of all true blessedness are within us; there or nowhere is

Eden. If we have the tempers and dispositions set forth in these

Beatitudes, condition matters but very little. If the source of all

blessedness is within us, the first step to it all is poverty of

spirit. Be ye clothed with humility.' The Master girt Himself with the

servant's towel, and His disciples are to copy Him who said: Take My

yoke upon you. . . . I am meek and lowly in heart . . . and ye shall

find rest'--and is not that blessedness?--ye shall find rest unto your

souls.'

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THE SECOND BEATITUDE

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.'--MATT. v. 4.

An ordinary superficial view of these so-called Beatitudes is that they

are simply a collection of unrelated sayings. But they are a great deal

more than that. There is a vital connection and progress in them. The

jewels are not flung down in a heap; they are wreathed into a chain,

which whosoever wears shall have an ornament of grace about his neck.'

They are an outgrowth from a common root; stages in the evolution of

Christian character.

Now, I tried to show in the former sermon how the root of them all is

the poverty of spirit which is spoken of in the preceding verse; and

how it really does lie at the foundation of the highest type of human

character, and in its very self is sure of possessing the Kingdom of

Heaven. And now I turn to the second of these Beatitudes. Like all the

others, it is a paradox, for it starts from a wholly different

conception from the common one, of what is man's chief good. If the

aims which usually engross us are really the true aims of life, then

there is no meaning in this saying of our Lord, for then it had been

better not to sorrow at all than to sorrow and be comforted. But if the

true purpose for which we are all gifted with this solemn gift of life

is that we may become imitators of God as dear children,' then there

are few things for which men should be more thankful than the sacred

sorrow, than which there are few instruments more powerful for creating

the type of character which we are set here to make our own. All lofty,

dignified, serious thinkers and poets (who for the most of men are the

best teachers) had spoken this same thought as well as Christ. But He

speaks it with a difference all His own, which deepens incalculably its

solemnity, and sets the truth of the otherwise sentimental saying,

which flies often in the face of human nature, upon immovable

foundations.

Let me ask you, then, to look with me, in the simplest possible way, at

the two thoughts of our text, as to who are the mourners that are

blessed,' and as to what is the consolation that they receive.

I. The mourners who are blessed.

Blessed are they that mourn.' Ah! that is not a universal bliss. All

mourners are not blessed. It would be good news, indeed, to a world so

full of miseries that men sometimes think it were better not to be, and

holding so many wrecked and broken hearts, if every sorrow had its

benediction. But just as we saw in the preceding discourse that the

poverty which Christ pronounced blessed is not mere straitness of

circumstances, or lack of material wealth, so here the sorrow, round

the head of which He casts this halo of glory, is not that which

springs from the mere alteration of external circumstances, or from any

natural causes. The influence of the first saying runs through all the

Beatitudes, and since it is the poor in spirit' who are there

pronounced happy, so here we must go far deeper than mere outward

condition, in order to find the ground of the benediction pronounced.

Let us be sure, to begin with, of this, that no condition, be it of

wealth or woe, is absolutely and necessarily good, but that the seat of

all true blessedness lies within, in the disposition which rightly

meets the conditions which God sends.

So I would say, first, that the mourners whom Christ pronounces

blessed' are those who are poor in spirit.' The mourning is the emotion

which follows upon that poverty. The one is the recognition of the true

estimate of our own characters and failings; the other is the feeling

that follows upon that recognition. The one is the prophet's

clear-sighted I am a man of unclean lips'; the other is the same

prophet's contemporaneous wail, Woe is me, for I am undone!'

And surely, brethren, if you and I have ever had anything like a

glimpse of what we really are, and have brought ourselves into the

light of God's face, and have pondered upon our characters and our

doings in that--not fierce' but all-searching, light' that flashes from

Him, there can be no attitude, no disposition, more becoming the best,

the purest, the noblest of us, than that Woe is me, for I am undone!'

Oh, dear friends, if--not as a theological term, but as a clinging,

personal fact--we realise what sin against God is, what must

necessarily come from it, what aggravations His gentleness, His

graciousness, His constant beneficence cause, how facilely we do the

evil thing and then wipe our lips and say, We have done no harm,' we

should be more familiar than we are with the depths of this experience

of mourning for sin.

I cannot too strongly urge upon you my own conviction--it may be worth

little, but I am bound to speak it--that there are few things which the

so-called Christianity of this day needs more than an intenser

realisation of the fact, and the gravity of the fact, of personal

sinfulness. There lies the root of the shallowness of so much that

calls itself Christianity in the world to-day. It is the source of

almost all the evils under which the Church is groaning. And sure I am

that if millions of the people that complacently put themselves down in

the census as Christians could but once see themselves as they are, and

connect their conduct with God's thought about it, they would get

shocks that would sober them. And sure I am that if they do not thus

see themselves here and now, they will one day get shocks that will

stupefy them. And so, dear friends, I urge upon you, as I would upon

myself, as the foundation and first step towards all the sunny heights

of God-likeness and blessedness, to go down, down deep into the hidden

corners, and see how, like the elders of Israel whom the prophet beheld

in the dark chamber, we worship creeping things, abominable things,

lustful things, in the recesses within. And then we shall possess more

of that poverty of spirit, and the conscious recognition of our own

true character will merge into the mourning which is altogether

blessed.

Now, note, again, how such sorrow will refine and ennoble character.

How different our claims upon other men would be if we possessed this

sober, saddened estimate of what we really are! How our petulance, and

arrogance, and insisting upon what is due to us of respect and homage

and deference would all disappear! How much more rigid would be our

guard upon ourselves, our own emotions, our own inclinations and

tastes! How much more lenient would be our judgment of the openly and

confessedly naughty ones, who have gone a little further in act, but

not an inch further in essence, than we have done! How different our

attitude to our fellows; and how lowly our attitude to God! Such sorrow

would sober us, would deliver us from our lusting after the gauds of

earth, would make us serious and reflective, would bring us to that

sad, wise valour' which is the conquering characteristic of humanity.

There is nothing more contemptible than the lives which, for want of

this self-knowledge, foam away in idle mirth, and effervesce in what

the world calls high spirits.'

There is no music in the life

That sounds with idiot laughter solely,

There's not a string attuned to mirth

But has its chords in melancholy.'

So said one whose reputation in English literature is mainly that of a

humorist. He had learned that the only noble humanity is that in which

the fountains of laughter and of tears lie so close together that their

waters intermingle. I beseech you not to confound the laughter of

fools,' which is the crackling of thorns under the pot,' with the true,

solemn, ennobling gladness which lives along with this sorrow of my

text.

Further, such mourning infused into the sorrow that comes from external

disasters will make it blessed too. As I have said, there is nothing in

any condition of life which necessarily and universally makes it

blessed. Though poets and moralists and Christian people have talked a

great deal, and beautifully and truly, about the sanctifying and

sweetening influences of calamity, do not let us forget that there are

perhaps as many people made worse by their sorrows as are made better

by them. There is such a thing as being made sullen, hard, selfish,

negligent of duty, resentful against God, hopeless, by the pressure of

our calamities. Blessed be God, there is such a thing as being drawn to

Him by them! Then they, too, come within the sweep of this benediction

of the Master, and outward distress is glorified into the sorrow which

is blessed. A drop or two of this tincture, the mourning which comes

from poverty of spirit, slipped into the cup of affliction, clears and

sweetens the waters, and makes them a tonic bitter. Brethren, if our

outward losses and disappointments and pains help us to apprehend, and

are accepted by us in the remembrance of, our own unworthiness, then

these, too, are God's sweet gifts to us.

One word more. This mourning is perfectly compatible with, and indeed

is experienced in its purest form only along with, the highest and

purest joy. I have been speaking about the indispensable necessity of

such sadness for all noble life. But let us remember, on the other

hand, that no one has so much reason to be glad as he has who, in

poverty of spirit, has clasped and possesses the wealth of the Kingdom.

And if a man, side by side with this profound and saddened sense of his

own sinfulness, has not a hold of the higher thing--Christ's

righteousness given to penitence and faith--then his knowledge of his

own unworthiness is still too shallow to inherit a benediction. There

is no reason why, side by side in the Christian heart, there should not

lie--there is every reason why there should lie--these two emotions,

not mutually discrepant and contradictory, but capable of being blended

together--the mourning which is blessed, and the joy which is

unspeakable and full of glory.

II. And now a word or two with regard to the consolation which such

mourning is sure to receive.

It is not true, whatever sentimentalists may say, that all sorrow is

comforted and therefore blessed. It may be forgotten. Pain may sting

less; men may betake themselves to trivial, or false, unworthy, low

alleviations, and fancy that they are comforted when they are only

diverted. But the sorrow meant in my text necessarily ensures for every

man who possesses it the consolation which follows. That consolation is

both present and future.

As for the present, the mourning which is based, as our text bases it,

on poverty of spirit, will certainly bring after it the consolation of

forgiveness arid of cleansing. Christ's gentle hand laid upon us, to

cause our guilt to pass away, and the inveterate habits of inclination

towards evil to melt out of our nature, is His answer to His child's

cry, Woe is me, for I am undone!' And anything is more probable than

that Christ, hearing a man thus complain of himself before Him, should

fail to send His swift answer.

Ah, brethren! you will never know how deep and ineffably precious are

the consolations which Christ can give, unless you have learned despair

of self, and have come helpless, hopeless, and yet confident, to that

great Lord. Make your hearts empty, and He will fill them; recognise

your desperate condition, and He will lift you up. The deeper down we

go into the depths, the surer is the rebound and the higher the soaring

to the zenith. It is they who have poverty of spirit, and mourning

based upon it, and only they, who pass into the sweetest, sacredest,

secretest recesses of Christ's heart, and there find all-sufficient

consolation.

In like manner, that consolation will come in its noblest and most

sufficing form to those who take their outward sorrows and link them

with this sense of their own ill-desert. Oh, dear friends, if I am

speaking to any one who to-day has a burdened heart, let such be sure

of this, that the way to consolation lies through submission; and that

the way to submission lies through recognition of our own sin. If we

will only lie still, let Him strike home, and bless the rod,' the rod

will blossom and bear fruit. The water of the cataract would not flash

into rainbow tints against the sunshine, unless it had been dashed into

spray against black rocks. And if we will but say with good old Dr.

Watts,

When His strokes are felt,

His strokes are fewer than our crimes,

And lighter than our guilt,'

it will not be hard to bow down and say, Thy will be done,' and with

submission consolation will be ours.

Is there anything to say about that future consolation? Very little,

for we know very little. But God Himself shall wipe away all tears from

their eyes.' The hope of that consolation is itself consolation, and

the hope becomes all the more bright when we know and measure the

depths of our own evil. Earth needs to be darkened in order that the

magic, ethereal beauty of the glow in the western heavens may be truly

seen. The sorrow of earth is the background on which the light of

heaven is painted.

So, dear friends, be sure of this, that the one thing which ought to

move a man to sadness is his own character. For all other causes of

grief are instruments for good. And be sure of this, too, that the one

thing which can ensure consolation adequate to the grief is bringing

the grief to the Lord Christ and asking Him to deal with it. His first

word of ministry ran parallel with these two Beatitudes. When He spoke

them He began with poverty of spirit, and passed to mourning and

consolation, and when He opened His lips in the synagogue of Nazareth

He began with, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath

anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the poor, to give unto them

that mourn in Zion a diadem for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the

garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.'

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THE THIRD BEATITUDE

Blessed are the meek! for they shall inherit the earth,--MATT, v. 5.

The originality of Christ's moral teaching lies not so much in the

novelty of His precepts as in the new relation in which He sets them,

the deepening which He gives them, the motives on which He bases them,

and the power which He communicates to keep them. Others before Him had

pronounced a benediction on the meek, but our Lord means far more than

they did, and, both in His description of the character and in the

promise which He attaches to it, He vindicates the uniqueness of His

notion of a perfect man.

The world's ideal is, on the whole, very different from His. It

inclines to the more conspicuous and so-called heroic virtues; it

prefers a great, flaring, yellow sunflower to the violet hiding among

the grass, and making its presence known only by fragrance. Blessed are

the strong, who can hold their own,' says the world. Blessed are the

meek,' says Christ.

The Psalmist had said it before Him, and had attached verbally the same

promise to the word. But our Lord means more than David did when he

said, The meek shall inherit the earth.' I ask you to think with me

now, first, what this Christian meekness is; then, whence it issues;

and then, whither it leads.

I. What Christian meekness is.

Now, the ordinary use of the word is to describe an attitude, or more

properly a disposition, in regard to men, especially in regard to those

who depreciate, or wrong, or harm us. But the Christian conception of

meekness, whilst it includes that, goes far deeper; and, primarily, has

reference to our attitude, or rather our disposition, towards God. And

in that aspect, what is it? Meek endurance and meek obedience, the

accepting of His dealings, of whatever complexion they are, and however

they may tear or desolate our hearts, without murmuring, without

sulking, without rebellion or resistance, is the deepest conception of

the meekness which Christ pronounces blessed. When sorrow comes upon

us, unless we have something more than natural strength bestowed upon

us, we are all but certain, like fractious children when beaten, to

kick and plunge and scream, or to take the infliction of the sorrow as

being an affront and an injury. If we have any claim to this

benediction, we must earn it by accepting our sorrows; then the

accepted sorrow becomes a solemn joy, or almost akin thereto. The ox

that kicks against the goads only does two things thereby; it does not

get away from them, but it wounds its own hocks, and it drives the

sharp points deeper into the ragged wounds. Let Him strike, dear

friend, for when He strikes He cuts clean; and there is no poison on

the edge of His knife. Meekness towards God is, first, patient

endurance of His Will.

And, in reference to Him, it is, next, unquestioning docility and

obedience. Its seat is in the will. When the will is bowed, a man is

far on his road to perfection; and the meaning of all that God does

with us--joys and sorrows, light and darkness, when His hand gives, and

when His hand withdraws, as when His authoritative voice commands, and

the sweet impulses of His love graciously constrain--is that our wills

may be made plastic and flexible, like a piece of wrought leather, to

every touch of His hand. True meekness goes far deeper down than any

attitude towards men. It lays hold on the sovereign will of God as our

supreme good, and delights in absolutely and perfectly conforming

itself thereto.

And then there follows, as a matter of course, that which is usually

the whole significance of the word, the meekness which is displayed in

our attitude towards men. The truly meek heart remains unprovoked

amidst all provocation. Most men are like dogs that answer bark for

bark, and only make night hideous and themselves hoarse thereby. But it

is our business to meet evil with good; and the more we are

depreciated, the more we are harmed, the more we are circled about by

malice and by scorn, the more patiently and persistently to love on.

Ah, brethren, it is easy to say and hard to do thus; but it is a plain

Christian duty. Old-fashioned people believe that the sun puts out the

fire. I know not how that may be, but sure I am that the one thing that

puts out the fire of antagonism and wrath and malice in those who

dislike or would harm us is that we should persistently shine upon, and

perchance overcome, evil with good. Provoked, we remain, if we are

truly meek, masters of ourselves and calm and equable, and so are

blessed in ourselves. Meekness makes no claims upon others. Plenty of

people are sore all over with the irritation caused by not getting what

they consider due respect. They howl and whine because they are not

appreciated. Do not expect much of men. Make no demands, if for no

better reason than because the more you demand the less you will get;

and the less you seem to think to be your due, the more likely you are

to receive what you desire.

But that is a poor, shallow ground. The true exhortation is, Be ye

imitators of God, as dear children.'

Ah, what a different world we should live in if the people that say,

Oh, the Sermon on the Mount is my religion,' really made it their

religion! How much friction would be taken out of all our lives; how

all society would be revolutionised, and earth would become a Paradise!

But there is another thing to be taken into account in the description

of meekness. That grace, as the example of our Lord shows, harmonises

with undaunted bravery and strenuous resistance to the evil in the

world. On our own personal account, there are to be no bounds to our

patient acceptance of personal wrong; on the world's account, there are

to be no bounds to our militant attitude against public evils. Only let

us remember that the wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of

God.' If contending theologians, and angry philanthropists, and social

reformers, that are ready to fly at each other's throats for the sacred

cause of humanity, would only remember that there is no good to be done

except in this spirit, there would be more likelihood of the errors and

miseries of mankind being redressed than, alas! there is to-day.

Gentleness is the strongest force in the world, and the soldiers of

Christ are to be priests, and to fight the battles of the Kingdom,

robed, not in jingling, shining armour or with sharp swords, nor with

fierce and eager bitterness of controversy, but in the meekness which

overcomes. You may take all the steam-hammers that ever were forged and

batter at an iceberg, and, except for the comparatively little heat

that is developed by the blows and melts some smell portion, it will be

ice still, though pulverised instead of whole. But let it get into the

silent drift of the Arctic current, and let it move quietly down to the

southward, then the sunbeams smite its coldness to death, and it is

dissipated in the warm ocean. Meekness is conqueror. Be not overcome of

evil, but overcome evil with good.'

II. Notice whence this Christian meekness flows.

You observe the place which this Beatitude holds in the linked series

of these precious sayings. It follows upon poverty of spirit' and

mourning.' And it follows, too, upon the comfort' which the mourner is

promised that he will receive. It is the conduct and disposition

towards God and man which follows from the inward experience described

in the two former Beatitudes, which had relation only to ourselves.

The only thing that can be relied upon as an adequate cold water douche

to our sparks of anger, resentment, retaliation, and rebellion is that

we shall have passed through the previous experiences, have learned a

just and lowly estimate of ourselves, have learned to come to God with

penitence in our hearts, and have been raised by His gracious hand from

the dust where we lay at His feet, and been welcomed to His embrace. He

who thus has learned himself, and has felt repentance, and has received

the comfort of forgiveness and cleansing, he, and he only, is the man

who, under all provocation and in any and every circumstance, can be

absolutely trusted to live in the spirit of meekness.

If I have found out anything of my own sin, if my eyes have been filled

with tears and my heart with conscious unworthiness before Him, oh,

then, surely I shall not kick or murmur against discipline of which the

main purpose is to rid me of the evil which is slaying me; but rather I

shall recognise in the sorrows that do fall upon me, in the losses and

disappointments and empty places in my life and heart, one way of God's

fulfilling His great promise, From all your filthiness, and from all

your idols, I will cleanse you.' The man who has thus learned the

purpose, the highest purpose, of sorrow, is not likely to remonstrate

with God for giving him too much of the cleansing medium.

In like manner, if we have, in any real way, received for our own the

comfort which God gives to the penitent heart, we shall be easily

pleased with anything that He sends. And if we have measured ourselves,

not against ourselves, but against His law, and have found out how much

we owe unto our Lord, it is not likely that we shall take our brother

by the throat and say, Pay me that thou owest.' If any treat me badly,

try to rob me, harm me, sneer at me, or turn the cold shoulder to me,

who am I that I should resent that? Oh, brethren, we need, for our

right relation to our fellows, a deeper conviction of our sinfulness

before Him. Many of us are blessed with natural tendencies to meekness,

but these are insufficient. Many of us seek to cultivate this grace

from true and right, though not the deepest, motives. Let us reinforce

them by that which comes from the consideration of the place which this

Beatitude holds in the wreathed chain, and remember that poverty of

spirit' and mourning' must precede it.

Now, there is a sharp test for us Christian people. If I have learned

myself, and have penitently received God's pardon, I shall be meek with

God and with man. If I am not meek with God and with man, have I

received God's pardon? One great reason why so many of you Christian

people have so little consciousness of God's forgiving mercy, as a

constant joy in your lives, is because you have so little obeyed the

commandment, Be ye imitators of God, and walk in love, as God hath

forgiven and loved us.'

III. And now, lastly, note whither this meekness leads.

They shall inherit the earth.' The words are quoted, as I have already

said, from one of the psalms, and in the Psalmist's mouth they had, I

suppose, especial reference to Israel's peaceful possession of the

promised land, which in that Old Dispensation was made contingent on

the people's faithfulness. In that aspect, and looking at this Sermon

on the Mount as the programme of the King Himself, what a bucket of

cold water such words as these must have poured on the hot Messianic

expectations of the carnal Jew! Here was a King that did not expect to

win back the land by armed rebellion against the Roman legions, but

said, Be meek, and you will truly possess it, whether there is a Pilate

in the procurator's house at C泡rea or not.'

But for us the words have a double reference, as all the promises

annexed to these Beatitudes have. They apply to the present; they apply

to the future. And that is no mere looseness of interpretation, eking

out an insufficient verification of them here upon earth by some dim

hopes of a future fulfilment, but it flows from the plain fact that the

gifts which a man receives on condition of his being a true disciple

are one and the same in essence, and only differ in degree, here and

hereafter. Circumstances alter, no doubt, and there will be much in

that heavenly state unlike that which we experience here. But the

essence of Christian blessedness is the same in this world and in the

furthest reach of the shining but dim eternity beyond. And so we take

the double reference of these words to be inherent in the facts of the

case, and not to be a makeshift of interpretation.

There is a present inheritance of the earth which goes, as certainly as

the shadow with the sunshine, with the meekness spoken of in our text.

Not literal, of course, for it is not true that this Christian grace

has in it any tendency whatever to draw to itself material good of any

sort. The world in outward possession belongs to the strong men, to the

men of faculty, of force and push and ambition. If you want to get

through a crowd, make your elbows as sharp, and your feet upon the toes

of your neighbours as heavy as you can, and a road will be made for

you; but, in the majority of cases, the meek man on the edge of the

crowd will stop there.

Nor is it true that there would be any real blessedness, though the

earth were ours in that outward sense. For you cannot measure happiness

by the acre, nor does an outward condition of the most full-fed

abundance, and of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, and above the

gnawings of care, ensure to any man even the shabby blessedness that

the world knows, to say nothing of the solid beatitude that Christ

proclaims.

So we must go deeper than that for the meaning of inherit.' Whatever

are our circumstances, it is true that this calm, equable, submissive

acceptance of the divine will and obedience to it, and this loving and

unresentful attitude towards men, bring with them necessarily a

peacefulness of heart which gets the highest good out of the modicum of

material supplies which God's providence may send us. It used to be the

idea that gods and beatified spirits were nourished, not by the gross,

material flesh of the sacrifices, but by a certain subtle aroma and

essence that went up in the incense smoke. So Christ's meek men do live

and thrive, and are blessed in a true possession of earthly good, even

though their outward portion of it may be very small. Better is a

little that a righteous man hath than the riches of many wicked.'

And, beyond that, there is a further fulfilment of this promise, upon

which I venture to say but very little. It seems to me very probable

that our Lord's words here fall in with what appears to be a general

stream of representation throughout Scripture, to the effect that the

perfected form of the Kingdom of God is to be realised in this

renovated earth, when it becomes the new earth in which dwelleth

righteousness.' Whether that be so or no, at all events we may fairly

gather from the words the thought that in the ultimate state of

assimilation and fellowship with God and Christ to which Christian

people have a right to look forward, there will be an external universe

on which they will exercise their activities, and from which they will

draw as yet unimagined delights.

But, at all events, dear brethren, we may be sure of this blessed

thought, that they who meekly live, knowing and mourning their sin, and

who meekly take to their hearts as their only hope the comfort of

Christ's pardon and cleansing, who are meekly recipient, meekly

enduring, meekly obedient, shall have in their hearts, even here, a

quiet fountain of peace which shall make the wilderness rejoice and

blossom as the rose, and hereafter shall be crowned with the lordship

of all. Meekness overcomes, and he that overcometh shall inherit all

things.'

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THE FOURTH BEATITUDE

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for

they shall be filled.'--MATT. v. 6.

Two preliminary remarks will give us the point of view from which I

desire to consider these words now. First, we have seen, in previous

sermons, that these paradoxes of the Christian life which we call the

Beatitudes are a linked chain, or, rather, an outgrowth from a common

root. Each presupposes all the preceding. Now, of course, it is a

mistake to expect uniformity in the process of building up character,

and stages which are separable and successive in thought may be

simultaneous and coalesce in fact. But none the less is our Lord here

outlining successive stages in the growth of a true Christian life. I

shall have more to say about the place in the series which this

Beatitude holds, but for the present I simply ask you to remember that

it has a background and set of previous experiences, out of which it

springs, and that we shall not understand the depth of Christ's meaning

if we isolate it from these and regard it as standing alone.

Then, another consideration is the remarkable divergence in this

Beatitude from the others. The meek,' the merciful,' the pure in heart'

the peacemakers,' have all attained to certain characteristics. But

this is not a benediction pronounced upon those who have attained to

righteousness, but upon those who long after it. Desire, which has

reached such a pitch as to be comparable to the physical craving of a

hungry man for food or to the imperious thirst of parched throats,

seems a strange kind of blessedness; but it is better to long for a

higher--though it be unattained--good than to be content with a lower

which is possessed. Better to climb, though the summit be far and the

path be steep, than to browse amongst the herds in the fat valleys.

Aspiration is blessedness when it is worthily directed. Let us, then,

look at these two points of this Beatitude; this divine hunger of the

soul, and its satisfaction which is sure.

I. Note, then, the hunger which is blessed.

Now righteousness' has come to be a kind of theological term which

people use without attaching any very distinct meaning to it. And it

would be little improvement to substitute for righteousness' the

abstraction of moral conformity to the will of God. Suppose we try to

turn the words of my text into modern English, and instead of saying,

Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness,' say,

Blessed are the men and women that long more than for anything else to

be good. Does not that sound a little more near our daily lives than

the well-worn and threadbare word of my text? Righteousness is neither

more nor less than in spirit a will submitted to God, and in conduct

the practice of whatsoever things are noble and lovely and of good

report.

The production of such a character, the aiming after the perfection of

spirit and of conduct, is the highest aim that a man can set before

him. There are plenty of other hungers of the soul that are legitimate.

There are many of them that are bracing and ennobling and elevating. It

is impossible not to hunger for the supply of physical necessities. It

is good to long for love, for wisdom. It is better to long most to be

good men and women. For what are we here for? To enjoy? To work? To

know? Yes! But it is not conduct, and it is still less thought, and it

is least of all enjoyment, in any of its forms, which is the purpose of

life, and ought to be our aim here upon earth. We are here to learn to

be; and the cultivation and production of characters that lie parallel

with the will of God is the Omega of all our life in the flesh. All

these other things, even the highest of them, the yearning desire

To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,

Beyond the furthest bounds of human thought,'

ought to be subordinate to this further purpose of being good men and

women. All these are scaffolding; the building is a character conformed

to God's will and assimilated to Christ's likeness.

That commends itself as a statement of man's chief end to all

reasonable and thoughtful men in their deepest and truest moments. And

so, whilst we must let our desires go out on the lower levels, and seek

to draw to ourselves the various gifts that are necessary for the

various phases and sides of our being, here is one that a man's own

conscience tells him should stand clearly supreme and dominant--the

hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Still further, notice how this desire, on which our Lord pronounces His

benediction, comes in a series. I know that all men have latent, and

sometimes partially and fragmentarily operative in their lives and

manifest on the surface, sporadic desires after goodness. The existence

of these draws the line between man and devil. And there is no soul on

earth which has not sometimes felt the longing to be better than it is,

to its own consciousness, to-day. But the yearning which our Lord

blesses comes after, and is the result of, the previous characteristics

which He has described. There must be the poverty of spirit which

recognises our own insufficiency and unworthiness; or, to put it into

simpler words, we must know ourselves to be sinners. There must be the

mourning which follows upon that revelation of ourselves; the penitence

which does not wash away sin, but which makes us capable of receiving

forgiveness. There must be the comfort which comes from pardon

received; and there must be the yielding of ourselves to the Supreme

Will, which is the true root of all meekness, in the face of antagonism

from creatures and of opposition from circumstances. When thus a man's

self-conceit is beaten out of him, and he knows how far he is from the

possession of any real, deep righteousness of his own; and when,

further, his heart has glowed with the consciousness of forgiveness;

and when, further, his will has bowed itself before the Father in

heaven, then there will spring in his heart a hungering and thirsting,

deeper far and far more certain of fruition, than ever can be realised

in another heart, a stranger to such experiences. Brethren, if we are

ever to possess the righteousness which is itself blessed, it must be

because we have the hunger and the thirst which are sharpened and

accentuated by profound discovery of our own evil, lowly penitence

before God, and glad assurance of free and full forgiveness.

Then note, still further, how that which is pronounced blessed is not

the realisation of a desire, but the desire itself. And that is so, not

only because, as I said, all noble aspiration is good, fulfilled or

unfulfilled, and aim is of more importance than achievement, and what a

man strongly wishes is often the revelation of his deepest self, and

the prophecy of what he will be; but Christ puts the desire for a

certain quality here as in line with the possession of a number of

other qualities attained, because He would hint to us that such a

righteousness as shall satisfy the immortal hunger and thirst of our

souls is one to be received in answer to longing, and not to be

manufactured by our own efforts.

It is a gift; and the condition of receiving the gift is to wish it

honestly, earnestly, deeply, continually. The Psalmist had a glimpse of

the same truth when he crowned his description of the man who was fit

to ascend the hill of the Lord, and to stand in His holy place, with,

he shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the

God of his salvation.'

Of course, in saying that the first step towards the possession of this

divinely bestowed and divinely blessed righteousness is not effort but

longing, I do not forget that the retention of it, and the working of

it into our characters, and out in our conduct, must be the result of

our own continual diligence. But it is effort based on faith; and it is

mainly, as I believe, the effort to keep open the line of communication

between us and God, the great Giver, which ensures our possession of

this gift of God. Dear friends, the righteousness that avails for us is

not of our making, but of God's giving, through Jesus Christ.

So, before I pass to the other thoughts of my text, may I pause here

for a moment? Blessed are they that hunger and thirst'--think of the

picture that that suggests--the ravenous desire of a starving man, the

almost fierce longing of a parched throat. Is that a picture of the

intensity, of the depth, of our desires to be good? Do we professing

Christian men and women long to be delivered from our evils and to be

clothed in righteousness, with an honesty and an earnestness and a

continuity of longing which would make such words as these of my text

anything else, if applied to us, than the bitterest irony? Oh, one

looks out over the Christian Church, and one looks--which is more to

the purpose--into one's own heart, and contrasts the tepid, the lazy,

the occasional, and, I am afraid, the only half-sincere wishes to be

better, with the unmistakable earnestness and reality of our longings

to be rich, or wise, or prosperous, or famous, or happy in our domestic

relationships, and the like. Alas! alas! that the whole current of the

great river of so many professing Christians' desires runs towards

earth and creatures, and the tiniest little trickle is taken off, like

a lade for a mill, from the great stream, and directed towards higher

things. It is hunger and thirst after righteousness that is blessed.

You and I can tell whether our desires deserve such a name as that.

II. And now, secondly, the satisfying of this divine hunger of the

soul.

They shall be filled,' says our Lord. Now all these promises appended

to the Beatitudes have a double reference--to the certainty of the

present, and to the perfection of the future. That there is such a

double reference may be made very obvious if we notice that the first

of the promises, which includes them all, and of which the others are

but aspects and phases, is cast into the present tense, whilst the

remainder stand in the future. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven,' not

shall be--they shall be comforted,' they shall inherit the earth,' and

so on. So, then, we are warranted, indeed we are obliged, to regard

this great promise in the text as having two epochs of fulfilment--one

partially here upon earth, one complete hereafter. And these two

differ, not in kind, but in degree.

So then, with regard even to the present, they shall be filled.' Should

not that be a gospel to the seeking spirit of man, who knows so well

what it is to be crucified with the pangs of a vain desire, and to set

his heart upon that which never comes into his hands? There is one

region in which nothing is so impossible as that any desire should be

in vain, or any wish should be unfulfilled, and it is the region into

which Christ points us in these great words of my text. Turn away from

earth, where fulfilled desires and unfulfilled are often equally

disappointed ones. Turn away from the questionable satisfactions which

come to those whose hearts go out in longing for love, wisdom, wealth,

transitory felicity; and be sure of this, that the one longing which

never will be disappointed, nor, when answered, will prove to have

given us but ashes instead of bread, is the longing to be like God and

like Christ. That desire alone is sure to be fulfilled, and, being

fulfilled, is sure to be blessed.

It is not true that all desires after righteousness are fulfilled.

Those which spring up, as I have said, in men's hearts sporadically,

and apart from the background of the experiences of my text, are not

always, not often, even partially accomplished. There are in every

land, no doubt, souls that thirst after righteousness, as they are able

to discern it. And we are sure of this, that no such effort and longing

passes unnoticed by Him who hears the young ravens when they cry,' and

is not deaf to the prayer of men who long to be good. But the

experience of the bulk of us, apart from Jesus Christ, is the things

that I would not, these I do, and the things that I would, these I do

not.' The hunger and thirst after righteousness, imperfect as they are,

which are felt at intervals by all men, do not avail to break the awful

continuity of their conduct as evil in the sight of God and of their

own consciences. And so, just because every man knows something of the

sting of this desire after righteousness, which yet remains for the

most part unfulfilled, the world is full of sadness. Oh, wretched man

that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' comes to

be the expression of the noblest amongst us. Then this great Gospel

comes to us, and the Nazarene confidently fronts a world dimly

conscious of its need, and sometimes miserable because it is bad, and

says: Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. . . . Come

to Me, and drink.'

What right had He to stand thus and promise that every desire after

goodness should be fulfilled in Him? He had the right, because He

Himself had the power and the purpose to fulfil it. For this is the

very heart of His Gospel: that He will give to every one who asks it

that spirit of life which was His own, and which shall make us free

from the law of sin and death.'

Thus, dear friends, we have to be content to take the place of

recipients, and to accept, not to work out for ourselves, this

righteousness for which, more or less feebly, and all of us too feebly,

we do sometimes long. Oh, believe me, away from Him you will never

receive into your characters a goodness that will satisfy yourselves.

Siberian prisoners sometimes break their chains and escape for some

distance. They are generally taken back and again shut up in their

captivity. If we are able, as we are in some measure, to break the

bondage of evil in ourselves, we are not able to complete our

emancipation by any skill, effort, or act of ours. We must be content

to receive the blessing. There is no loom of earth which can weave, and

no needle that man's hands can use which can stitch together, the pure

garment that befits a soul. We must be content to take the robe of

righteousness which Jesus Christ has wrought, and to strip off, by His

help, the ancient self, splashed with the filth of the world, and

spotted by the flesh: and to put on the new man,' which Christ, and

Christ alone, bestows.

As for the future fulfilment of this promise--desire will live in

heaven, desire will dilate the spirit, the dilated spirit will be

capable of fuller gifts of God-likeness, and increased capacity will

ensure increased reception. Thus, through eternity, in blessed

alternation, we shall experience the desire that brings new gifts and

the satisfying that produces new desires.

Dear friends, all that I have been trying to say in this sermon is

gathered up into the one word--that I may be found in Him, not having

my own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ,

the righteousness which is of God by faith.'

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THE FIFTH BEATITUDE

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.'--MATT. v. 7.

THE divine simplicity of the Beatitudes covers a divine depth, both in

regard to the single precepts and to the sequence of the whole. I have

already pointed out that the first of the series Is to be regarded as

the root and germ of all the subsequent ones. If for a moment we set it

aside and consider only the fruits which are successively developed

from it, we shall see that the remaining members of the sequence are

arranged in pairs, of which each contains, first, a characteristic more

inward and relating to the deep things of individual religion; and,

second, a characteristic which has its field of action in our relations

to men. For example, the mourners' and the meek' are paired. Those who

hunger and thirst after righteousness' and the merciful' are paired.

The pure in heart' and the peacemakers' are paired.

Now that sequence can scarcely be accidental. It is the application in

detail of the great principle which our Lord endorsed in its Old

Testament form when He said that the first great commandment, the love

of God, had a companion consequent on and like unto it, the love of our

neighbour. Religion without beneficence, and beneficence without

religion, are equally maimed. The one is a root without fruit, and the

other a fruit without a root. The selectest emotions, the lowliest

faith, the loftiest aspirations, the deepest consciousness of one's own

unworthiness--these priceless elements of personal religion--are of

little worth unless there are inseparably linked with them meekness,

mercifulness, and peacemaking. What God hath joined together, let not

man put asunder.' If any Christian people have neglected the service of

man for the worship of God, they are flying in the face of Christ's

teaching. If any antagonists of Christianity attack it on the ground

that it fosters such neglect, they mistake the system that they

criticise, and are judging it by the imperfect practice of the

disciples instead of by the perfect precepts of the Master.

So, then, here we have a characteristic lodged in the very heart of

this series of Beatitudes which refers wholly to our demeanour to one

another. My remarks now will, therefore, be of a very homely,

commonplace, and practical kind.

I. Note the characteristic on which our Lord here pours out His

blessing--Mercy.

Now, like all the other members of this sequence, with the exception,

perhaps, of the last, this quality refers to disposition much rather

than to action. Conduct is included, of course; but conduct only

secondarily. Jesus Christ always puts conduct second, as all wise and

great teachers do. As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.' That is

the keynote of all noble morality. And none has ever carried it out

more thoroughly than has the morality of the Gospel. It is a poor

translation and limitation of this great word which puts in the

foreground merely merciful actions. The mercifulness of my text is,

first and foremost, a certain habitual way of looking at and feeling

towards men, especially to men in suffering and need, and most

especially to men who have proved themselves bad and blameworthy. It is

implied that a rigid retribution would lead to severer methods of

judgment and of action.

Therefore the first characteristic of the merciful man is that he is

merciful in his judgments; not making the worst of people, no Devil's

Advocate in his estimates of his fellows; but, endlessly, and, as the

world calls it, foolishly and incredibly, gentle in his censures, and

ever ready to take the charitable--which is generally the

truer--construction of acts and motives. That is a very threadbare

thought, brother, but the way to invest commonplace with startling

power is to bring it into immediate connection with our own life and

conduct. And if you will try to walk by this threadbare commonplace for

a week, I am mistaken if you do not find out that it has teeth to bite

and a firm grip to lay upon you. Threadbare truth is not effete until

it is obeyed, and when we try to obey it, it ceases to be commonplace.

Again, I may remind you that this mercifulness, which is primarily an

inward emotion, and a way, as I said, of thinking of, and of looking

at, unworthy people, must necessarily, of course, find its

manifestation in our outward conduct. And there will be, what I need

not dilate upon, a readiness to help, to give, to forgive not only

offences against society and morality, but offences against ourselves.

I need not dwell longer upon this first part of my subject. I wished

mainly to emphasise that to begin with action, in our understanding of

mercifulness, is a mistake; and that we must clear our hearts of

antipathies, and antagonisms, and cynical suspicions, if we would

inherit the blessings of our text.

Before I go further, I would point out the connection between this

incumbent duty of mercifulness and the preceding virtue of meekness. It

is hard enough to bear the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy

takes,' without one spot of red in the cheek, one perturbation or flush

of anger in the heart; and to do that might task us all to the utmost.

But that is not all that Christ's ethics require of us. It is not

sufficient to exercise the passive virtue of meekness; there must be

the active one of mercifulness. And to call for that is to lay an

additional weight upon our consciences, and to strain and stretch still

further the obligation under which we come. We have not done what the

worst men and our most malicious enemies have a right to receive from

us when we say, with the cowardly insincerity of the world, I can

forgive but I cannot forget.' That is no forgiveness, and that is no

mercifulness It is not enough to stand still, unresisting. There must

be a hand of helpfulness stretched out, and a gush of pity and

mercifulness in the heart, if we are to do what our Master has done for

us all, and what our Master requires us to do for one another.

Mercifulness is the active side of the passive meekness.

Further, in a word, I would note here another thing, and that is--what

a sad, stern, true view of the condition of men in the world results

from noticing that the only three qualities in regard to our relation

to them which Christ sets in this sevenfold tiara of diamonds are

meekness in the face of hatred and injustice; mercifulness in the face

of weakness and wickedness; peacemaking in the face of hostility and

wrangling. What a world in which we have to live, where the crowning

graces are those which presuppose such vices as do these! Ah! dear

friends, as sheep in the midst of wolves' is true to-day. And the one

conquering power is patient gentleness, which recompenses all evil with

good, and is the sole means of transforming and thus overcoming it.

People talk a great deal, and a good deal of it very insincerely, about

their admiration for these precepts gathered together in this chapter.

If they would try to live them for a fortnight, they would perhaps

pause a little longer than some of them do before they said, as do

people that detest the theology of the New Testament, The Sermon on the

Mount is my religion.' Is it? It does not look very like it. At all

events, if it is, it is a religion behind which practice most wofully

limps.

II. Let me ask you to look at what I have already in part referred

to--the place in this series which Mercifulness holds.

Now, of course, I know, and nothing that I say now is to be taken for a

moment as questioning or underestimating it, that, altogether apart

from religion, there is interwoven into the structure of human nature

that sentiment of mercifulness which our Lord here crowns with His

benediction. But it is not that natural, instinctive sentiment--which

is partially unreliable, and has little power apart from the

reinforcement of higher thoughts to carry itself consistently through

life--that our Lord is here speaking about; but it is a mercifulness

which is more than an instinct, more than a sentiment, more than the

natural answer of the human heart to the sight of compassion and

distress, which is, in fact, the product of all that has preceded it in

this linked chain of characteristics and their blessings.

And so I ask you to recall these. Poor in spirit,' mourning,' meek,'

hungering and thirsting after righteousness'--these are the springs

that feed the flow of this river; and if it be not fed from them, but

from the surface-waters of human sentiment and instinct, it will dry up

long before it has availed to refresh barren places, and to cool

thirsty lips. And note also the preceding promises, theirs is the

kingdom of heaven'; they shall be comforted'; they shall inherit the

earth; they shall be filled.' These are experiences which, again, are

another collection of the head-waters of this stream.

That is to say, the true, lasting, reliable, conquering mercifulness

has a double source. The consciousness of our own weakness, the sadness

that creeps over the heart when it makes the discovery of its own sin,

the bowed submission primarily to the will of God, and secondarily to

the antagonisms which, in subservience to that will, we may meet in

life, and the yearning desire for a fuller righteousness and a more

lustrous purity in our own lives and characters--these are the

experiences which will make a man gentle in his judgment of his

brother, and full of melting charity in all his dealings with him. If I

know how dark my own nature is, how prone to uncommitted evils, how

little I have to thank myself for the virtues that I have practised,

which are largely due to my exemption from temptation and to my

opportunities, and how little I have in my own self that I can venture

to bring to the stern judgment which I am tempted to apply to other

people, then the words of censure will falter on my tongue, and the

bitter construction of my brother's conduct and character will be

muffled in silence. Except as to open outbreakings,' said one of the

very saintliest of men, I want nothing of what Judas and Cain had.' If

we feel this, we shall ask ourselves, Who art thou that judgest another

man's servant?' and the condemnation of others will stick in our

throats when we try to utter it.

And, on the other hand, if I, through these paths of self-knowledge,

and lowly estimate of self, and penitent confession of sin, and

flexibility of will to God, and yearning, as for my highest food and

good, after a righteousness which I feel I do not possess, have come

into the position in which my poverty is, by His gift, made rich, and

the tears are wiped away from off my face by His gracious hand, and a

full possession of large blessings bestowed on my humble will, and the

righteousness for which I long imparted to me, shall I not have learned

how divine a thing it is to give to the unworthy, and so be impelled to

communicate what I have already received? Be ye therefore imitators of

God, as beloved children; and walk in love as Christ also hath loved

us.' They only are deeply, through and through, universally and always

merciful who have received mercy. The light is reflected at the same

angle as it falls, and the only way by which there can come from our

faces and lives a glory that shall lighten many dark hearts, and make

sunshine in many a shady place, is that these hearts shall have turned

full to the very fountain itself of heavenly radiance, and so have

received of the Lord that which also' they deliver' unto men.

And so, brethren, there are two plain, practical exhortations from

these thoughts. One is, let us Christian people learn the fruits of

God's mercy, and be sure of this, that our own mercifulness in regard

to men is an accurate measure of the amount of the divine mercy which

we have received. The other is, let all of us learn the root of man's

mercy to men. There is plenty, of a sort, of philanthropy and

beneficent and benevolent work and feeling to-day, entirely apart from

all perception of, and all faith in, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in so

far as the individuals who exercise that beneficence are concerned. I,

for my part, am narrow enough to believe that the streams of

non-Christian charitableness, which run in our land and in other lands

to-day, have been fed from Christ's fountain, though the supply has

come underground, and bursts into light apparently unconnected with its

source. If there had been no New Testament there would have been very

little of the beneficence which flouts the New Testament to-day.

Historically, it is the great truths, which we conveniently summarise

as being evangelical Christianity, that have been mother to the new

charity that, since Christ, has been breathed over the world. I, for my

part, believe that if you strike out the doctrine of universal

sinfulness, if you cover over the Cross of Christ, if you do not find

in it the manifestation of a God who is endlessly merciful to the most

unworthy, you have destroyed the basis on which true and operative

benevolence will rest. So then, dear brethren, let us all seek to get a

humbler and a truer conception of what we ourselves are, and a loftier

and truer faith of what God in Christ is; and then to remember that if

we have these, we are bound to, and we shall, show that we have them,

by making that which is the anchor of our hope the pattern of our

lives.

III. Lastly, notice the requital, They shall obtain mercy.'

Now, it is a wretched weakening of that great thought to suppose that

it means that if A. is merciful to B., B. will be merciful to A. That

is sometimes true, and sometimes it is not. It does not so very much

matter whether it is true or not; that is not what Jesus Christ means.

All these Beatitudes are God's gifts, and this is God's gift too. It is

His mercy which the merciful man obtains.

But you say: Have you not just been telling us that this sense and

experience of God's mercy must precede my mercy, and now you say that

my mercy must precede God's?' No; I do not say that it must precede it;

I do say that my mercifulness is, as it were, lodged between the

segments of a golden circle, and has on one side the experience of the

divine mercy which quickens mine by thankfulness and imitation; on the

other side, the larger experience of the divine mercy which follows

upon my walking after the example of my Lord.

This is only one case of the broad general principle, to him that hath

shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken even that

which he hath.' Salvation is no such irreversible gift as that once

bestowed a man can go on anyhow and it will continue; but it is given

in such a fashion as that, for its retention, and still more for its

increase, there must be a certain line of feeling and of action.

Our Lord does not mean to say, of course, that this one isolated member

of a series carries with it the whole power of bringing down upon a man

the blessings which are only due to the combination of the whole

series, but that it stands as one of that linked band which shall

receive the blessing from on high. And the blessing here is stated in

accordance with the particular Grace in question, according to that

great law of retaliation which brings life unto life and death unto

death.

No man who, having received the mercy of God, lives harsh, hard,

self-absorbed, implacable, and uncommunicative, will keep that mercy in

any vivid consciousness or to any blessed issue. The servant took his

fellow-servant by the throat, and said, Pay me that thou owest,' and

his master said, Deliver him to the tormentors until he pay the

uttermost farthing.' You receive your salvation as a free gift; you

keep it by feelings and conduct correspondent to the gift.

Though benevolence which has an eye to self is no benevolence, it is

perfectly legitimate, and indeed absolutely necessary, that whilst the

motive for mercifulness is mercy received, the encouragement to

mercifulness should be mercy still to be given. Walk in love, as Christ

also hath loved us'; and when you think of your own unworthiness, and

of the great gifts which a gracious God has given, let these impel you

to move amongst men as copies of God, and be sure that you deepen your

spiritual life, not only by meditation and by faith, but by practical

work, and by showing towards all men mercy like the mercy which God has

bestowed upon you.

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THE SIXTH BEATITUDE

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.'--MATT. v. 8.

AT first hearing one scarcely knows whether the character described in

this great saying, or the promise held out, is the more inaccessible to

men. The pure in heart': who may they be? Is there one of us that can

imagine himself possessed of a character fitting him for the vision of

God, or such as to make him bear with delight that dazzling blaze? They

shall see God,' whom no man hath seen at any time, nor can see.' Surely

the requirement is impossible, and the promise not less so. But does

Jesus Christ mock us with demands that cannot be satisfied, and dangle

before us hopes that can never be realised? There have been many

moralists and would-be teachers who have done that. What would be the

use of saying to a man lying on a battlefield sore wounded, and with

both legs shot off, If you will only get up and run, you will be safe'?

What would be the use of telling men how blessed they would be if they

were the opposite of what they are? But that is not Christ's way.

These words, lofty and remote as they seem, are in truth amongst the

most hopeful and radiant that ever came from even His lips. For they

offer the realisation of an apparently impossible character, they

promise the possession of an apparently impossible vision; and they

soothe fears, and tell us that the sight from which, were it possible,

we should sometimes fain shrink, is the source of our purest gladness.

So there are three things, it seems to me, worth our notice in these

great words--How hearts can be made pure; how the pure heart can see

God; and how the sight can be simple blessedness.

I. How hearts can be made pure.

Now, the key which has unlocked for us, in previous sermons, the

treasures of meaning in these Beatitudes, is especially necessary here.

For, as I have said, if you take this to be a mere isolated saying, it

becomes a mockery and a pain. But if you connect it, as our Lord would

have us connect it, with all the preceding links of this wreathed chain

describing the characteristics of a devout soul, then it assumes an

altogether different appearance. The pure in heart' are they who have

exercised and received the previous qualifications and bestowments from

God. That is to say, there must precede all such purity as is capable

of the divine vision, the poverty of spirit which recognises its true

condition, the mourning which rightly feels the gravity and awfulness

of that condition, the desire for its opposite, which will never be the

hunger and thirst' of a soul, except it is preceded by a profound sense

of sin and the penitence that ensues thereupon.

But when these things have gone before, and when they have been

accompanied, as they surely will be, with the results that flow from

them without an interval of time--viz. enrichment with possession of

the kingdom, the comforting and drying of the tears of penitence, and

the possession of a righteousness bestowed because it is desired, and

not won because it is worked for--then, and only then, will the heart

be purged and defecated from its evils and its self-regard, and its

eyes opened and couched and strengthened to behold undazzled the

eternal light of God. The word of my text, standing alone, ministers

despair. Regarded where Christ set it, as one of the series of

characteristics which He has been describing, it kindles the brightest

and surest hope.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' No; but

God can change them; and the implication of my text, regarded in its

due relation to these other Beatitudes, is just that the requisite

purity is not of man's working, but is God's gift. The same truth which

here results from the study of the place of our text in this series is

condensed into a briefer, but substantially equivalent, form in the

saying of another part of the New Testament, about purifying their

hearts by faith.'

Dear brethren, we come back to the old truth--all a man's hope of, and

effort after, reformation and self-improvement must begin with the

consciousness of sin, the lament over it, the longing for divine

goodness, the opening of the heart for the reception thereof; and only

then can we rise to these serene heights of purity of heart. This, and

this alone, is the way by which a clean thing' can be brought out of an

unclean one.' and men stained and foul with evil, and bound under the

chains of that which is the mother of all evil, the undue making

themselves the centres of their lives, can be washed and cleansed and

emancipated, and God be made the end and the aim, the motive and the

goal, the power and the reward, of all their work. Righteousness is a

gift to begin with, and it is a gift bestowed on condition of

repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' We all have

longings after purity, suppressed, dashed, contradicted a thousand

times in our lives day by day, but there they are; and the only way by

which they can be fully satisfied is when we go with our foul hands,

empty as well as foul, and lift them up to God, and say, Give what Thou

commandest, even the clean heart, and we shall be clean.'

But then, do not let us forget, either, that this gift bestowed not

once and for ever, but continuously if there be continuous desire, is

to be utilised, appropriated, worked into our characters, and worked

out in our lives, by our own efforts, as well as by our own faith.

Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse

ourselves from all filthiniess of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness

in the fear of the Lord.' Every man that hath this' gift bestowed,

purifieth himself even as He is pure.' He that brings to us the gift of

regeneration, by which we receive the new nature which is free from

sin, calls to each of us as He presents to us the basin with the

cleansing water, Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your

doings; . . . cease to do evil, learn to do well.' What God hath joined

together let not man put asunder,' viz. the act of faith by which we

receive, the act of diligence by which we use, the purifying power.

II. Note how the pure heart sees God.

One is tempted to plunge into mystical depths when speaking upon such a

text as this, but I wish to resist the temptation now, and to deal with

it in a plain, practical fashion. Of course I need not remind you, or

do more than simply remind you, that the matter in question here is no

perception by sense of Him who is invisible, nor is it, either, an

adequate and direct knowledge and comprehension of Him who is infinite,

and whom a man can no more comprehend than he can stretch his short

arms round the flaming orb of the central sun. But still, there is a

relation to God possible for sinful men when they have been purified

through the faith that is in Jesus Christ, which is so direct, so

immediate, that it deserves the name of vision; and which, as I

believe, is the ground of a firmer certitude, and of a no less clear

apprehension, than is the sense from which the name is borrowed. For

the illusions of sense have no place in the sight which the pure heart

has of its Father, God.

Only, remember that here, and in the interpretation of all such

Scriptural words, we have ever to be guided and governed by the great

principle which our Lord laid down, under very solemn circumstances,

when He said: He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' Jesus Christ,

whose name from eternity is the Word, is, from eternity to eternity,

that which the name indicates--viz. the revealing activity of the

eternal God. And, as I believe, wherever there have been kindled in

men's hearts, either by the contemplation of nature and providence, or

by the intuitions of their own spirits, any glints or glimpses of a

God, there has been the operation of the Light that lighteth every man

that cometh into the world.' And far beyond the limits of historical

Revelation within Israel, as recorded in Scripture, that Eternal Word

has been unveiling, as men's dim eyes were capable of perceiving it,

the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. But for us who stand in

the full blaze of that historical manifestation in the character and

work of Jesus Christ our Saviour, our vision of God is neither more nor

less than the apprehension and the realisation of Christ as God

manifest in the flesh.'

Whether you call it the vision of God, or whether you call it communion

with God in Jesus Christ, or whether you fall back upon the other

metaphor of God dwelling in us and we dwelling in God, it all comes to

the same thing, the consciousness of His presence, the realisation of

His character, the blessed assurance of loving relations with Him, and

the communion in mind, heart, will, and conduct, with God who has come

near to us all in Jesus Christ.

Now, I need not remind you, I suppose, that for such a realisation and

active, real communion, purity of heart is indispensable. That is no

arbitrary requirement, but inherent, as we all know, in the very nature

of the case. If we think of what He is, we shall feel that only the

pure in heart can really pass into loving fellowship with Him. How can

two walk together except they be agreed?' And if we reflect upon the

history of our own feelings and realisation of God's presence with us,

we shall see that impurity always drew a membrane over the eye of our

souls, or cast a mist of invisibility over the heavens. The smallest

sin hides God from us. A very, very little grain of dye stuff will

darken miles of a river, and make it incapable of reflecting the blue

sky and the sparkling stars. The least evil done and loved blurs and

blots, if it does not eclipse, for us the doers the very Sun of

Righteousness Himself. No sinful men can walk in the midst of that

fiery furnace and not be consumed. The pure in heart'--and only

they--shall see God.'

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, that in this, as in all these

Beatitudes, the germinal fulfilment in the present life is not to be

parted off by a great gap from the perfect fulfilment in the life which

is to come. And so I do not dwell so much on the differences, great and

wonderful as these must necessarily be, between the manner of

apprehension and communion with God which it is reserved for heaven to

bestow upon us, and the manner of those which we may enjoy here; but I

rather would point to the blessed thought that in essence they are one,

however in degree they may be different. No doubt, changed

circumstances, new capacities, the withdrawal of time and sense, the

dropping away of the veil of flesh, which is the barrier between us and

the unseen order of things in which we live and move and have our

being,' will induce changes and progresses in the manner and in the

degree of that vision about which it would be folly for us to speak. If

there were anything here with which we could compare the state of the

blessed in heaven, in so far as it differs from their state on earth,

we could form some conception of these differences; but if there were

anything here with which we could compare it, it would be less glorious

than it is. It is well that we should have to say, Eye hath not seen,

nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things

that God hath prepared.' So let us be thankful that it doth not yet

appear what we shall be'; and let us never allow our ignorance of the

manner to make us doubt or neglect the fact, seeing that we know that

when He shall appear . . . we shall see Him as He is.'

III. Lastly, notice how this sight brings blessedness.

There is nothing else that will satisfy the eye with seeing.' The

vision of God, even in that incipient and imperfect form which is

possible upon earth, is the one thing that will calm our distractions,

that will supply our needs, that will lift our lives to a level of

serene power and blessedness, unattainable by any other way. Such a

sight will dim all the dazzling illusions of earth, as, when the sun

leaps into the heavens, the stars hide their faces and faint into

invisibility. It will make us lords of ourselves, masters of the world,

kings over time and sense and the universe. Everything will be

different when earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush

afire with God.' That is what is possible for a Christian holding fast

by Jesus Christ, and in Him having communion with the Father and the

Holy Spirit.

Brethren, I venture to say no word about the blessedness of that

future. Heaven's golden gates keep their secret well. Even the purest

joys of earth, about which poets have sung for untold centuries, after

all singing need to be tasted before they are conceived of; and all our

imaginings about the blessedness yonder is but like what a chrysalis

might dream in its tomb as to the life of the radiant winged creature

which it would one day become. Let us be content to be ignorant, and

believe with confidence that we shall find that the vision of God is

the heaven of heavens.

We shall owe that eternal vision to the eternal Revealer; for, as I

believe, Scripture teaches us that it is only in Him that the glorified

saints see the Father, as it is only in Him that here on earth we have

the vision of God. That sight is not, like the bodily sense to which it

is compared, a far-off perception of an ungrasped brightness, but it is

the actual possession of what we behold. We see God when we have God.

When we have God we have enough.

But I dare not close without one other word. There is a vision of God

possible to an impure heart, in which there is no blessedness. There

comes a day in which they shall call upon the rocks to fall and cover

them from the face of Him that sits upon the throne.' The alternative

is before each of us, dear friends--either every eye shall see Him, and

they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail

because of Him'; or, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness. I shall

be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.' If we cry, Create a

clean heart in me, O God!' He will answer, I will give you a new heart,

and take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a

heart of flesh, and I will pour clean water upon you, and ye shall be

clean.'

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THE SEVENTH BEATITUDE

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of

God.'--MATT. v. 9.

This is the last Beatitude descriptive of the character of the

Christian. There follows one more, which describes his reception by the

world. But this one sets the top stone, the shining apex, upon the

whole temple-structure which the previous Beatitudes had been gradually

building up. You may remember that I have pointed out in previous

sermons how all these various traits of the Christian life are deduced

from the root of poverty of spirit. You may also remember how I have

had occasion to show that if we consider that first Beatitude, Blessed

are the poor in spirit,' as the root and mother of all the rest, the

remainder are so arranged as that we have alternately a grace which

regards mainly the man himself and his relations to God, and one which

also includes his relations to man.

Now there are three of these which look out into the world, and these

three are consummated by this one of my text. These are the meek,'

which describes a man's attitude to opposition and hatred; the

merciful,' which describes his indulgence in judgment and his

pitifulness in action; and the peacemakers.' For Christian people are

not merely to bear injuries and to recompense them with pity and with

love, but they are actively to try to bring about a wholesomer and

purer state of humanity, and to breathe the peace of God, which passes

understanding, over all the janglings and struggles of this world.

So, I think, if we give a due depth of significance to that name

peacemaker,' we shall find that this grace worthily completes the whole

linked series, and is the very jewel which clasps the whole chain of

Christian and Christ-like characteristics.

I. How are Christ's peacemakers made?

Now there are certain people whose natural disposition has in it a fine

element, which diffuses soothing and concord all around them. I dare

say we all have known such--perhaps some good woman, without any very

shining gifts of intellect, who yet dwelt in such peace of heart

herself that conflict and jangling were rebuked in her presence. And

there are other people who love peace, and seek after it in the

cowardly fashion of letting things alone; whose peacemaking' has no

nobler source than hatred of trouble, and a wish to let sleeping dogs

lie. These, instead of being peacemakers, are war-makers, for they are

laying up materials for a tremendous explosion some day.

But it is a very different temper that Jesus Christ has in view here,

and I need only ask you to do again what we have had occasion to do in

the previous sermons of this series--to link this characteristic with

those that go before it, of which it is regarded as being the bright

and consummate flower and final outcome. No man can bring to others

that which he does not possess. Vainly will he whose own heart is torn

by contending passions, whose own life is full of animosities and

unreconciled outstanding causes of alienation and divergence between

him and God, between him and duty, between him and himself, ever seek

to shed any deep or real peace amongst men. He may superficially solder

some external quarrels, but that is not all that Jesus Christ means.

His peacemakers are created by having passed through all the previous

experiences which the preceding verses bring out. They have learned the

poverty of their own spirits. They have wept tears, if not real and

literal, yet those which are far more agonising--tears of spirit and

conscience--when they have thought of their own demerits and

foulnesses. They have bowed in humble submission to the will of God,

and even to that will as expressed by the antagonisms of man. They have

yearned after the possession of a fuller and nobler righteousness than

they have attained. They have learned to judge others with a gentle

judgment because they know how much they themselves need it, and to

extend to others a helping hand because they are aware of their own

impotence and need of succour. They have been led through all these,

often painful, experiences into a purity of heart which has been

blessed by some measure of vision of God; and, having thus been

equipped and prepared, they are fit to go out into the world and say,

in the presence of all its tempests, Peace! be still.' Something of the

miracle-working energy of the Master whom they serve will be shed upon

those who serve Him.

Brethren, the peacemaker who is worthy of the name must have gone

through these deep spiritual experiences. I do not say that they are to

come in regular stages, separable from each other. That is not the way

in which a character mounts towards God. It does so not by a flight of

steps, at distinctly different elevations, but rather by an ascending

slope. And, although these various Christian graces which precede that

of my text are separable in thought, and are linked in the fashion that

our Lord sets forth in experience, they may be, and often are,

contemporaneous.

But whether separated from one another in time or not, whether this

life-preparation, of which the previous verses give us the outline, has

been realised drop by drop, or whether it has been all flooded on to

the soul at once, as it quite possibly has, in some fashion or other it

must precede our being the sort of peacemakers that Christ desires and

blesses.

There is only one more point that I would make here before I go on, and

that is, that it is well to notice that the climax of Christian

character, according to Jesus Christ Himself, is found in our relations

to men, and not in our relation to God. Worship of heart and spirit,

devout emotions of the sacredest, sweetest, most hallowed and hallowing

sort, are absolutely indispensable, as I have tried to show you. But

equally, if not more, important is it for us to remember that the

purest communion with God, and the selectest emotional experiences of

the Christian life, are meant to be the bases of active service; and

that, if such service does not follow these, there is good reason for

supposing that these are spurious, and worth very little. The service

of man is the outcome of the love of God. He who begins with poverty of

spirit is perfected when, forgetting himself, and coming down from the

mountain-top, where the Shekinah cloud of the Glory and the audible

voice are, he plunges into the struggles of the multitude below, and

frees the devil-ridden boy from the demon that possesses him. Begin by

all means with poverty of spirit, or you will never get to

this--Blessed are the peacemakers.' But see to it that poverty of

spirit leads to the meekness, the mercifulness, the peace-bringing

influence which Christ has pronounced blessed.

II. What is the peace which Christ's peacemakers bring?

This is a very favourite text with people that know very little of the

depths of Christianity. They fancy that it appeals to common sense and

men's natural consciences, apart altogether from minutenesses of

doctrine or of Christian experience. They are very much mistaken. No

doubt there is a surface of truth, but only a surface, in the

application that is generally given to these words of our text, as if

it meant nothing more than he is a good man that goes about and tries

to make contending people give up their quarrels, and produces a

healing atmosphere of tranquillity wherever he goes.' That is perfectly

true, but there is a great deal more in the text than that. If we

consider the Scriptural usage of this great word peace,' and all the

ground that it covers in human experience; if we remember that it

enters as an element into Christ's own name, the Peace-Bringer,' the

Prince of Peace'; and if we notice, as I have already done, the place

which this Beatitude occupies in the series, we shall be obliged to

look for some far deeper meaning before we can understand the sweep of

our Lord's intention here.

I do not think that I am going one inch too far, or forcing meanings

into His words which they are not intended to bear, when I say that the

first characteristic of the peace, which His disciples have been passed

through their apprenticeship in order to fit them to bring, is the

peace of reconciliation with God. The cause of all the other fightings

in the world is that men's relation to the Father in heaven is

disturbed, and that, whilst there flow out from Him only amity and

love, these are met by us with antagonism often, with opposition of

will often, with alienation of heart often, and with indifference and

forgetfulness almost uniformly. So the first thing to be done to make

men at peace with one another and with themselves is to rectify their

relation to God, and bring peace there.

We often hear in these days complaints of Christian Churches and

Christian people because they do not fling themselves, with sufficient

energy to please the censors, into movements which are intended to

bring about happier relations in society. The longest way round is

sometimes the shortest way home. It does not belong to all of us

Christians, and I doubt whether it belongs to the Christian Church as

such at all, to fling itself into the movements to which I have

referred. But if a man go and carry to men the great message of a

reconciled and a reconciling God manifest in Jesus Christ, and bringing

peace between men and God, he will have done more to sweeten society

and put an end to hostility than I think he will be likely to do by any

other method. Christian men and women, whatever else you and I are here

for, we are here mainly that we may preach, by lip and life, the great

message that in Christ is our peace, and that God was in Christ

reconciling the world to Himself.'

We are not to leave out, of course, that which is so often taken as

being the sole meaning of the great word of my text. There is much that

we are all bound to do to carry the tranquillising and soothing

influences of Gospel principles and of Christ's example into the

littlenesses of daily life. Any fool can stick a lucifer match into a

haystack and make a blaze. It is easy to promote strife. There is a

malicious love of it in us all; and ill-natured gossip has a great deal

to do in bringing it about. But it takes something more to put the fire

out than it did to light it, and there is no nobler office for

Christians than to seek to damp down all these devil's flames of envy

and jealousy and mutual animosity. We have to do it, first, by making

very sure that we do not answer scorn with scorn, gibes with gibes,

hate with hate, but seek to overcome evil with good.' It takes two to

make a quarrel, and your most hostile antagonist cannot break the peace

unless you help him. If you are resolved to keep it, kept it will be.

May I say another word? I think that our text, though it goes a good

deal deeper, does also very plainly tell us Christian folk what is our

duty in relation to literal warfare. There is no need for me to discuss

here the question as to whether actual fighting with armies and swords

is ever legitimate or not. It is a curious kind of Christian duty

certainly, if it ever gets to be one. And when one thinks of the

militarism that is crushing Europe and driving her ignorant classes to

wild schemes of revolution; and when one thinks of the hell of

battlefields, of the miseries of the wounded, of mourning widows, of

ruined peaceful peasants, of the devil's passions that war sets loose,

some of us find it extremely hard to believe that all that is ever in

accordance with the mind of Christ. But whether you agree with me in

that or no, surely my text points to the duty of the Christian Church

to take up a very much more decisive position in reference to the

military spirit than, alas! it ever has done. Certainly it does seem to

be not very obviously in accordance with Christ's teachings that

men-of-war should be launched with a religious service, or that Te

Deums should be sung because thousands have been killed. It certainly

does seem to be something like a satire on European Christianity that

one of the chief lessons we have taught the East is that we have

instructed the Japanese how to use Western weapons to fight their

enemies. Surely, surely, if Christian churches laid to heart as they

ought these plain words of the Master, they would bring their united

influence to bear against that demon of war, and that pinchbeck,

spurious glory which is connected with it. Blessed are the

peacemakers': let us try to earn the benediction.

III. Lastly, note the issue of this peacemaking.

They shall be called the sons of God.' Called? By whom? Christ does not

say, but it should not be difficult to ascertain. It seems to me that

to suppose that it is by men degrades this promise, instead of making

it the climax of the whole series. Besides, it is not true that if a

Christian man lives as I have been trying to describe, protesting

against certain evils, trying to diffuse an atmosphere of peace round

about him; and, above all, seeking to make known the Name of the great

Peacemaker, men will generally call him a son of God.' The next verse

but one tells us what they will call him. Blessed are ye when men shall

revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you

falsely for My sake.' They are a great deal more likely to have stones

and rotten eggs flung at them than to be pelted with bouquets of

scented roses of popular approval. No! no! it is not man's judgment

that is meant here. It matters very little what men call us. It matters

everything what God calls us. It is He who will call them sons of God.'

So the Apostle John thought that Christ meant, for he very beautifully

and touchingly quotes this passage when he says, Beloved! behold what

manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be

called the sons of God.'

God's calling is a recognition of men for what they are. God owns the

man that lives in the fashion that we have been trying to outline--God

owns him for His child; manifestly a son, because he has the Father's

likeness. Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children, and

walk in love.' God in Christ is the first Peacemaker, and they who go

about the world proclaiming His peace and making peace, bear the image

of the heavenly, and are owned by God as His sons.

What does that owning mean? Well, it means a great deal which has yet

to be disclosed, but it means this, too, that the whisper of the Voice

which owns us for children will be heard by ourselves. The Spirit which

cries, Abba, Father!' will open our ears to hear Him say, Thou art My

beloved Son.' Or, to put it into plain English, there is no surer way

by which we can come to the calm, happy, continual consciousness of

being the children of God than by this living like Him, to spread the

peace of God over all hearts.

I have said in former sermons that all these promises, which are but

the natural outcome of the characteristics to which they are attached,

have a double reference, being fulfilled in germ here, and in maturity

hereafter. Like the rest, this one has that double reference. For the

consciousness, here and now, that we are the children of God is but, as

it were, the morning twilight of what shall hereafter be an typesetting

meridian sunshine. What depths of divine assimilation, what mysteries

of calm, peaceful, filial fellowship, what riches beyond count of

divine inheritance, lie in the name of son, the possession of these

alone can tell. For the same Apostle, whose comment upon these words we

have already quoted, goes on to say, It doth not yet appear what we

shall be.'

Only we have one assurance, wide enough for all anticipation, and firm

enough for solid hope: If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and

joint-heirs with Christ.' He must make us sons before we can be called

sons of God. He must give us peace with God, with ourselves, with men,

with circumstances, before we can go forth effectually to bring peace

to others. If He has given us these good things, He has bound us to

spread them. Let us do so. And if our peace ever is spoken in vain as

regards others, it will come back to us again; and we shall be kept in

perfect peace, even in the midst of strife, until we enter at last into

the city of peace and serve the King of Peace for ever.

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THE EIGHTH BEATITUDE

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for

theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'--MATT. v. 10.

We have seen the description of the true subjects of the kingdom

growing into form and completeness before our eyes in the preceding

verses, which tell us what they are in their own consciousness, what

they are in their longings, what they become in inward nature by God's

gift of purity, how they move among men as angels of God, meek,

merciful, peace-bringing. Is anything more needed for complete

portraiture, any added touch to the picture? Yes--what the world is to

them, what are its wages for such work, what its perception of such

characters. Their relations to it are those of peace-bringers,

reconcilers; its to them are those of hostility and dislike. Blessed

are the persecuted for righteousness' sake.

I take these words to be as universal and permanent in their

application as any which have preceded them. This characteristic is,

like all the others, the result of those which go before it and

presupposes their continuous operation. The benediction which is

attached is not an arbitrary promise, but stands in as close a relation

of consequence to the characteristic as do the others. And it is marked

out as the last in the series by being a repetition of the first, to

express the idea of completeness, a rounded whole; to suggest that all

the others are but elements of this, and that the initial blessing

given to the poor in spirit is identical with that which is the reward

of the highest Christian character, the one possessing implicitly what

the other has in full development.

1. The world's recompense to the peace-bringers.

It may be thought that this clause, at all events, has reference to

special epochs only, and especially to the first founding of

Christianity. Such a reference, of course, there is. And very

remarkable is it how clearly and honestly Christ always warned would-be

disciples of what they would earn in this world by following Him.

But He seems to take especial pains to show that He here proclaims a

principle of equal generality with the others, by separating the

application of it to His immediate hearers which follows in the next

verse, from the universal statement in the text. Their individual

experience was but to illustrate the general rule, not to exhaust it.

And you remember how frequently the same thought is set forth in

Scripture in the most perfectly general terms.

1. Notice that antagonism is inevitable between a true Christian and

the world.

Take the character as it is sketched in verses preceding. Point by

point it is alien from the sympathies and habits of irreligious men.

The principles are different, the practices are different.

A true Christian ought to be a standing rebuke to the world, an

incarnate conscience.

There are but two ways of ending that antagonism: either by bringing

the world up to Christian character, or letting Christian character

down to the world.

2. The certain and uniform result is opposition and

dislike--persecution in its reality.

Darkness hateth light.

Some will, no doubt, be touched; there is that in all men which

acknowledges how awful goodness is. But the loftier character is not

loved by the lower which if loves.

Aristides the Just.' Christ Himself.

As to practice--a righteous life will not make a man popular.' And as

for opinions'--earnest religious opinions of any sort are distasteful.

Not the profession of them, but the reality of them--especially those

which seem in any way new or strange--make the average man angrily

intolerant of an earnest Christianity which takes its creed seriously

and insists on testing conventional life by it. Indolence,

self-complacency, and inborn conservatism join forces in resenting the

presence of such inconvenient enthusiasts, who upset everything and

want to turn the world upside down.'

The moping owl doth to the moon complain

Of such as, wandering near her ivy tower.

Molest her ancient, solitary reign.'

The seeds of the persecuting temper are in human nature, and they

germinate in the storms which Christianity brings with it.

3. The phases vary according to circumstances.

We have not to look for the more severe and gross kinds of persecution.

The tendency of the age is to visit no man with penalties for his

belief, but to allow the utmost freedom of thought.

The effect of Christianity upon popular morality has been to bring men

up towards the standard of Christ's righteousness.

The long proclamation of Christian truth in England has the effect of

making mere profession of it a perfectly safe and even proper thing.

But the antagonism remains at bottom the same.

Let a man earnestly accept even the creeds of established religion and

live by them, and he will find that out. Let him seek to proclaim and

enforce some of those truths of Christianity whose bearing upon social

and economical and ecclesiastical questions is but partially

understood. Let him set up and stick to a high standard of Christian

morality and see what comes of it, in business, say, or in social life.

All that will live godly will suffer persecution.'

4. The present forms are perhaps not less hard to bear than the old

ones.

They are, no doubt, very small in contrast with the lions in the arena

or the fires of Smithfield. The curled lip, the civil scorn, the

alienation of some whose good opinion we would fain have, or, if we

stand in some public position, the poisonous slanders of the press, and

the contumacious epithets, are trivial but very real tokens of dislike.

We have the assassin's tongue instead of the assassin's dagger. But yet

such things may call for as much heroism as braving a rack, and the

spirit that shoots out the tongue may be as bad as the spirit that

yelled, Christianos ad leones.' 5. The great reason why professing

Christians now know so little about persecution is because there is so

little real antagonism. If ye were of the world, the world would love

his own.' The Church has leavened the world, but the world has also

leavened the Church; and it seems agreed by common consent that there

is to be no fanatical goodness of the early primitive pattern. Of

course, then, there will be no persecution, where religion goes in

silver slippers, and you find Christian men running neck and neck with

others, and no man can tell which is which.

Then, again, many escape by avoiding plain Christian duty, shutting

themselves up in their own little c?ies.

(a) Let us be sure that we never flinch from our Christian character to

buy anybody's good opinion.

It is not for us to lower our flags to whoever fires across our bows.

Do you never feel it an effort to avow your principles? Do you never

feel that they are being smiled away in society? Are you not flattered

by being shown that this religion of yours is the one thing that stands

between you and cordial reception by these people?

(b) Let us be sure that it is righteousness and Christ which are the

grounds of anything of the sort we have to bear, and not our own faults

of temper and character.

(c) Let us be sure that we are not persecutors our selves.

To be so is inherent in human nature.

Men have often been both confessors and inquisitors. The spirit of

censorious judgment, of fierce hate, of impatient intolerance, has

often disgraced Christian men. It is for us to be only and always meek,

merciful peace-bringers; and if men will not accept truth, to seek to

win and woo them, not to be angry.

It is very hard to be both firm and tolerant, not letting the foolish

heart expand into a lazy glow of benevolence to all beliefs, and so

perilling one's own, nor letting intense adherence to our own

convictions darken into impotent wrath against their harshest

opponents. But let us remember that as God is our great example of

mercy, so Christ is our great example of patience, both under the

world's unbelief and the world's persecution.

II. God's Gift to the persecuted.

The kingdom of heaven.'

This last promise is the same as the first--to express completeness, a

rounded whole. All the others are but elements of this.

That highest reward given to the perfectest saint is but the fuller

possession of what is given in germ to the humblest and sinfullest at

the very first. The poor in spirit gets it at the beginning.

It is not implied by this promise that a Christian man's blessedness

depends on the accident of some other person's behaviour to him, or

that martyrs have a place which none others can reach. But theirs is

the kingdom of heaven as a natural result of the character which brings

about persecution, and as a natural result of the development of that

character which persecution brings about. This promise, like all the

others, has its twofold fulfilment.

There is a present recompense.

Persecution is the result of a character which brings Christians into

the kingdom. Theirs is the kingdom--they are subjects. To them it is

given to enter.

Persecution makes the present consciousness of the possession of the

kingdom more vivid and joyous. It brings the enforced sense of a

vocation separate from the hostile world's. As Thomas Fuller puts it

somewhere, in troublous times the Church builds high, just as the men

do in cities where there is little room to expand on the ground level.

Persecution brightens and solidifies hope, and thus may become

infinitely sweet and blessed. How often it has been given to the

martyr, as it was given to Stephen, to see heaven opened and Jesus

standing at the right hand of God, as if risen to His feet to uphold as

well as to receive His servant. Paul and Silas made the prison walls

ring with their praises, though their backs were livid with wales and

stained with blood. And we, in our far smaller trials for Christ's

sake, may have the same more conscious possession of the kingdom and

brightened hope of yet fuller possession of it.

There is a future recompense in the perfect kingdom, where men are

rewarded according to their capacities. And if the way in which we have

met the world's evil has been right, then that will have made us fit

for a fuller possession.

In closing we recur to the thought of all these Beatitudes as a chain

and the beginning of all as being penitence and faith.

Many a poor man, or many a little child, may have a higher place in

heaven than some who have died at the stake for their Lord, for not our

history, but our character, determines our place there, and all the

fulness of the kingdom belongs to every one who with penitent heart

comes to God in Christ, and then by slow degrees from that root brings

forth first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.

Here is Jesus' ideal of character--poor in spirit, mourning, meek,

hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart,

peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness' sake. To be these is to be

blessed. And here is Jesus' ideal of what, over and above the inherent

blessedness of such a character, constitutes the true blessedness of a

soul--the possession of the kingdom of heaven, comfort from God, the

inheritance of the earth of which the inheritor may not own a yard,

full satisfaction of the longing after righteousness, the obtaining of

mercy from God, the name of sons of God, and, last as first, the

possession of the kingdom of heaven. Is Jesus' ideal yours? Do you

believe that such a character is the highest that a man can attain,

that in itself it is truly blessed, and will bring about results in

contrast with which all baser-born joys are coarse and false? Happy

will you be if you so believe, and if so believing you make the ideal

which He paints your aim, and therefore secure the blessedness which He

attaches to it as your exceeding great reward.

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SALT WITHOUT SAVOUR

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour,

wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but

to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.'--MATT. v. 13.

These words must have seemed ridiculously presumptuous when they were

first spoken, and they have too often seemed mere mockery and irony in

the ages since. A Galilean peasant, with a few of his rude countrymen

who had gathered round him, stands up there on the mountain, and says

to them, You, a handful, are the people who are to keep the world from

rotting, and to bring it to all its best light.' Strange when we think

that Christ believed that these men were able to do these grand

functions because they drew their power from Himself! Stranger still to

think that, notwithstanding all the miserable inconsistencies of the

professing Church ever since, yet, on the whole, the experience of

history has verified these words! And although some wise men may curl

their lips with a sneer as they say about us Christians, Ye are the

salt of the earth!' yet the most progressive, and the most enlightened,

and the most moral portion of humanity has derived its impulse to

progress, its enlightenment as to the loftiest truths, and the purest

portion of its morality, from the men who received their power to

impart these from Jesus Christ.

And so, dear brethren, I have to say two or three things now, which I

hope will be plain and earnest and searching, about the function of the

Christian Church, and of each individual member of it, as set forth in

these words; about the solemn possibility that the qualification for

that function may go away from a man; about the grave question as to

whether such a loss can ever be repaired; and about the certain end of

the saltless salt.

I. First, then, as to the high task of Christ's disciples as here set

forth.

Ye are the salt of the earth'! The metaphor wants very little

explanation, however much enforcement it may require. It involves two

things: a grave judgment as to the actual state of society, and a lofty

claim as to what Christ's followers are able to do to it.

A grave judgment as to the actual state of society--it is corrupt and

tending to corruption. You do not salt a living thing. You salt a dead

one that it may not be a rotting one. And, Christ says by implication

here, what He says plainly more than once in other places:--Human

society, without My influence, is a carcass that is rotting away and

disintegrating; and you, faithful handful, who have partially

apprehended the meaning of My mission, and have caught something of the

spirit of My life, you are to be rubbed into that rotting mass to

sweeten it, to arrest decomposition, to stay corruption, to give

flavour to its insipidity, and to save it from falling to pieces of its

own wickedness. Ye are the salt of the earth.'

Now, it is not merely because we are the bearers of a truth that will

do all this that we are thus spoken of, but we Christian men are to do

it by the influence of conduct and character.

There are two or three thoughts suggested by this metaphor. The chief

one is that of our power, and therefore our obligation, to arrest the

corruption round us, by our own purity. The presence of a good man

hinders the devil from having elbow-room to do his work. Do you and I

exercise a repressive influence (if we do not do anything better), so

that evil and low-toned life is ashamed to show itself in our presence,

and skulks back as do wrong-doers from the bull's-eye of a policeman's

lantern? It is not a high function, but it is a very necessary one, and

it is one that all Christian men and women ought to discharge--that of

rebuking and hindering the operation of corruption, even if they have

not the power to breathe a better spirit into the dead mass.

But the example of Christian men is not only repressive. It ought to

tempt forth all that is best and purest and highest in the people with

whom they come in contact. Every man who does right helps to make

public opinion in favour of doing right; and every man who lowers the

standard of morality in his own life helps to lower it in the community

of which he is a part. And so in a thousand ways that I have no need to

dwell upon here, the men that have Christ in their hearts and something

of Christ's conduct and character repeated in theirs are to be the

preserving and purifying influence in the midst of this corrupt world.

There are two other points that I name, and do not enlarge upon. The

first of them is--salt does its work by being brought into close

contact with the substance upon which it is to work. And so we, brought

into contact as we are with much evil and wickedness, by many common

relations of friendship, of kindred, of business, of proximity, of

citizenship, and the like,--we are not to seek to withdraw ourselves

from contact with the evil. The only way by which the salt can purify

is by being rubbed into the corrupted thing.

And once more, salt does its work silently, inconspicuously, gradually.

Ye are the light of the world,' says Christ in the next verse. Light is

far-reaching and brilliant, flashing that it may be seen. That is one

side of Christian work, the side that most of us like best, the

conspicuous kind of it. Ay! but there is a very much humbler, and, as I

fancy, a very much more useful, kind of work that we have all to do. We

shall never be the light of the world,' except on condition of being

the salt of the earth.' You have to play the humble, inconspicuous,

silent part of checking corruption by a pure example before you can

aspire to play the other part of raying out light into the darkness,

and so drawing men to Christ Himself.

Now, brethren, why do I repeat all these common, threadbare platitudes,

as I know they are? Simply in order to plant upon them this one

question to the heart and conscience of you Christian men and

women:--Is there anything in your life that makes this text, in its

application to you, other else than the bitterest mockery?

II. The grave possibility of the salt losing its savour.

There is no need for asking the question whether such loss is a

physical fact or not, whether in the natural realm it is possible for

any forms of matter that have saline taste to lose it by any cause.

That does not at all concern us. The point is that it is possible for

us, who call ourselves--and are--Christians, to lose our penetrating

pungency, which stays corruption; to lose all that distinguishes us

from the men that we are to better.

Now I think that nobody can look upon the present condition of

professing Christendom; or, in a narrower aspect, upon the present

condition of English Christianity; or in a still narrower, nobody can

look round upon this congregation; or in the narrowest view, none of us

can look into our own hearts--without feeling that this saying comes

perilously near being true of us. And I beg you, dear Christian

friends, while I try to dwell on this point, to ask yourselves this

question--Lord, is it I? and not to be thinking of other people whom

you may suppose the cap will fit.

There is, then, manifest on every side--first of all, the obliteration

of the distinction between the salt and the mass into which it is

inserted, or to put it into other words, Christian men and women

swallow down bodily, and practise thoroughly, the maxims of the world,

as to life, as to what is pleasant and what is desirable, and as to the

application of morality to business. There is not a hair of difference

in that respect between hundreds and thousands of professing Christian

men, and the irreligious man that has his office up the same staircase.

I know, of course, that there are in every communion saintly men and

women who are labouring to keep themselves unspotted from the world,

but I know too that in every communion there are those, whose religion

has next to no influence on their general conduct, and does not even

keep them from corruption, to say nothing of making them sources of

purifying influence. You cannot lay the flattering unction to your

souls that the reason why there is so little difference between the

Church and the world to-day is because the world has grown so much

better. I know that to a large extent the principles of Christian

ethics have permeated the consciousness of a country like this, and

have found their way even amongst people who make no profession at all

of being Christians. Thank God for it; but that does not explain it

all.

If you take a red-hot ball out of a furnace and lay it down upon a

frosty moor, two processes will go on--the ball will lose heat and the

surrounding atmosphere will gain it. There are two ways by which you

equalise the temperature of a hotter and a colder body: the one is by

the hot one getting cold, and the other is by the cold one getting hot.

If you are not heating the world, the world is freezing you. Every man

influences all men round him, and receives influences from them, and if

there be not more exports than imports, if there be not more influences

and mightier influences raying out from him than are coming into him,

he is a poor creature, and at the mercy of circumstances. Men must

either be hammers or anvil';--must either give blows or receive them. I

am afraid that a great many of us who call ourselves Christians get a

great deal more harm from the world than we ever dream of doing good to

it. Remember this, you are the salt of the earth,' and if you do not

salt the world, the world will rot you.

Is there any difference between your ideal of happiness and the

irreligious one? Is there any difference between your notion of what is

pleasure, and the irreligious one? Is there any difference in your

application of the rules of morality to daily life, any difference in

your general way of looking at things from the way of the ungodly

world? Yes, or No? Is the salt being infected by the carcass, or is it

purifying the corruption? Answer the question, brother, as before God

and your own conscience.

Then there is another thing. There can be no doubt but that all round

and shared by us, there are instances of the cooling of the fervour of

Christian devotion. That is the reason for the small distinction in

character and conduct between the world and the Church to-day. An

Arctic climate will not grow tropical fruits, and if the heat have been

let down, as it has been let down, you cannot expect the glories of

character and the pure unworldliness of conduct that you would have had

at a higher temperature. Nor is there any doubt but that the present

temperature is, with some of us, a distinct loss of heat. It was not

always so low. The thermometer has gone down.

There are, no doubt, some among us who had once a far more vigorous

Christian life than they have to-day; who were once far more aflame

with the love of God than they are now. And although I know, of course,

that as years go on emotion will become less vivid, and feeling may

give place to principle, yet I know no reason why, as years go on,

fervour should become less, or the warmth of our love to our Master

should decline. There will be less spluttering and crackling when the

fire burns up; there may be fewer flames; but there will be a hotter

glow of ruddy, unflaming heat. That is what ought to be in our

Christian experience.

Nor can there be any doubt, I think, but that the partial obliteration

of the distinction between the Church and the world, and the decay of

the fervour of devotion which leads to it, are both to be traced to a

yet deeper cause, and that is the loss or diminution of actual

fellowship with Jesus Christ. It was that which made these early

disciples salt.' It was that which made them light.' It is that, and

that alone, which makes devotion burn fervid, and which makes

characters glow with the strange saintliness that rebukes iniquity, and

works for the purifying of the world. And so I would remind you that

fellowship with Jesus Christ is no vague exercise of the mind but is to

be cultivated by three things, which I fear me are becoming less and

less habitual amongst professing Christians:--Meditation, the study of

the Bible, private prayer. If you have not these--and you know best

whether you have them or not--no power in heaven or earth can prevent

you from losing the savour that makes you salt.

III. Now I come to the next point, and that is the solemn question: Is

there a possibility of re-salting the saltless salt, of restoring the

lost savour?

Wherewithal shall it be salted?' says the Master. That is plain enough,

but do not let us push it too far. If the Church is meant for the

purifying of the world, and the Church itself needs purifying, is there

any power in the world that will do it? If the army joins the rebels,

is there any force that will bring back the army to submission? Our

Lord is speaking about ordinary means and agencies. He is saying in

effect, if the one thing that is intended to preserve the meat loses

its power, is there anything lying about that will salt that? So far,

then, the answer seems to be--No.

But Christ has no intention that these words should be pushed to the

extreme of asserting that if salt loses its savour, if a man loses the

pungency of his Christian life, he cannot win it back, by going again

to the source from which he received it at first. There is no such

implication in these words. There is no obstacle in the way of a

penitent returning to the fountain of all power and purity, nor of the

full restoration of the lost savour, if a man will only bring about a

full reunion of himself with the source of the savour.

Dear brethren, the message is to each of us; the same pleading words,

which the Apocalyptic seer heard from Heaven, come to you and me:

Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do

the first works.' And all the savour and the sweetness that flow from

fellowship with Jesus Christ will come back to us in larger measure

than ever, if we will come back to the Lord. Repentance and returning

will bring back the saltness to the salt, and the brilliancy to the

light.

IV. But one last word warns us what is the certain end of the saltless

salt.

As the other Evangelist puts it: It is neither good for the land nor

for the dunghill.' You cannot put it upon the soil; there is no

fertilising virtue in it. You cannot even fling it into the

rubbish-heap; it will do mischief there. Pitch it out into the road; it

will stop a cranny somewhere between the stones when once it is well

trodden down by men's heels. That is all it is fit for. God has no use

for it, man has no use for it. If it has failed in doing the only thing

it was created for, it has failed altogether. Like a knife that will

not cut, or a lamp that will not burn, which may have a beautiful

handle, or a beautiful stem, and may be highly artistic and decorated;

but the question is, Does it cut, does it burn? If not, it is a failure

altogether, and in this world there is no room for failures. The

poorest living thing of the lowest type will jostle the dead thing out

of the way. And so, for the salt that has lost its savour, there is

only one thing to be done with it--cast it out, and tread it under

foot.

Yes; where are the Churches of Asia Minor, the patriarchates of

Alexandria, of Antioch, of Constantinople; the whole of that early

Syrian, Palestinian Christianity: where are they? Where is the Church

of North Africa, the Church of Augustine? Trodden under foot of men!'

Over the archway of a mosque in Damascus you can read the

half-obliterated inscription--Thy Kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting

Kingdom,' and above it--There is no God but God, and Mohammed is His

prophet!' The salt has lost his savour, and been cast out.

And does any one believe that the Churches of Christendom are eternal

in their present shape? I see everywhere the signs of disintegration in

the existing embodiments and organisations that set forth Christian

life. And I am sure of this, that in the days that are coming to us,

the storm in which we are already caught, all dead branches will be

whirled out of the tree. So much the better for the tree! And a great

deal that calls itself organised Christianity will have to go down

because there is not vitality enough in it to stand. For you know it is

low vitality that catches all the diseases that are going; and it is

out of the sick sheep's eyeholes that the ravens peck the eyes. And it

will be the feeble types of spiritual life, the inconsistent

Christianities of our churches, that will yield the crop of apostates

and heretics and renegades, and that will fall before temptation.

Brethren, remember this: Unless you go back close to your Lord, you

will go further away from Him. The deadness will deepen, the coldness

will become icier and icier; you will lose more and more of the life,

and show less and less of the likeness, and purity, of Jesus Christ

until you come to this--I pray God that none of us come to it--Thou

hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.' Dead!

My brother, let us return unto the Lord our God, and keep nearer Him

than we ever have done, and bring our hearts more under the influence

of His grace, and cultivate the habit of communion with Him; and pray

and trust, and leave ourselves in His hands, that His power may come

into us, and that we in the beauty of our characters, and the purity of

our lives, and the elevation of our spirits, may witness to all men

that we have been with Christ; and may, in some measure, check the

corruption that is in the world through lust.

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THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be

hid. 15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but

on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good

works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'--MATT. v. 14-16.

The conception of the office of Christ's disciples contained in these

words is a still bolder one than that expressed by the preceding

metaphor, which we considered in the last sermon. Ye are the salt of

the earth' implied superior moral purity and power to arrest

corruption. Ye are the light of the world' implies superior spiritual

illumination, and power to scatter ignorance.

That is not all the meaning of the words, but that is certainly in

them. So then, our Lord here gives His solemn judgment that the world,

without Him and those who have learned from Him, is in a state of

darkness; and that His followers have that to impart which will bring

certitude and clearness of knowledge, together with purity and joy and

all the other blessed things which are the fruit of the light.'

That high claim is illustrated by a very homely metaphor. In every

humble house from which His peasant-followers came, there would be a

lamp--some earthen saucer with a little oil in it, in which a wick

floated, a rude stand to put it upon, a meal-chest or a flour-bin, and

a humble pallet on which to lie. These simple pieces of furniture are

taken to point this solemn lesson. When you light your lamp you put it

on the stand, do you not? You light it in order that it may give light;

you do not put it under the meal-measure or the bed. So I have kindled

you that you may shine, and put you where you are that you may give

light.'

And the same thought, with a slightly different turn in the

application, lies in that other metaphor, which is enclosed in the

middle of this parable about the light: a city that is set on an hill

cannot be hid.' Where they stood on the mountain, no doubt they could

see some village perched upon a ridge for safety, with its white walls

gleaming in the strong Syrian sunlight; a landmark for many a mile

round. So says Christ: The City which I found, the true Jerusalem, like

its prototype in the Psalm, is to be conspicuous for situation, that it

may be the joy of the whole earth.'

I take all this somewhat long text now because all the parts of it hold

so closely together, and converge upon the one solemn exhortation with

which it closes, and which I desire to lay upon your hearts and

consciences, Let your light so shine before men.' I make no pretensions

to anything like an artificial arrangement of my remarks, but simply

follow the words in the order in which they lie before us.

I. First, just a word about the great conception of a Christian man's

office which is set forth in that metaphor, Ye are the light of the

world.'

That expression is wide, generic,' as they say. Then in the unfolding

of this little parable our Lord goes on to explain what kind of a light

it is to which He would compare His people--the light of a lamp

kindled. Now that is the first point that I wish to deal with.

Christian men individually, and the Christian Church as a whole, shine

by derived light. There is but One who is light in Himself. He who

said, I am the light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk

in darkness,' was comparing Himself to the sunshine, whereas when He

said to us, Ye are the light of the world; men do not light a lamp and

put it under a bushel,' He was comparing us to the kindled light of the

lamp, which had a beginning and will have an end.

Before, and independent of, His historical manifestation in the flesh,

the Eternal Word of God, who from the beginning was the Life, was also

the light of men; and all the light of reason and of conscience, all

which guides and illumines, comes from that one source, the Everlasting

Word, by whom all things came to be and consist. He was the true light

which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' And further, the

historic Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the source for men of all true

revelation of God and themselves, and of the relations between them;

the Incarnate Ideal of humanity, the Perfect Pattern of conduct, who

alone sheds beams of certainty on the darkness of life, who has left a

long trail of light as He has passed into the dim regions beyond the

grave. In both these senses He is the light, and we gather our radiance

from Him.

We shall be light' if we are in the Lord.' It is by union with Jesus

Christ that we partake of His illumination. A sunbeam has no more power

to shine if it be severed from the sun than a man has to give light in

this dark world if He be parted from Jesus Christ. Cut the current and

the electric light dies; slacken the engine and the electric arc

becomes dim, quicken it and it burns bright. So the condition of my

being light is my keeping unbroken my communication with Jesus Christ;

and every variation in the extent to which I receive into my heart the

influx of His power and of His love is correctly measured and

represented by the greater or the lesser brilliancy of the light with

which I reflect His radiance. Ye were some time darkness, but now are

ye light in the Lord.' Keep near to Him, and a firm hold of His hand,

and then you will be light.

And now I need not dwell for more than a moment or two upon what I have

already said is included in this conception of the Christian man as

being light. There are two sides to it: one is that all Christian

people who have learned to know Jesus Christ and have been truly taught

of Him, do possess a certitude and clearness of knowledge which make

them the lights of the world. We advance no claims to any illumination

as to other than moral or religious truth. We leave all the other

fields uncontested. We bow humbly with confessed ignorance and with

unfeigned gratitude and admiration before those who have laboured in

them, as before our teachers, but if we are true to our Master, and

true to the position in which He has placed us, we shall not be ashamed

to say that we believe ourselves to know the truth, in so far as men

can ever know it, about the all-important subject of God and man, and

the bond between them.

To-day there is need, I think, that Christian men and women should not

be reasoned or sophisticated or cowed out of their confidence that they

have the light because they do know God. It is proclaimed as the

ultimate word of modern thought that we stand in the presence of a

power which certainly is, but of which we can know nothing except that

it is altogether different from ourselves, and that it ever tempts us

to believe that we can know it, and ever repels us into despair. Our

answer is Yes! we could have told you that long ago, though not

altogether in your sense; you have got hold of half a truth, and here

is the whole of it:--No man hath seen God at any time, nor can see

Him!' (a Gospel of despair, verified by the last words of modern

thinkers), the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father,

He hath declared Him.'

Christian men and women, Ye are the light of the world.' Darkness in

yourselves, ignorant about many things, ungifted with lofty talent, you

have possession of the deepest truth; do not be ashamed to stand up and

say, even in the presence of Mars' Hill, with all its Stoics and

Epicureans:--Whom ye ignorantly'--alas! not worship'--Whom ye

ignorantly speak of, Him declare we unto you.'

And then there is the other side, which I only name, moral purity.

Light is the emblem of purity as well as the emblem of knowledge, and

if we are Christians we have within us, by virtue of our possession of

an indwelling Christ, a power which teaches and enables us to practise

a morality high above the theories and doings of the world. But upon

this there is the less need to dwell, as it was involved in our

consideration of the previous figure of the salt.

II. And now the next point that I would make is this, following the

words before us--the certainty that if we are light we shall shine.

The nature and property of light is to radiate. It cannot choose but

shine; and in like manner the little village perched upon a hill there,

glittering and twinkling in the sunlight, cannot choose but be seen.

So, says Christ, If you have Christian character in you, if you have Me

in you, such is the nature of the Christian life that it will certainly

manifest itself.' Let us dwell upon that for a moment or two. Take two

thoughts: All earnest Christian conviction will demand expression; and

all deep experience of the purifying power of Christ upon character

will show itself in conduct.

All earnest conviction will demand expression. Everything that a man

believes has a tendency to convert its believer into its apostle. That

is not so in regard to common every-day truths, nor in regard even to

truths of science, but it is so in regard to all moral truth. For

example, if a man gets a vivid and intense conviction of the evils of

intemperance and the blessings of abstinence, look what a fiery

vehemence of propagandism is at once set to work. And so all round the

horizon of moral truth which is intended to affect conduct; it is of

such a sort that a man cannot get it into brain and heart without

causing him before long to say--This thing has mastered me, and turned

me into its slave; and I must speak according to my convictions.'

That experience works most mightily in regard to Christian truth, as

the highest. What shall we say, then, of the condition of Christian men

and women if they have not such an instinctive need of utterance? Do

you ever feel this in your heart:--Thy word shut up in my bones was

like a fire. I was weary of forbearing, and I could not stay'?

Professing Christians, do you know anything of the longing to speak

your deepest convictions, the feeling that the fire within you is

burning through all envelopings, and will be out? What shall we say of

the men that have it not? God forbid I should say there is no fire, but

I do say that if the fountain never rises into the sunlight above the

dead level of the pool, there can be very little pressure at the main;

that if a man has not the longing to speak his religious convictions,

those convictions must be very hesitating and very feeble; that if you

never felt I must say to somebody I have found the Messias,' you have

not found Him in any very deep sense, and that if the light that is in

you can be buried under a bushel, it is not much of a light after all,

and needs a great deal of feeding and trimming before it can be what it

ought to be.

On the other hand, all deep experience of the purifying power of Christ

upon character will show itself in conduct. It is all very well for

people to profess that they have received the forgiveness of sins and

the inner sanctification of God's Spirit. If you have, let us see it,

and let us see it in the commonest, pettiest affairs of daily life. The

communication between the inmost experience and the outermost conduct

is such as that if there be any real revolution deep down, it will

manifest itself in the daily life. I make all allowance for the loss of

power in transmission, for the loss of power in friction. I am glad to

believe that you and I, and all our imperfect brethren, are a great

deal better in heart than we ever manage to show ourselves to be in

life. Thank God for the consolation that may come out of that

thought--but notwithstanding I press on you my point that, making all

such allowance, and setting up no impossible standard of absolute

identity between duty and conduct in this present life, yet, on the

whole, if we are Christian people with any deep central experience of

the cleansing power and influence of Christ and His grace, we shall

show it in life and in conduct. Or, to put it into the graphic and

plain image of my text, If we are light we shall shine.

III. Again, and very briefly, this obligation of giving light is still

further enforced by the thought that that was Christ's very purpose in

all that He has done with us and for us.

The homely figure here implies that He has not kindled the lamp to put

it under the bushel, but that His purpose in lighting it was that it

might give light. God has made us partakers of His grace, and has given

to us to be light in the Lord, for this among other purposes, that we

should impart that light to others. No creature is so small that it has

not the right to expect that its happiness and welfare shall be

regarded by God as an end in His dealings with it; but no creature is

so great that it has the right to expect that its happiness or

well-being shall be regarded by God and itself as God's only end in His

dealings with it. He gives us His grace, His pardon, His love, the

quickening of His Spirit by our union with Jesus Christ; He gives us

our knowledge of Him, and our likeness to Him--what for? For my own

salvation, for my happiness and well-being,' you say. Certainly,

blessed be His name for His love and goodness! But is that all His

purpose? Paul did not think so when he said, God who commanded the

light to shine out of darkness hath shined into our hearts that we

might give to others the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in

the face of Jesus Christ.' And Christ did not think so when He said,

Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but that it may

give light to all that are in the house.' Heaven doth with us as we

with torches do: not light them for themselves.' The purpose of God is

that we may shine. The lamp is kindled not to illumine itself, but that

it may give light to all that are in the house.'

Consider again, that whilst all these things are true, there is yet a

solemn possibility that men--even good men--may stifle and smother and

shroud their light. You can do, and I am afraid a very large number of

you do do, this; by two ways. You can bury the light of a holy

character under a whole mountain of inconsistencies. If one were to be

fanciful, one might say that the bushel or meal-chest meant material

well-being, and the bed, indolence and love of ease. I wonder how many

of us Christian men and women have buried their light under the

flour-bin and the bed, so interpreted? How many of us have drowned our

consecration and devotion in foul waters of worldly lusts, and have let

the love of earth's goods, of wealth and pleasure and creature love,

come like a poisonous atmosphere round the lamp of our Christian

character, making it burn dim and blue?

And we can bury the light of the Word under cowardly and sheepish and

indifferent silence. I wonder how many of us have done that? Like

blue-ribbon men that button their great-coats over their blue ribbons

when they go into company where they are afraid to show them, there are

many Christian people that are devout Christians at the Communion

Table, but would be ashamed to say they were so in the miscellaneous

company of a railway carriage or a table d'hote. There are professing

Christians who have gone through life in their relationships to their

fathers, sisters, wives, children, friends, kindred, their servants and

dependants, and have never spoken a loving word for their Master. That

is a sinful hiding of your light under the bushel and the bed.

IV. And so the last word, into which all this converges, is the plain

duty: If you are light, shine!

Let your light so shine before men,' nays the text, that they may see

your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.' In the

next chapter our Lord says: Take heed that ye do not your alms before

men to be seen of them. Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for

they love to pray standing in the synagogues that they may be seen of

men.' What is the difference between the two sets of men and the two

kinds of conduct? The motive makes the difference for one thing, and

for another thing, Let your light so shine' does not mean take

precautions that your goodness may come out into public,' but it means

Shine!' You find the light, and the world will find the eyes, no fear

of that! You do not need to seek to be seen of men,' but you do need to

shine that men may see.

The lighthouse keeper takes no pains that the ships tossing away out at

sea may behold the beam that shines from his lamp; all that he does is

to feed it and tend it. And that is all that you and I have to do--tend

the light, and do not, like cowards, cover it up. Modestly, but yet

bravely, carry out your Christianity, and men will see it. Do not be as

a dark lantern, burning with the slides down and illuminating nothing

and nobody. Live your Christianity, and it will be beheld.

And remember, candles are not lit to be looked at. Candles are lit that

something else may be seen by them. Men may see God through your words,

through your conduct, who never would have beheld Him otherwise,

because His beams are too bright for their dim eyes. And it is an awful

thing to think that the world always-- always--takes its conception of

Christianity from the Church, and neither from the Bible nor from

Christ; and that it is you and your like, you inconsistent Christians,

you people that say your sins are forgiven and yet are doing the old

sins day by day which you say are pardoned, you low-toned, unpraying,

worldly Christian men, who have no elevation of character and no

self-restraint of life and no purity of conduct above the men in your

own profession and in your own circumstances all round you--it is you

that are hindering the coming of Christ's Kingdom, it is you that are

the standing disgraces of the Church, and the weaknesses and diseases

of Christendom. I speak strongly, not half as strongly as the facts of

the case would warrant; but I lay it upon all your consciences as

professing Christian people to see to it that no longer your

frivolities, or doubtful commercial practices, or low, unspiritual tone

of life, your self-indulgence in household arrangements, and a dozen

other things that I might name--that no longer do they mar the

clearness of your testimony for your Master, and disturb with envious

streaks of darkness the light that shines from His followers.

How effectual such a witness may be none who have not seen its power

can suppose. Example does tell. A holy life curbs evil, ashamed to show

itself in that pure presence. A good man or woman reveals the ugliness

of evil by showing the beauty of holiness. More converts would be made

by a Christ-like Church than by many sermons. Oh! if you professing

Christians knew your power and would use it, if you would come closer

to Christ, and catch more of the light from His face, you might walk

among men like very angels, and at your bright presence darkness would

flee away, ignorance would grow wise, impurity be abashed, and sorrow

comforted.

Be not content, I pray you, till your own hearts are fully illumined by

Christ, having no part dark--and then live as remembering that you have

been made light that you may shine. Arise, shine, for thy light is

come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

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THE NEW FORM OF THE OLD LAW

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not

come to destroy, but to fulfil. 18. For verily I say unto you, Till

heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from

the law, till all be fulfilled. 19. Whosoever therefore shall break one

of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called

the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach

them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20. For

I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the

righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter

into the kingdom of heaven. 21. Ye have heard that it was said by them

of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in

danger of the judgment: 22. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry

with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment;

and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the

council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of

hell-fire. 23. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and

there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24. Leave

there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to

thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 25. Agree with thine

adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any

time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver

thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. 26. Verily I say

unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid

the uttermost farthing.'--MATT. v. 17-26.

This passage falls naturally into two parts--the former extending from

verse 17 to 20 inclusive; the latter, from verse 21 to the end. In the

former, the King of the true kingdom lays down the general principles

of the relation between its laws and the earlier revelation of the

divine will; in the latter, He exemplifies this relation in one case,

which is followed, in the remainder of the chapter, by three other

illustrative examples.

I. The King laying down the law of His kingdom in its relation to the

older law of God.

The four verses included in this section give a regular sequence of

thought: verse 17 declaring our Lord's personal relation to the former

revelation as fulfilling it; verse 18 basing that statement of the

purpose of His coming on the essential permanence of the old law;

verses 19 and 20 deducing thence the relation of His disciples to that

law, and that in such a way that verse 19 corresponds to verse 18, and

affirms that this permanent law is binding in its minutest details on

His subjects, while verse 20 corresponds to verse 17, and requires

their deepened righteousness as answering to His fulfilment of the law.

The first thing that strikes one in looking at these verses is their

authoritative tone. There may, even thus early in Christ's career, have

been some murmurs that He was taking up a position of antagonism to

Mosaism, which may account for the think not' which introduces the

section. But however that may be, the swift transition from the

Beatitudes to speak of Himself and of the meaning of His work is all of

a piece with His whole manner; for certainly never did religious

teacher open his mouth, who spoke so perpetually about Himself as did

the meek Jesus. I came' declares that He is the coming One,' and is

really a claim to have voluntarily appeared among men, as well as to be

the long-expected Messiah. With absolute decisiveness He states the

purpose of His coming. He knows the meaning of His own work, which so

few of us do, and it is safe to take His own account of what He

intends, as it so seldom is. His opening declaration is singularly

composed of blended humility and majesty. Its humility lies in His

placing Himself, as it were, in line with previous messengers, and

representing Himself as carrying on the sequence of divine revelation.

It would not have been humble for anybody but Him to say that, but it

was so for Him. Its majesty lies in His claim to fulfil' all former

utterances from God. His fulfilment of the law properly so called is

twofold: first, in His own proper person and life, He completes

obedience to it, realises its ideal; second, in His exposition of it,

both by lip and life, He deepens and intensifies its meaning, changing

it from a letter which regulates the actions, to a spirit which moves

the inward man.

So these first words point to the peculiarity of His coming as being

His own act, and make two daring assertions, as to His character, which

He claims to be sinless, and as to His teaching, which he claims to be

an advance upon all the former divine revelation. As to the former, He

speaks here as He did to John, thus it becometh us to fulfil all

righteousness.' No trace of consciousness of sin or defect appears in

any words or acts of His. The calmest conviction that He was perfectly

righteous is always manifest. How comes it that we are not repelled by

such a tone? We do not usually admire self-complacent religious

teachers. Why has nobody ever given Christ the lie, or pointed to His

unconsciousness of faults as itself the gravest fault? Strange

inaugural discourse for a humble sage and saint to assert his own

immaculate perfection, stranger still that a listening world has said,

Amen!' Note, too, the royal style here. In this part of the Sermon' our

Lord twice uses the phrase, I say unto you,' which He once introduces

with His characteristic verily.' Once He employs it to give solemnity

to the asseveration which stretches forward to the end of this

solid-seeming world, and once He introduces by it the stringent demand

for His followers' loftier righteousness. His unsupported word is given

us as our surest light in the dark future, His bare command as the most

imperative authority. This style goes kingly; it calls for absolute

credence and unhesitating submission. When He speaks, even if we have

nothing but His word, it is ours neither to make reply' nor to reason

why,' but simply to believe, and swiftly to do. Rabbis might split

hairs and quote other rabbis by the hour; philosophers may argue and

base their teachings on elaborate demonstrations; moralists may seek to

sway the conscience through reason; legislators to appeal to fear and

hope. He speaks, and it is done; He commands, and it stands fast. There

is nothing else in the world the least like the superb and mysterious

authority with which He fronts the world, and, as Fountain of knowledge

and Source of obligation, summons us all to submit and believe, by that

Verily, I say unto you.'

Verse 18. Next we have to notice the exuberant testimony to the

permanence of the law. Not the smallest of its letters, not even the

little marks which distinguished some of them, or the flourishes at the

top of some of them, should pass,--as we might say, not even the stroke

across a written t,' which shows that it is not l.' The law shall last

as long as the world. It shall last till it be accomplished. And what

then? The righteousness which it requires can never be so realised that

we shall not need to realise it any more, and in the new heavens

righteousness dwelleth. But in a very real sense law shall cease when

fulfilled. There is no law to him who can say, Thy law is within my

heart.' When law has become both law and impulse,' it has ceased to be

law, in so far as it no longer stands over against the doer as an

external constraint.

Verse 19. On this permanence of the law Christ builds its imperative

authority in His kingdom. Obviously, the kingdom of heaven' in verse 19

means the earthly form of that kingdom. The King republishes, as it

were, the old code, and adopts it as the basis of His law. He thus

assumes the absolute right of determining precedence and dignity in

that kingdom. The sovereign is the fountain of honour,' whose word

ennobles. Observe the merciful accuracy of the language. The breach of

the commandments either in theory or in practice does not exclude from

the kingdom, for it is, while realised on earth, a kingdom of sinful

men aiming after holiness; but the smallest deflection from the law of

right, in theory or in practice, does lower a man's standing therein,

inasmuch as it makes him less capable of that conformity to the King,

and consequent nearness to Him, which determines greatness and

smallness there. Dignity in the kingdom depends on Christ-likeness, and

Christ-likeness depends on fulfilling, as He did, all righteousness.

Small flaws are most dangerous because least noticeable. More Christian

men lose their chance of promotion in the kingdom by a multitude of

little sins than by single great ones.

Verse 20. As the King has Himself by His perfect obedience fulfilled

the law, His subjects likewise must, in their obedience, transcend the

righteousness of those who best knew and most punctiliously kept it.

The scribes and Pharisees are not here regarded as hypocrites, but

taken as types of the highest conformity with the law which the old

dispensation afforded. The new kingdom demands a higher, namely a more

spiritual and inward righteousness, one corresponding to the profounder

meaning which the King gives to the old commandment. And this loftier

fulfilment is not merely the condition of dignity in, but of entrance

at all into, the kingdom. Inward holiness is the essence of the

character of all its subjects. How that holiness is to be ours is not

here told, except in so far as it is hinted by the fact that it is

regarded as the issue of the King's fulfilling the law. These last

words would have been terrible and excluding if they had stood alone.

When they follow I am come to fulfil,' they are a veiled gospel,

implying that by His fulfilment the righteousness of the law is

fulfilled in us.

II. We have an illustrative example in the case of the old commandment

against murder. This part of the passage falls into three

divisions--each occupying two verses. First we have the deepening and

expansion of the commandment. This part begins with the royal style

again. What was said to them of old' is left in its full authority. But

I say unto you' represents Jesus as possessing co-ordinate authority

with that law, of which the speaker is unnamed, perhaps because the

same Word of God which now spoke in Him had spoken it. We need but

refer here to the Jewish courts and Sanhedrim, and to that valley of

Hinnom, where the offal of Jerusalem and the corpses of criminals were

burned, nor need we discuss the precise force of Raca' and thou fool.'

The main points to be observed are, the distinct extension of the

conception of killing' to embrace malevolent anger, whether it find

vent or is kept close in the heart; the clear recognition that, whilst

the emotion which is the source of the overt act is of the same nature

as the act, and that therefore he who hateth his brother is a

murderer,' there are degrees in criminality, according as the anger

remains unexpressed, or finds utterance in more or less bitter and

contemptuous language; that consequently there are degrees in the

severity of the punishment which is administered by no earthly

tribunal; and that, finally, this stern sentence has hidden in it the

possibility of forgiveness, inasmuch as the consequence of the sin is

liability to punishment, but not necessarily suffering of it. The old

law had no such mitigation of its sentence.

Verses 23, 24. The second part of this illustrative example intensifies

the command by putting obedience to it before acts of external worship.

The language is vividly picturesque. We see a worshipper standing at

the very altar while the priest is offering his sacrifice. In that

sacred moment, while he is confessing his sins, a flash across his

memory shows him a brother offended,--rightly or wrongly it matters

not. The solemn sacrifice is to pause while he seeks the offended one,

and, whatever the other man's reception of his advances may be, he

cleanses his own bosom of its perilous stuff; then he may come back and

go on with the interrupted worship. Nothing could put in a clearer

light the prime importance of the command than this setting aside of

sacred religious acts for its sake. Obedience is better than

sacrifice.' And the little word therefore,' at the beginning of verse

23, points to the terrible penalties as the reason for this urgency. If

such destruction may light on the angry man, nothing should come

between him and the conquest of his anger. Such self-conquest, which

will often seem like degradation, is more acceptable service to the

King, and truer worship, than all words or ceremonial acts. Deep truths

as to the relations between worship, strictly so called, and life, lie

in these words, which may well be taken to heart by those whose altar

is Calvary, and their gift the thank-offering of themselves.

Verses 25, 26. The third part is a further exhortation to the same

swiftness in casting out anger from the heart, thrown into a parabolic

form. When you quarrel with a man, says Christ in effect, prudence

enjoins to make it up as soon as possible, before he sets the law in

motion. If once he, as plaintiff, has brought you before the judge, the

law will go on mechanically through the stages of trial, condemnation,

surrender to the prison authorities, and confinement till the last

farthing has been paid. So, if you are conscious that you have an

adversary,--and any man that you hate is your adversary, for he will

appear against you at that solemn judgment to come,--agree with him,

put away the anger out of your heart at once. In the special case in

hand, the adversary' is the man with whom we are angry. In the general

application of the precept to the whole series of offences against the

law, the adversary may be regarded as the law itself. In either

interpretation, the stages of appearing before the judge and so on up

till the shutting up in prison are the stages of the judgment before

the tribunal, not of earth, but of the kingdom of heaven. They point to

the same dread realities as are presented in the previous verses under

the imagery of the Jewish courts and the foul fires of the valley of

Hinnom. Christ closes the grave parable with His solemn Verily I say

unto thee'--as looking on the future judgment, and telling us what His

eyes saw. The words have no bearing on the question of the duration of

the imprisonment, for He does not tell us whether the last farthing

could ever be paid or not; but they do teach this lesson, that, if once

we fall under the punishments of the kingdom, there is no end to them

until the last tittle of the consequences of our breach of its law has

been paid. To delay obedience, and still more to delay abandoning

disobedience, is madness, in view of the storm that may at any moment

burst on the heads of the rebels.

Thus He deepens and fulfils one precept of the old law by extending the

sweep of its prohibition from acts to thoughts, by setting obedience to

it above sacrifice and worship, and by picturing in solemn tones of

parabolic warning the consequences of having the disobeyed precept as

our unreconciled adversary. In this one case we have a specimen of His

mode of dealing with the whole law, every jot of which He expanded in

His teaching, and perfectly observed in His life.

A gospel is hidden even in these warnings, for it is distinctly taught

that the offended law may cease to be our adversary, and that we may be

reconciled with it, ere yet it has accused us to the judge. It was not

yet time to proclaim that the King fulfilled' the law, not only by

life, but by death, and that therefore all His believing subjects are

justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the

law,' as well as endowed with the righteousness by which they fulfil

that law in deeper reality, and fairer completeness, than did those of

old time,' who loved it most.

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SWEAR NOT AT ALL'

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou

shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine

oaths: 34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for

it is God's throne: 35. Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool;

neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. 36. Neither

shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair

white or black. 37. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay:

for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.'--MATT. v. 33-37.

In His treatment of the sixth and seventh commandments, Jesus deepened

them by bringing the inner man of feeling and desire under their

control. In His treatment of the old commandments as to oaths, He

expands them by extending the prohibitions from one kind of oath to all

kinds. The movement in the former case is downwards and inwards; in the

latter it is outwards, the compass sweeping a wider circle. Perjury, a

false oath, was all that had been forbidden. He forbids all. We may

note that the forms of colloquial swearing, which our Lord specifies,

are not to be taken as an exhaustive enumeration of what is forbidden.

They are in the nature of a parenthesis, and the sentence runs on

continuously without them--Swear not at all . . . but let your

communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay.' The reason appended is equally

universal, for it suggests the deep thought that whatsoever is more

than these' that is to say, any form of speech that seeks to strengthen

a simple, grave asseveration by such oaths as He has just quoted,

cometh of evil' inasmuch as it springs from, and reveals, the

melancholy fact that his bare word is not felt binding by a man, and is

not accepted as conclusive by others. If lies were not so common, oaths

would be needless. And oaths increase the evil from which they come, by

confirming the notion that there is no sin in a lie unless it is sworn

to.

The oaths specified are all colloquial, which were and are continually

and offensively mingled with common speech in the East. Nowhere are

there such habitual liars, and nowhere are there so many oaths. Every

traveller there knows that, and sees how true is Christ's filiation of

the custom of swearing from the custom of falsehood. But these

poisonous weeds of speech not only tended to degrade plain veracity in

the popular mind, but were themselves parents of immoral evasions, for

it was the teaching of some Rabbis, at all events, that an oath by

heaven' or by earth' or by Jerusalem' or by my head' did not bind. That

further relaxation of the obligation of truthfulness was grounded on

the words quoted in verse 33, for, said the immoral quibblers, it is

"thine oaths to the Lord" that thou "shalt perform," and for these

others you may do as you like' Therefore our Lord insists that every

oath, even these mutilated, colloquial ones which avoid His name, is in

essence an appeal to God, and has no sense unless it is. To swear such

a truncated oath, then, has the still further condemnation that it is

certainly an irreverence, and probably a quibble, and meant to be

broken. It must be fully admitted that there is little in common

between such pieces of senseless profanity as these oaths, or the

modern equivalents which pollute so many lips to-day, and the oath

administered in a court of justice, and it may further be allowed

weight that Jesus does not specifically prohibit the oath by the Lord,'

but it is difficult to see how the principles on which He condemns are

to be kept from touching even judicial oaths. For they, too, are

administered on the ground of the false idea that they add to the

obligation of veracity, and give a guarantee of truthfulness which a

simple affirmation does not give. Nor can any one, who knows the

perfunctory formality and indifference with which such oaths are

administered and taken, and what a farce kissing the book' has become,

doubt that even judicial oaths tend to weaken the popular conception of

the sin of a lie and the reliance to be placed upon the simple Yea,

yea; Nay, nay.'

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NON-RESISTANCE

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth

for a tooth: 39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but

whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other

also. 40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy

coat, let him have thy cloke also. 41. And whosoever shall compel thee

to go a mile, go with him twain. 42. Give to him that asketh thee, and

from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.'--MATT. v.

38-42.

The old law directed judges to inflict penalties precisely equivalent

to offences--an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth' (Exod. xxi.

24), but that direction was not for the guidance of individuals. It was

suited for the stage of civilisation in which it was given, and

probably was then a restriction, rather than a sanction, of the wild

law of retaliation. Jesus sweeps it away entirely, and goes much

further than even its abrogation. For He forbids not only retaliation

but even resistance. It is unfortunate that in this, as in so many

instances, controversy as to the range of Christ's words has so largely

hustled obedience to them out of the field, that the first thought

suggested to a modern reader by the command Resist not evil' (or, an

evil man) is apt to be, Is the Quaker doctrine of uniform

non-resistance right or wrong, instead of, Do I obey this precept? If

we first try to understand its meaning, we shall be in a position to

consider whether it has limits, springing from its own deepest

significance, or not. What, then, is it not to resist? Our Lord gives

three concrete illustrations of what He enjoins, the first of which

refers to insults such as contumelious blows on the cheek, which are

perhaps the hardest not to meet with a flash of anger and a returning

stroke; the second of which refers to assaults on property, such as an

attempt at legal robbery of a man's undergarment; the third of which

refers to forced labour, such as impressing a peasant to carry military

or official baggage or documents--a form of oppression only too well

known under Roman rule in Christ's days. In regard to all three cases,

He bids His disciples submit to the indignity, yield the coat, and go

the mile. But such yielding without resistance is not to be all. The

other cheek is to be given to the smiter; the more costly and ample

outer garment is to be yielded up; the load is to be carried for two

miles. The disciple is to meet evil with a manifestation, not of anger,

hatred, or intent to inflict retribution, but of readiness to submit to

more. It is a hard lesson, but clearly here, as always, the chief

stress is to be laid, not on the outward action, but on the

disposition, and on the action mainly as the outcome and exhibition of

that. If the cheek is turned, or the cloak yielded, or the second mile

trudged with a lowering brow, and hate or anger boiling in the heart,

the commandment is broken. If the inner man rises in hot indignation

against the evil and its doer, he is resisting evil more harmfully to

himself than is many a man who makes his adversary's cheeks tingle

before his own have ceased to be reddened. We have to get down into the

depths of the soul, before we understand the meaning of non-resistance.

It would have been better if the eager controversy about the breadth of

this commandment had oftener become a study of its depth, and if,

instead of asking, Are we ever warranted in resisting?' men had asked,

What in its full meaning is non-resistance?' The truest answer is that

it is a form of Love,--love in the face of insults, wrongs, and

domineering tyranny, such as are illustrated in Christ's examples. This

article of Christ's New Law comes last but one in the series of

instances in which His transfiguring touch is laid on the Old Law, and

the last of the series is that to which He has been steadily advancing

from the first--namely, the great Commandment of Love. This precept

stands immediately before that, and prepares for it. It is, as suffused

with the light of the sun that is all but risen, Resist not evil,' for

Love beareth all things.'

It is but a shallow stream that is worried into foam and made angry and

noisy by the stones in its bed; a deep river flows smooth and silent

above them. Nothing will enable us to meet evil' with a patient

yielding love which does not bring the faintest tinge of anger even

into the cheek reddened by a rude hand, but the love of God shed abroad

in the heart,' and when that love fills a man, out of him will flow a

river of living water,' which will bury evil below its clear, gentle

abundance, and, perchance, wash it of its foulness. The quality of'

this non-resistance is twice blessed,' it blesseth him that gives and

him that takes.' For the disciple who submits in love, there is the

gain of freedom from the perturbations of passion, and of steadfast

abiding in the peace of a great charity, the deliverance from the

temptation of descending to the level of the wrong-doer, and of losing

hold of God and all high visions. The tempest-ruffled sea mirrors no

stars by night, nor is blued by day. If we are to have real communion

with God, we must not flush with indignation at evil, nor pant with

desire to shoot the arrow back to him that aimed it at us. And in

regard to the evil-doer, the most effectual resistance is, in many

cases, not to resist. There is something hid away somewhere in most

men's hearts which makes them ashamed of smiting the offered left

cheek, and then ashamed of having smitten the right one. It is a shame

to hit him, since he does not defend himself,' comes into many a

ruffian's mind. The safest way to travel in savage countries is to show

oneself quite unarmed. He that meets evil with evil is overcome of

evil'; he that meets it with patient love is likely in most cases to

overcome evil with good.' And even if he fails, he has, at all events,

used the only weapon that has any chance of beating down the evil, and

it is better to be defeated when fighting hate with love than to be

victorious when fighting it with itself, or demanding an eye for an

eye.

But, if we take the right view of this precept, its limitations are in

itself. Since it is love confronting, and seeking to transform evil

into its own likeness, it may sometimes be obliged by its own self not

to yield. If turning the other cheek would but make the assaulter more

angry, or if yielding the cloak would but make the legal robber more

greedy, or if going the second mile would but make the press-gang more

severe and exacting, resistance becomes a form of love and a duty for

the sake of the wrong-doer. It may also become a duty for the sake of

others, who are also objects of love, such as helpless persons who

otherwise would be exposed to evil, or society as a whole. But while

clearly that limit is prescribed by the very nature of the precept, the

resistance which it permits must have love to the culprit or to others

as its motive, and not be tainted by the least suspicion of passion or

vengeance. Would that professing Christians would try more to purge

their own hearts, and bring this solemn precept into their daily lives,

instead of discussing whether there are cases in which it does not

apply! There are great tracts in the lives of all of us to which it

should apply and is not applied; and we had better seek to bring these

under its dominion first, and then it will be time enough to debate as

to whether any circumstances are outside its dominion or not.

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THE LAW OF LOVE

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour,

and hate thine enemy. 44. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless

them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them

which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45. That ye may be the

children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to

rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on

the unjust. 46. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have

ye? do not even the publicans the same? 47. And if ye salute your

brethren only, what do ye more than others! do not even the publicans

so? 48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven

is perfect.'--MATT. v. 43-48.

The last of the five instances of our Lord's extending and deepening

and spiritualising the old law is also the climax of them. We may

either call it the highest or the deepest, according to our point of

view. His transfiguring touch invests all the commandments with which

He has been dealing with new inwardness, sweep, and spirituality, and

finally He proclaims the supreme, all-including commandment of

universal love. It hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour'--that

comes from Lev. xix. 18; but where does and hate thine enemy' come

from? Not from Scripture, but in the passage in Leviticus neighbour' is

co-extensive with children of thy people,' and the hatred and contempt

of all men outside Israel which grew upon the Jews found a foothold

there. Who is my neighbour?' was apparently a well-discussed question

in the schools of the Rabbis, and, whether any of these teachers ever

committed themselves to plainly formulating the principle or not,

practically the duty of love was restricted to a narrow circle, and the

rest of the wide world left out in the cold. But not only was the

circumference of love's circle drawn in, but to hate an enemy was

elevated almost into a duty. It is the worst form of retaliation. An

eye for an eye' is bad enough, but hate for hate plunges men far deeper

in the devil's mire. To flash back from the mirror of the heart the

hostile looks which are flung at us, is our natural impulse; but why

should we always leave it to the other man to pitch the keynote of our

relations with him? Why should we echo only his tones? Cannot we leave

his discord to die into silence and reply to it by something more

musical? Two thunder-clouds may cast lightnings at each other, but they

waste themselves in the process. Better to shine meekly and

victoriously on as the moon does on piled masses of darkness till it

silvers them with its quiet light. So Jesus bids us do. We are to

suppress the natural inclination to pay back in the enemy's own coin,

to give him as good as he gave us,' to show proper spirit,' and all the

other fine phrases with which the world whitewashes hatred and revenge.

We are not only to allow no stirring of malice in our feelings, but we

are to let kindly emotions bear fruit in words blessing the cursers,

and in deeds of goodness, and, highest of all, in prayers for those

whose hate is bitterest, being founded on religion, and who are

carrying it into action in persecution. We cannot hate a man if we pray

for him; we cannot pray for him if we hate him. Our weakness often

feels it so hard not to hate our enemies, that our only way to get

strength to keep this highest, hardest commandment is to begin by

trying to pray for the foe, and then we gradually feel the infernal

fires dying down in our temper, and come to be able to meet his evil

with good, and his curses with blessings. It is a difficult lesson that

Jesus sets us. It is a blessed possibility that Jesus opens for us,

that our kindly emotions towards men need not be at the mercy of theirs

to us. It is a fair ideal that He paints, which, if Christians

deliberately and continuously took it for their aim to realise, would

revolutionise society, and make the fellowship of man with man a

continual joy. Think of what any community, great or small, would be,

if enmity were met by love only and always. Its fire would die for want

of fuel. If the hater found no answering hate increasing his hate, he

would often come to answer love with love. There is an old legend

spread through many lands, which tells how a princess who had been

changed by enchantment into a loathly serpent, was set free by being

thrice kissed by a knight, who thereby won a fair bride with whom he

lived in love and joy. The only way to change the serpent of hate into

the fair form of a friend is to kiss it out of its enchantment.

No doubt, partial anticipations of this precept may be found, buried

under much ethical rubbish, elsewhere than in the Sermon on the Mount,

and more plainly in Old Testament teaching, and in Rabbinical sayings;

but Christ's originality' as a moral teacher lies not so much in the

absolute novelty of His commandments, as in the perspective in which He

sets them, and in the motives on which He bases them, and most of all

in His being more than a teacher, namely, the Giver of power to fulfil

what He enjoins. Christian ethics not merely recognises the duty of

love to men, but sets it as the foundation of all other duties. It is

root and trunk, all others are but the branches into which it ramifies.

Christian ethics not merely recognises the duty, but takes a man by the

hand, leads him up to his Father God, and says: There, that is your

pattern, and a child who loves his Father will try to copy his ways and

be made like Him by his love. So Morality passes into Religion, and

through the transition receives power beyond its own. The perfection of

worship is imitation, and when men call Him Father' whom they adore,

imitation becomes the natural action of a child who loves.

A dew-drop and a planet are both spheres, moulded by the same law of

gravitation. The tiny round of our little drops of love may be not all

unlike the colossal completeness of that Love, which owns the sun as

His sun,' and rays down light and distils rain over the broad world.

God loves all men apart altogether from any regard to character,

therefore He gives to all men all the good gifts that they can receive

apart from character, and if evil men do not get His best gifts, it is

not because He withholds, but because they cannot take. There are human

love-gifts which cannot be bestowed on enemies or evil persons. It is

not possible, nor fit, that a Christian should feel to such as he does

to those who share his faith and sympathies; but it is possible, and

therefore incumbent, that he should not only negatively clear his heart

of malice and hatred, but that he should positively exercise such

active beneficence as they will receive. That is God's way, and it

should be His children's.

The thought of the divine pattern naturally brings up the contrast

between it and that which goes by the name of love among men. Just

because Christians are to take God as their example of love, they must

transcend human examples. Here again Jesus strikes the note with which

He began His teaching of His disciples' righteousness'; but very

significantly He does not now point to Pharisees, but to publicans, as

those who were to be surpassed. The former, no doubt, were models of

righteousness' after a rigid, whitewashed-sepulchre sort, but the

latter had bigger hearts, and, bad as they were and were reputed to be,

they loved better than the others. Jesus is glad to see and point to

even imperfect sparks of goodness in a justly condemned class. No

doubt, publicans in their own homes, with wife and children round them,

let their hearts out, and could be tender and gentle, however gruff and

harsh in public. When Jesus says even the publicans,' He is not

speaking in contempt, but in recognition of the love that did find some

soil to grow on, even in that rocky ground. But is not the bringing in

of the reward' as a motive a woful downcome? and is love that loves for

the sake of reward, love at all? The criticism and questions forget

that the true motive has just been set forth, and that the thought of

reward' comes in, only as secondary encouragement to a duty which is

based upon another ground. To love because we shall gain something,

either in this world or in the next, is not love but long-sighted

selfishness; but to be helped in our endeavours to widen our love so as

to take in all men, by the vision of the reward, is not selfishness but

a legitimate strengthening of our weakness. Especially is that so, in

view of the fact that the reward' contemplated is nothing else than the

growth of likeness to the Father in heaven, and the increase of filial

consciousness, and the clearer, deeper cry, Abba, Father.' If longing

for, and having regard to, that recompense of reward' is selfishness,

and if the teaching which permits it is immoral, may God send the world

more of such selfishness and of teachers of it!

But the reference to the shrunken love-streams that flow among men

passes again swiftly to the former thought of likeness to God as the

great pattern. Like a bird glancing downwards for a moment to earth,

and then up again and away into the blue, our Lord's words re-soar, and

settle at last by the throne of God. The command, Be ye perfect, even

as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,' may be intended to refer

only to the immediately preceding section, but one is inclined to

regard it rather as the summing up of the whole of the preceding series

of commandments from verse 20 onwards. The sum of religion is to

imitate the God whom we worship. The ideal which draws us to aim at its

realisation must be absolutely perfect, however imperfect may be all

our attempts to reproduce it. We sometimes hear it said that to set up

perfection as our goal is to smite effort dead and to enthrone despair.

But to set up an incomplete ideal is the surest way to take the heart

out of effort after it. It is the Christian's prerogative to have ever

gleaming before him an unattained aim, to which he is progressively

approximating, and which, unreached, beckons, feeds hope of endless

approach, and guarantees immortality.

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TRUMPETS AND STREET CORNERS

Take heed that ye do nob your alms before men, to be seen of them:

otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. 2.

Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before

thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that

they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their

reward. 3. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what

thy right hand doeth; 4. That thine alms may be in secret: and thy

Father, which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee openly. 5. And

when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they

love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the

streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have

their reward.'--MATT. vi. 1-5.

Our Lord follows His exposition of the deepened sense which the old law

assumes in His kingdom, by a warning against the most subtle foes of

true righteousness. He first gives the warning in general terms in

verse 1, and then flashes its light into three dark corners, and shows

how hankering after men's praise corrupts the beneficence which is our

duty to our neighbour, the devotion which is our duty to God, and the

abstinence which is our duty to ourselves. We deal now with the two

former.

We have first the general warning, given out like the text of a sermon,

or the musical phrase which underlies the various harmonies of some

concerto. The first word implies that the evil is a subtle and seducing

one. Take heed' as of something which may steal into and mar the

noblest lives. The serpent lies coiled under the leaves, and may sting

and poison the unwary hand. The generality of the warning, and the

logical propriety of the whole section, require the adoption of the

reading of the Revised Version, namely, righteousness.' The thing to be

taken heed of is not the doing it before men,' which will often be

obligatory, often necessary, and never in itself wrong, but the doing

it to be seen of them.' Not the number of spectators, but the furtive

glance of our eyes to see if they are looking at us, makes the sin. We

are to let our good works shine, that men may glorify our Father. Pious

souls are to shine, and yet to be hid,--a paradox which can be easily

solved by the obedient. If our motive is to make God's glory more

visible, we shall not be seeking to be ourselves admired. The

harp-string's swift vibrations, as it gives out its note, make it

unseen.

The reason for the warning goes on two principles: one that

righteousness is to be rewarded, over and above its own inherent

blessedness; another, that the prospect of the reward is a legitimate

stimulus, over and above the prime reason for righteousness, namely,

that it is righteous. The New Testament morality is not good enough for

some very superfine people, who are pleased to call it selfish because

it lets a martyr brace himself in the fire by the vision of the crown

athwart the smoke. Somehow or other, however, that selfish morality

gets itself put in practice, and turns out more unselfish people than

its assailants manage to produce. Perhaps the motive which they attack

may be part of the reason.

The mingling of regard for man's approbation with apparently righteous

acts absolutely disqualifies them for receiving God's reward, for it

changes their whole character, and they are no longer what they seem.

Charity given from that motive is not charity, nor prayer offered from

it devotion.

I. The general warning is applied to three cases, of which we have to

deal with two. Our Lord speaks first of ostentatious almsgiving. Note

that we are not to take blowing the trumpets' as actual fact. Nobody

would do that in a synagogue. The meaning of all attempts, however

concealed, to draw attention to one's beneficence, is just what the

ear-splitting blast would be; and the incongruity of startling the

worshippers with the harsh notes is like the incongruity of doing good

and trying to attract notice. I think Christ's ear catches the screech

of the brazen abomination in a good many of the ways of raising and

giving money, which find favour in the Church to-day. This is an

advertising age, and flowers that used to blush unseen are forced now

under glass for exhibition. No one needs to blow his own trumpet

nowadays. We have improved on the ruder methods of the Pharisees, and

newspapers and collectors will blow lustily and loud for us, and defend

the noise on the ground that a good example stimulates others. Perhaps

so, though it may be a question what it stimulates to, and whether B's

gift, drawn from him in imitation or emulation of A's, is any liker

Christ's idea of gifts than was A's, given that B might hear of it. To

a very large extent, the money getting and giving arrangements of the

modern Church are neither more nor less than the attempt to draw

Christ's chariot with the devil's traces. Christ condemned ostentation.

His followers too often try to make use of it. They have their reward.'

Observe that have means have received in full, and note the emphasis of

that their. It is all the reward that they will ever get, and all that

they are capable of. The pure and lasting crown, which is a fuller

possession of God Himself, has no charms for them, and could not be

given. And what a poor thing it is which they seek--the praise of men,

a breath, as unsubstantial and short-lived as the blast of the trumpet

which they blew before their selfish benevolence. Their charity was no

charity, for what they did was not to give, but to buy. Their gift was

a speculation. They invested in charity, and looked for a profit of

praise. How can they get God's reward? True benevolence will even hide

the giving right hand from the idle left, and, as far as may be, will

dismiss the deed from the doer's consciousness. Such alms, given wholly

out of pity and desire to be like the all-giving Father, can be

rewarded, and will be, with that richer acquaintance with Him and more

complete victory over self, which is the heaven of heaven and the

foretaste of it now.

In its coarsest forms, this ostentation is out and out hypocrisy, which

consciously assumes a virtue which it has not. But far more common and

dangerous is the subtle, unconscious mingling of it with real

charity--the eye wandering from the poor, whom the hand is helping, to

the bystanders--and it is this mingling which we have therefore to take

most heed to avoid. One drop of this sour stuff will curdle whole

gallons of the milk of human kindness. The hypocrisy which hoodwinks

ourselves is more common and perilous than that which blinds others.

II. We need not dwell at length on the second application of the

general warning--to prayer; as the words are almost, and the thoughts

entirely, identical with those of the former verses. If there be any

action of the spirit which requires the complete exclusion of thoughts

of men, it is prayer, which is the communion of the soul alone with

God. It is as impossible to pray, and at the same time to think of men,

as to look up and down at once. If we think of prayer, as formalists in

all times have done, as so many words, then it will not seem

incongruous to choose the places where men are thickest for saying our

prayers,' and we shall do it with all the more spirit if we have

spectators. That accounts for a great deal of the devotion' in

Mohammedan and Roman Catholic countries which travellers with no love

for Protestant Christianity are so fond of praising. But if we think of

prayer as Christ did, as being the yearning of the soul to God, we

shall feel that the inmost chamber and the closed door are its fitting

accompaniments. Of course, our Lord is not forbidding united prayer;

for each of the assembled worshippers may be holding communion with

God, which is none the less solitary though shared by others, and none

the less united though in it each is alone with God.

III. Our Lord passes for a time from the more immediate subject of

ostentation to add other teaching about prayer, which still farther

unfolds its true conception. Another corruption arising from the error

of thinking that prayer is an outward act, is vain repetition,'

characteristic of all heathen religion, and resting upon a profound

disbelief in the loving willingness of God to help. Of course, earnest,

reiterated prayer is not vain repetition. Jesus is not here condemning

His own agony in Gethsemane when He thrice said the same words.' The

persistence in prayer, which is the child of faith, is no relation to

the parrot-like repetition which is the child of disbelief, nor does

the condemnation of the one touch the other. The frenzied priests who

yelled, O Baal, hear us!' all the long day; the Buddhists who repeat

the sacred invocation till they are stupefied; the poor devotee who

thinks merit is proportioned to the number of Paternosters and Aves,

are all instances of this gross mechanical conception of prayer. Are

there no similar superstitions nearer home? Are there no ministers or

congregations that we ever heard of, who have a regulation length for

their prayers, and would scarcely think they had prayed at all if their

devotions were as short as most of the prayers in the Bible? Are we in

no danger of believing what Christ here tells us is pure

heathenism--that many words may move God?

The only real remedy against such degradation of the very idea of

prayer lies in the deeper conceptions of God and of it which Christ

here gives. He knows our needs before we ask. Then what is prayer for?

Not to inform Him, nor to move Him, unwilling, to have mercy, as if,

like some proud prince, He required a certain amount of recognition of

His greatness as the price of His favours, but to fit our own hearts by

conscious need and true desire and dependence, to receive the gifts

which He is ever willing to give, but we are not always fit to receive.

As St. Augustine has it, the empty vessel is by prayer carried to the

full fountain.

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SOLITARY PRAYER

Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy

Father which is in secret, . . .'--MATT. vi. 6.

An old heathen who had come to a certain extent under the influence of

Christ, called prayer the flight of the solitary to the Solitary.'

There is a deep truth in that, though not all the truth.

Prayer is not only the most intensely individual act that a man can

perform, but it is also the highest social act. Christ came not to

carry solitary souls by a solitary pathway to heaven, but to set the

solitary in families and to rear up a church. Of that church the

highest function is united worship.

No one is likely to fall into the mistake of supposing that this

passage before us condemns praying in the synagogues, or even, if need

were, at the street corners. It does not, of course, interdict social

public prayer, though it enjoins solitary secret communion with the

solitary, secret God.

I. What is the practice here enjoined?

Since that they may be seen of men' constitutes the evil, we may fairly

say that Christ is not here prescribing the place where, but the spirit

in which, we ought to pray; that what He condemns is not the fact of

praying where we can be seen, but of picking out the place in order

that we may be seen; that, in a word, the contrast here is between

ostentation and sincerity. A man that has sidelong looks at the

passers-by in his devotions has not much devotion.

But then, as a material help to this, we need solitude and secrecy;

they are not indispensable, but almost so. And in that solitude what is

to be our occupation? One word answers the question--Communion. We are

to be alone that we may more fully and thrillingly feel that we are

with God. That communion will have an intellectual element in which we

try to rise to perception of the high truths as to God, or in

meditation gaze on Him, and a petitionary element in which we ask for

the communication of His grace according to our needs.

II. What is the special worth of such a habit?

1. The truths that we profess to believe are in their nature such as

can only be vividly realised by such an exercise. They are all matters

of faith, not of sense. God is a spirit, and is felt near by none but

still and waiting spirits. Our religion has to do with the Unseen, the

Solemn, the Profound, the Remote. These are not to be fully felt

hastily. They are like mountains that grow on us as we gaze, like a

fair scene that we must be alone in, rightly to feel. They must be

allowed to saturate the soul. The eye must be slowly accustomed to the

light.

2. The pressure of the world can only be resisted by such an exercise.

Our business as Christians is to keep ourselves free from it.

3. The tone and balance of our own minds can only be preserved and

restored thus. Solitude is the mother-country of the strong. I was left

alone, and I saw this great vision.' We get hot and fevered, interested

and absorbed, and we need solitude as a counterpoise.

4. What is the connection of this with other kinds of worship and with

our life's work? It has a function of its own.

These cannot be substituted for it--public worship, reading Christian

books, bring a different class of feelings altogether into play.

They are not to be excluded by it. They find their true foundation in

it. A tree's branches stretch to the same circumference as its roots.

5. What is the special need of this precept for this age?

It is neglected in our modern life. The evils of our modern

Christianity, the low tone of religion, the small grasp of Christian

truth, the irreligious cast of religious work.

The thought of being alone with God will be a joy--or a terror.

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

After this manner therefore pray ye.'--MATT. vi. 9.

After this manner' may or may not imply that Christ meant this prayer

to be a form, but He certainly meant it for a model. And they who drink

in its spirit, and pray, seeking God's glory before their own

satisfaction, and, while trustfully asking from His hand their daily

bread, rise quickly to implore the supply of their spiritual hunger, do

pray after this manner,' whether they use these words or no.

All begins with the recognition of the Fatherhood of God. The clear and

fixed contemplation of God is the beginning of all true prayer, and

that contemplation does not fasten on His remote and partially

intelligible attributes, nor strive to climb to behold Him as in

Himself, but grasps Him as related to us. The Fatherhood of God implies

His communication of life, His tenderness, and our kindred. This is the

prayer of the children of the kingdom, and can only be truly offered by

those who, by faith in the Son, have received the adoption of sons. It

gathers all such into a family, so delivering their prayer from selfish

absorption in their own joys or needs. As our Father in Heaven,' He is

lifted clear above earth's limitations, changes, and imperfections. So

childlike familiarity is sublimed into reverence, our hearts are drawn

upward, and freed from the oppressive and narrowing attachment to earth

and sense.

The perfect sevenfold petitions of the prayer fall into two halves,

corresponding roughly to the first and second tables of the decalogue.

The first half consists of three petitions, which refer to God and His

kingdom. They are three, in accordance with the symbolism of numbers

which, in the Old Testament, always regards three as the sacred number

of completeness and of divinity. The second half consists of four

petitions, which refer to ourselves. They are four--the number which

symbolises the creature. The lessons taught by the order in which these

two halves occur do not need to be dwelt upon. God first and man

second, His glory before our wants--that is the true order. For how few

of us is it the spontaneous order! Do we first rise to God, and only

secondly descend to ourselves?

Note, too, the sequence in each of these halves. In the first we may

say that we begin from above and come down, or from within and come

outwards. In the second, the process is the opposite. We begin on the

lowest level with our external needs, and go upwards and inwards to

removal of sin, exemption from temptation, and complete deliverance

from evil. The first half gives us the beginning, middle, and end of

God's purposes for the world. The recognition of His name is the basis

of His kingdom, and His kingdom is the sphere in which alone His will

is done. The second half, in like manner, gives us the beginning,

middle, and end of His dealings with the individual, the common mercies

of daily bread, forgiveness, guidance, protection in conflict, and

final deliverance.

The name' of God is His revealed character. He hallows it when He so

acts as to make His holiness manifest. We hallow it when we regard it

as the holy thing which it is. That petition is first, because the

knowledge of God as He is self-revealed is the deepest want of men, and

the spread of that knowledge and reverence is the way by which His

kingdom comes.

God's kingdom is His rule over men's hearts. Christ began His ministry

by proclaiming its near approach, and in effect brought it to earth.

But it spreads slowly in the individual heart, and in the world.

Therefore, this second petition is ever in place, until the

consummation. God's rule is established through the hallowing of His

name; for it is a rule which works on men through their understandings,

and seeks no ignorant submission.

The sum of this first half is, Thy will be done, as in Heaven, so on

earth.' Obedience to that will is the end of God's self-revelation. It

makes all the difference whether we begin with the thought of the name

or of the will. In the latter case, religion will be slavish and

submission sullen. There is no more horrible and paralysing conception

of God than that of mere sovereign will. But if we think of Him as

desiring that we should know His name, and as gathering all its

syllables into the one perfect Word of God'; then we are sure that His

will must be intelligible and good. Obedience becomes delight, and the

surrender of our wills to His the glad expression of love. He who

begins with Thy will be done' is a slave, and never really does the

will at all; he who begins with Our Father, hallowed be Thy name,' is a

son, and his will, gladly yielding, is free in surrender, strong in

self-abnegation, and restful in putting the reins into God's hands.

The two halves make a whole. The second, which deals with our needs,

starts with the cry for bread, and climbs up slowly through the ills of

life, from bodily hunger to trespasses and human unkindness and

personal weakness, and a world of temptation, and the double evil of

sin and of sorrow, and so regains at last the starting-point of the

first half, Heaven and God. The probable meaning of the difficult word

rendered daily' seems to be sufficient for our need.' The lessons of

the petition are that God's children have a claim for the supply of

their wants, since He is bound, as a faithful Creator, not to send

mouths without sending meat to fill them, but that our desires should

be limited to our actual necessities, and our cravings, as well as our

efforts for the bread that perishes, made into prayers. Such a prayer

rightly used would put an end to much wicked luxury among Christians,

and to many questionable ways of getting wealth. Bless my cheating, my

sharp practice, my half lies!' If we dare not pray this prayer over

what we do in earning our living,' we had better ask ourselves whether

we are not rather earning our death.

Sin is debt Incurred to God. So Christ taught in the previous chapter

by His parable of agreeing with the adversary; and in the other

parables of the two debtors (Luke vii. 41) and of the unmerciful

servant (Matt. xviii. 23). As universal as the need for bread is the

need for pardon. It is the first want of the spiritual nature, but it

is a constantly recurring want, as this petition teaches us.

Forgiveness is the cancelling of a debt; but we must not forget that it

is a Father's forgiveness, and therefore does not merely, or even

chiefly, imply the removal of penalty, but much rather the unimpeded

flow of the Father's love, and consequently the removal of the

miserable consciousness of separation from Him. The appended comparison

as we have forgiven' does not mean that our forgiveness is the reason

for God's forgiveness of us. The ground of our pardon is Christ's work,

the condition of it our faith; but, as we saw in considering the

Beatitudes, the condition on which the children of the kingdom can

retain the blessing of the divine pardon is their imitation of it.

The next petition is the expression of conscious weakness. The forgiven

man, though in his deepest soul hating sin, is still surrounded with

sparks which may fire the combustibles in his heart. If we ask not to

be led into temptation, because we want a smooth and easy road, we are

wrong. If we do so from self-distrust and fear lest we fall, then it is

allowable. But perhaps we may draw a distinction between being tempted

and being led into temptation. The former may mean the presentation of

an inducement to do evil which we cannot hope to escape, and which it

is not well that we should escape. The latter may mean the further step

of embracing or being entangled in it by consenting to it. We do not

need to dread the entrance into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, for

if the Lord be with us we shall pass through it. Our prayer may mean,

lead us, not into, but through, the trial. It is the plaint of

conscious weakness, the recognition of God as ordering our path, the

cry of a heart which desires holiness most of all, and which trusts in

God's upholding hand in the hour of trial.

Deliver us from evil' is a petition which, in its width, fits the close

of the prayer better than does the translation of the Revised Version.

There seems an echo of the words in Paul's noble confidence while the

headsman's axe was so near, The Lord will deliver me from every evil

work.' Entire exemption from evil of every sort, whether sin or sorrow,

is the true end of our prayers, as it is the crown of God's purpose.

Nothing less can satisfy our yearnings; nothing less can fulfil the

divine desire for us. Nothing less should be the goal of our faith and

hope. To the height of meek assurance, and the reaching out of our

souls in desire which is the pledge of its own fulfilment, Christ would

have us attain on the wings of prayer. They can have no narrower bonds

to the horizon of their hopes, nor any lesser blessing for the

satisfaction of their longings, whose prayer begins with Our Father

which art in heaven'; for where the Father is, the child must wish to

be, and some day will be, to go out no more.

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OUR FATHER'

Our Father which art in heaven.'--MATT. vi. 9.

The words of Christ, like the works of God, are inexhaustible. Their

depth is concealed beneath an apparent simplicity which the child and

the savage can understand. But as we gaze upon them and try to fathom

all their meaning, they open as the skies above us do when we look

steadily into their blue chambers, or as the sea at our feet does when

we bend over to pierce its clear obscure. The poorest and weakest

learns from them the lesson of divine love and a mighty helper; the

reverent, loving contemplation of the profoundest souls, and the

experience of all the ages discern ever new depths in them and feel

that much remains unlearned. They did all eat and were filled, men,

women, and children--and they took up of fragments that were left five

baskets full.'

This is especially true about the Lord's Prayer. We teach it to our

children, and its divine simplicity becomes their lisping tongues and

little folded hands. But the more we ponder it, and try to make it the

model of our prayers, the more wonderful does its fulness of meaning

appear, the more hard does it become to pray after this manner.' There

is everything in it: the loftiest revelation of God in His relations to

us and in His purposes with the world; the setting forth of all our

relations to Him, to His purposes, and to one another; the grandest

vision of the future for mankind; the care for the smallest wants of

each day.

As a theology, it smites into fragments all false, unworthy human

thoughts of God. As an exposition of religion, the man who has drunk in

its spirit has ceased from self-will and sin. As a foundation of social

morals it lays deep the only basis for true human brotherhood, and he

who lives in its atmosphere will live in charity and helpfulness with

all mankind. As a guide for personal life, it gives us authoritatively

the order and relative worth of all human desires, and with these the

order and subordination of our pursuits and life's aims. As a prayer it

is all comprehensive and intended to be so, holding within the perfect

seven of its petitions, all for which we should come to God, and

resting them all on His divine name, and closing them all with a chorus

of thanksgiving. As a prophecy it opens the loftiest vision, beyond

which none is possible, of the final transformation of this world into

the kingdom in which God's will shall be perfectly done, and of the

final deliverance from, all evil of the struggling, sinning, sorrowing

souls of His children.

I desire to try in a series of sermons to set forth what little I can

see of the depth and comprehensiveness of this model of all prayer, and

of its ever fresh applicability to the wants and difficulties of our

days as of all days. But before dealing with that great invocation of

the divine name on which all rests, a word or two must be said touching

the introductory clause.

After this manner pray ye.' The question which is usually made

prominent in thinking of these words is really a very subordinate one.

Did Christ intend to establish a form, or only to give an example?

Churchmen say, a form; Dissenters generally say, an example. But it

would be better for both Churchmen and Dissenters to try to realise for

themselves what this manner' is.

Unquestionably, whether our Lord is giving us a form or not, His chief

object was not to prescribe words. To pray is not to repeat petitions,

and His commandment has for its chief meaning a much deeper one than

that He was giving us either a form which we are to incorporate

verbally with our prayers, or an outline according to which our spoken

supplications are to be shaped. Whether in addition to this we are to

regard the very words as to be used by us, will be determined by each

man and church according as he regards the use of set forms in prayer

as being the true and noblest manner of prayer. Such use is certainly

not inconsistent with the utmost spirituality, but the habitual use of

forms, especially their exclusive use, seems to many of us to be

dangerous, regard being had to the tendency of human nature to rest in

them. And it is not without significance that this very prayer of our

Lord's, which was given as the corrective of vain repetitions and idle,

heathenish chattering of forms of prayer, has itself come to be the

saddest instance in all Christendom of these very faults, while the

beads slip through the fingers of the mechanical repeater of muttered

Paternosters. Instead of wrangling about this subordinate question, let

us try to pray after this manner. We shall find it hard, but blessed.

Be sure that every prayer not after this manner is after a wrong

manner.

This prayer helps to reverse our foolish desire to make earth foremost.

The true end of prayer is to get our wills harmonised with His, not to

bend His to ours. Surely if self-denial and submission be the very

heart of Christianity, that should be most expressed in prayer which is

the very sanctuary of religion. The prayers that are to be offered

after this manner will not be passionate, petulant pleadings or

prescriptions to God to do this or that, but in them God and His glory

will be first, I second, and through Him and as He wills.

Ah, brethren! this is an awful requirement of Christ's. Who dare take

such holy words into his lips? It is a hard matter to pray as Christ

taught us. The prayer seems to move in a height of unapproachable

elevation, and the air there is too thin and pure for our gross lungs.

For be it remembered, we are not praying after this manner unless our

lives in some sort repeat and confirm our prayers. Do our hearts seek

first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? Are our energies given

to this, as their noblest aim, to hallow God's name; or does the very

blood in our hearts throb hot, passionate desires for worldly things,

and God's name and kingdom and will seem dreamy and far-off objects

which kindle no desire in our souls and rule no effort of our lives,

like suns far away which shed little light upon the earth and sway not

its rolling tides, that are obedient to the nearer but borrowed light

of the changeful moon? If so, no matter whether we use this form or

not, we are not praying after this manner.

Look, now, at this first clause, which is the basis of all.

I. The divine Name which is the ground and object of all our prayers.

It is not merely a formula of address, like the superscription on a

letter, but the reality of His character as revealed before us. There

is inseparable from all prayer the effort to conceive worthily of Him

to whom we speak; to raise our souls to that height.

How much of our prayer, even while truest, fails here! We may be

distinctly conscious of our wants; our wishes may be right, and our

confidence may be firm that God will give us what we ask; yet how often

there is no vivid thought of Him filling the mind! How often our

prayers are offered to a mere name! How seldom through the cloud-wrack

beneath His feet do we see His face!

This absorbed contemplation is the necessary preliminary of all real

prayer, and there is a truth in the thought that such losing of self in

gazing on God is the highest form of prayer. We should feel as some

peasant come to court who stands on the threshold of the

presence-chamber, and forgetting his grievances and his embassy, gazes

entranced on the splendour and benignity of his sovereign.

Look, then, at this Name: what it expresses. It is not new. The Jews

dimly had it, and even Greek and other paganisms knew of a father of

Gods and men.' The name of Father carries with it primarily the idea of

the Source of life (we also are His offspring'), and also, secondarily,

that of loving care.

How wonderful, how beautiful, that that earthly relation should find

its deepest reality in God! God be thanked that, like as a father

pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.'

But the true Christian idea of God's fatherhood is more than all this.

This is a prayer for disciples, for those who alone can really pray.

All men are God's children because all draw their life from Him, were

made in His image, and are objects of His love. But there is a

fatherhood and a sonship which are not universal, and for which another

birth is necessary. Its conditions are plainly laid down by the

Evangelist: To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become

sons of God,' and by the Apostle, Ye are the children of God through

faith in Christ Jesus.'

We are made sons through Jesus. We are made sons by faith.

And now, how should this Fatherhood affect our prayers? We shall come

with hope and familiar confidence, for your heavenly Father knoweth

what things ye have need of.' Does a father love to have his children

about him? Does a child shrink from telling its wishes to a father?

Also we must bend our wills to His--to a Father.

Contrast that conception with the ideas of God which we are all tempted

to cherish, the slavish one which dwells upon the gulf between God and

man, with the cold deity of natural religion,' with the Epicurean

notion of Him which divorces Him from all living interest in His

creation.

Contrast it with the ghastly image which our consciences and our fears

frame, the heathen notion of an avenger and cruel. We do not need to

seek to avert His anger. This mighty word shatters all cowering terror

and abject prostration.

And it is a vow as well as an Invocation, binding us to supreme love to

Him, to obedience to Him, to moral conformity with Him. Be ye perfect

as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. The noblest prayer is

Abba, Father.'

II. The loftiness and perfectness of that divine Name.

In heaven.' Not fact, but symbol, to express His exaltation above the

earth, and so suggesting all ideas of remoteness from creatures, from

earth's limitations and conditions, changes and imperfection, and

showing the gulf between man and God.

1. The thought that He is in heaven deepens our reverence, love casting

out fear, but making us more lowly. It leads to familiar yet

awe-stricken approach.

2. It exalts the preciousness of the Fatherhood, as being free from all

weakness and all change. It reveals a better Father than we can know

here; one not narrow of view, infirm of purpose, weak in tenderness,

bounded in power. As the heavens stretch calm and serene above us, far

from all our trouble and noise, unvexed, pitying, and dropping rain and

dew on earth, so is He.

3. It draws our hearts and hopes to our Father's home.

4. It delivers us from worship of the visible and from worship by means

of the visible. So the Name guards against placing stress on externals

and secondary forms, places, times of worship.

III. The Community of Brotherhood of the Worshippers.

Our Father.

1. All true enjoyment of blessings depends on our being willing to

share them. To keep for ourselves is to lose. We enter by faith into a

great community.

2. The effect of this on our prayers: to destroy their selfishness. We

bow to Him of whom the whole family is named.

3. Effect on our lives.

Dare we rise from our knees to plan and plot for ourselves? How we are

tempted to forget our brotherhood in personal animosities, vanity, and

self-interest, competing with others! Our differences of ideas arising

from differences of race, training, occupation, country, fling us

apart. Our differences of wealth and position alienate us. Our

differences of conception of Christianity often separate and embitter

us. But do these not crumble when we say Our Father'?

Think of the generations who have gone to the grave saying this prayer.

What a prophecy of the heaven, where all shall be gathered and each

feel his sense of Fatherhood increased by his brethren!

And this is the only possible basis for true fraternity among men.

Opinion? Men are not thinking machines.

Interest? Men are not ruled by calculations, and such union is the

destruction of true unity.

Common aims?--shallow.

Nation or race?--artificial and not capable of universality.

There is no brotherhood but that which rests on God's Fatherhood,

Christ's Sonship. For the world Christ has come, therefore we are no

more strangers and foreigners.'

Therefore, listening to His voice, and trusting in Him who has made us

heirs together with Him, let us lift up our voices, Our Father,' and

therein proclaim that God who loves every soul of man, who knows each

man's wants, who bends over him in pitying tenderness, who can neither

die nor change, and who will gather into His eternal home all His

prodigal children and keep them blessed by His side for evermore.

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HALLOWED BE THY NAME'

Hallowed be Thy name.'--MATT. vi. 9.

Name is character so far as revealed.

I. What is meaning of Petition?

Hallowed means to make holy; or to show as holy; or to regard as holy.

The second of these is God's hallowing of His Name. The third is men's.

The prayer asks that God would so act as to show the holiness of His

character, and that men, one and all, may see the holiness of His

character.

i.e. Hallowed by divine self-revelation.

Hallowed by human recognition.

Hallowed by human adoration and appropriate sentiments.

Hallowed by human action.

II. On what it rests:

On the Fatherhood of God.

On the confidence that God wills that His Name should be known. In

other words, the petition rests on the assurance of God's fatherly

love, which cannot but will that His children should know their Father

as He is.

On the fact that men need the knowledge of the Name.

On the conviction that men cannot attain it for themselves.

That Christ is the great means of His hallowing His Name.

His finished work does not render this prayer unnecessary.

I have declared Thy name, and will declare it.'

That this is to be issue of all. A grand prophecy.

III. Why put first.

Singular, that so remote a petition should stand at beginning. We

should begin not with ourselves, but with God; not with temporal wants,

not even with our own spiritual ones.

We begin not with men, but with God.

It is God's glory even more than men's knowledge of Him that the

petition contemplates. And though the two things coincide, which of

them is foremost in our minds makes an infinite difference.

Then in regard to God, we first ask not that His law may be kept, but

that His nature may be known.

The place of this petition in the prayer is explained by considerations

which suggest very important thoughts for ourselves and all men.

That true knowledge of God is the deepest and fundamental necessity for

all men.

That the knowledge will affect their whole scheme of thought and life.

That the most important of all questions is, How does a man think of

God?

That the Inward comes before the Outward.

That knowledge is the guide of emotions and of practical life, as set

forth here in the order of petitions.

This sequence of petitions corrects many errors into which we are apt

to fall.

(a) That religion is chiefly to give us forgiveness.

(b) That accurate knowledge of God and His will matters comparatively

little if we have devout emotions and experiences.

(c) That plans for the reformation of men should begin with the

exterior, leaving theological subtleties to themselves.

But this is not a theological subtlety.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,' is a maxim for social reformation as

well as for individual life.

IV. To what practical life this prayer binds us.

Following in our estimates, aims, and practice the sequence which it

prescribes. Desiring for world most of all that it may hallow the Name.

Seeking for ourselves to hallow it.

Seeking for ourselves that we may be the means of others doing so.

The ever-present remembrance, that the name of God is blasphemed or

hallowed, that God is glorified or disgraced, by us.

That to be like His name is true way to commend it. Do you know this

name?

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THY KINGDOM COME'

Thy kingdom come.'--MATT. vi. 10.

The Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad'; The Lord reigneth, let the

people tremble,' was the burden of Jewish psalmist and prophet from the

first to the last. They have no doubt of His present dominion. Neither

man's forgetfulness and man's rebellion, nor all the dark crosses and

woes of the world, can disturb their conviction that He is then and for

ever the sole Lord.

The kingdom is come, then. Yet John the Baptist broke the slumbers of

that degenerate people with the trumpet-call, Repent, for the kingdom

is at hand.' It is not come, then--but coming. And the Master said, If

I by the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is

come nigh unto you.' It is come, then, in Him. This prayer throws it

forward again into the future, and far down on the stream of prophecy;

we hear borne up to us through the darkness the shouts that shall hail

a future day when here on earth the kingdoms of this world shall become

the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. It is a kingdom, then, that

has ever been, and yet has stages of progress, a kingdom that was

established in Jesus; a kingdom that has a past, a present, and a

future on earth. It is after this world that the words are said, Come,

ye blessed, enter into the kingdom.' It is a kingdom, then, manifested

on earth, and yet a kingdom into which death, who keeps the keys of all

secrets, admits us.

Once more--the kingdom of God is within you. The kingdom of God is

righteousness, and peace, and joy.' But there is beyond earth to be a

manifestation of the kingdom in a more perfect form. It is the kingdom

of heaven,' not only because the King is Our Father which art in

heaven,' but because we cannot completely come into it, or it into us,

till we pass out of earth by death, and enter through that gate into

the city. He has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.

It is a dominion, then, over heart and soul, having its realm within,

standing not so much in outward institutions as in inner experiences;

and yet a kingdom which, though like leaven hid, shall like leaven be

seen in its effects; though like a seed buried deep, shall like a seed

blossom into a mighty tree; though it cometh not with observation, yet

is like to the lightning that flashes with a kind of omnipresence in

its rapid course from end to end, everywhere at once; which though it

be within, yet clearly is meant to rule over all outward acts, and one

day to have all kings bowing down before it.

These are the varieties with which the one thought of the kingdom of

God, or of heaven, is presented in Scripture. It is eternal yet

revealed in time, ever here but ever coming, ever coming but never come

on earth, but entered when we go yonder, ruling us man by man, inward,

spiritual, unseen, and yet moulding nations and institutions, outward

and visible, compelling sight and filling all the earth.

But these varieties are not contradictions, still less are they the

effects of a vague and imperfect notion which means anything or

everything according to the fancy of the writer. The conception is

clear and well defined. The kingdom of God is an organised community

which is subject to the will of the personal God. The elements of

subordination and society are both there. On the one hand there is the

Ruler, on the other there is the mass of subjects. The whole of the

varieties in the use of the term can be all reconciled in the one

simple central notion, but we cannot afford to lose sight of any of

them if we would understand what is meant by this prayer.

Let us take these thoughts which I have suggested, as expressing the

Scriptural meaning of this phrase, and by their help try to ascertain

what this prayer suggests.

I. God reigns, yet we pray for the coming of His kingdom.

That is to acknowledge that the world has departed from Him. It is at

once to separate ourselves from those who see in it no signs of

departure and rebellion. It is to confess that, Lord as He is whether

men believe it or no, whether men will it or no, yet that the relation

of common subordination as to a supreme Lord which we hold with all

creatures is not all that we are fit for, not all that we should be.

That dominion which the psalmist saw making the sea and the fulness

thereof rejoice, which is at once the control and the upholding, the

sustaining and the commanding, of all orders of being, is not the whole

of the dominion which can be exercised over man. The rule, which we

share with the trees of the field and the tribes of life, is not all;

and the unwilling control which the thought of an overruling Providence

demands that we shall believe that God exercises over all the workings

of men--that is not enough. And the terrible bending of men into

unconscious instruments, by which He that sitteth in the heavens laughs

at princes' and rulers' counsel, speaking to the tyrant as the rod of

His anger, using men as the axe with which He hews, and the staff in

His hand, and then casting away the tool into the fire--that is not the

kingdom that men are made to be. Something more, even the loving,

willing submission of heart and life to Him is possible, is needed,

unless, indeed, it is true that a man hath no pre-eminence over a

beast. Enough for them that He feedeth them when they cry; enough for

them that led they know not how, and fed by they know not whom, they

live they know not why, do they know not what, and die they know not

when. But be ye not as the horse or the mule which have no

understanding'; it is our prerogative to be led by His eye speaking to

the heart, not by His bridle appealing to the sense; to do Him loyal

service, to understand His purposes, to sympathise with them, and

sympathising to execute. This our prayer gives us the clear

distinction, then, between mere blind obedience and the true goal of

man. The kingdom is other and better than the creature-wide dominion.

And then, this prayer reposes on the confession that that higher,

better form of obedience is not yet attained. In a word, it can only be

prayed aright by a man who feels that the world has gone away from God

and His commandments. We separate ourselves by it from all who think

that this present state is the natural condition of men, the order into

which they were born, the kind of world which God intended; and we

assert, in sight of all the evils and sore sorrows that fill the world,

that this is not God's intention. People tell us that the doctrine of a

fall, an earth which has departed from God, a race which has rebelled,

is a gloomy and dark one, covering the face of life with sackcloth. But

it seems to me that instead of being so, it is the only conviction that

can make a man bear to see the world as it is. Brethren, which of these

two is the gloomy--the creed that says, Look at all these men dying--in

dumb ignorance, living in brutal sin; look at blood, rapine, lies,

battlefields, broken hearts, hopes that never set to fruit but died in

the bud, the stream of sad groans, and sadder curses, and wild mirth,

saddest of all. Look at it all, coming to pass on this fair earth amid

the pomp of sunsets and the calm beauty of autumn, and beneath the cold

stars, in a world where the noblest creature is the saddest, and accept

for explanation that it is the necessary road for the perfecting of the

creature; that it is all for the best, that it is exactly what God

meant the world to be;--or the creed which sees the same things and

says: This is not what God intended: an enemy hath done this'? Sin hath

entered into the world, and death by sin.

The Christian doctrine does not make the facts, but only the Christian

doctrine can explain them. It seems to me that if I believed that life

as I see it in the world, and as I feel it in myself, is life as God

meant it to be, I should either go mad or be a wise man, not a fool, if

I were to look up at the unpitying stars that could sing for joy over

such a creation, and say, There is no God. It is a refuge from such

possible horrors, not an aggravation of them, which this prayer teaches

us when it teaches us to pray for a kingdom yet to come, from which men

have departed, and in departing have worked for themselves all this woe

and ruin.

II. The kingdom for the coming of which we pray is established already.

Christ has established it. His name is King of kings and Lord of lords.

He is Prince of all the kings of the earth. He is crowned with glory

and honour. By Him, that is to say, it becomes possible for men to

serve God with the energies of their will, and by Him it becomes

possible for men to take the pardon which God gives in Him. He founds

the kingdom, and He exercises the dominion. On an eternal relation and

on an historical fact that dominion of His is grounded,--on an eternal

relation inasmuch as He, the everlasting Word of God, has from the

beginning been the Lord and King of the world; on an historical fact

inasmuch as that eternal Word has been manifested on earth, and tasted

death for every man. Christ founds the kingdom, for He by His

Incarnation and Sacrifice sets forth the weightiest motives for

service; He opens the path to return; He brings God's forgiveness to

men, and so shall rule over them for ever--a King and Priest upon His

throne: the Prince of all the kings of the earth, both because He has

from everlasting been the anointed King, and because in time He has

been, and will for ever be, the faithful and true witness, and the

first begotten from the dead. The foundation is thus laid, the dominion

established, the kingdom is come; but we are to pray for its perfecting

as the one hope of the world.

Then let us remember that we are thus guarded from the error that is

always rife, of looking for some new thing as the one deliverance for

earth. It is sad to mark how undying that tendency is. Age after age,

men have had the heartache of seeing hopes blasted, and fair schemes

for the regeneration of the world knocked to pieces about the ears of

their projectors, and yet they hope on. Every period, as every man, has

its times of credulity, its firm conviction that it has found the one

thing needful, and the shout of Eureka goes ever up. Alas, alas! time

after time the old experience is repeated, and the gratulations die

down into gloomy silence. Yet men hope on. What a strange testimony at

once of the futility of all the past attempts, and of the

indestructible conviction that men have of the certainty that the world

will be better and brighter some day, that undying expectation is! It

is sorrowful and yet ennobling to think of the persistency of the

expectation, and the disappointment of it.

God forbid that I should say a word to seem to disparage it! Not so. I

say the expectations are of God, and if men give them false shapes, and

scarcely understand them when they utter them, that does not in any

degree make the expectation less noble or less true. But what I wish to

urge is this, that the Christian attitude towards all such hopes should

not be unsympathising. Rather we are bound to say yes, it is so, and we

know how.' We are bound to proclaim that it is not any new thing that

we expect, but only the working out of the old. God be thanked that it

is not! The evils are not new, they have been from the beginning; and

God has surely not been so cruel to the world as to leave it till now

in the dark. Our hopes are not set on any new, untried remedy. This

bridge across the Infinite for us is not a frail plank on which no one

has yet walked, and which may crack and break when the timid foot of

the first passenger is on the centre, but it is a tried structure upon

which ages have walked.

Then if I have any hearers who are fancying that the gospel is worn

out, any who are glowing with the anticipation of great new things, who

scarcely know how, but believe that somehow, the ills that have in all

ages cursed humanity are to be exorcised by some new methods of social

organisation or the like--I pray them to ponder this prayer and to

receive its lesson. Do not say, you are but adding one more to the

Babel of opinions which confound us. Not so. We are not arguing for an

opinion, we are proclaiming a fact. We are not ventilating a nostrum,

we are preaching a divine revelation, a divine revealer. We are not

setting forth our notion of the evil, and our idea of what may be a

remedy. We are telling men God's word about both. We are preaching an

old, old truth: not man's opinion, but God's act; not man's device, but

Christ's power. We proclaim that the kingdom of God is nigh you, and

while a Babel, as you say, of private opinions, of passionate

complaints, of despairing cries afflicts the silence, one serene voice

rises, Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden,' and after

that sole voice rings out the twofold choral anthem--of praise,

Rejoice, O earth, for thy King is come'; and of prayer, Thy kingdom

come.'

III. We pray for the coming of a kingdom which is inward and spiritual.

I do not mean to weary you with any proofs that this is so. The whole

language of Christ, the whole tenor of Scripture, the common sense of

the case, the testimony of our own souls as to what we want most,

confirm this. But it is enough to note the admitted fact; to enforce

the thought that thus the kingdom assumes a purely individual

character, and that thus its power over individuals is the pledge of

its power over masses, and is its way of exercising universal sway. We

have all of us one human heart, and therefore what the kingdom can do

and has done for me or for any oilier man, it can do for all.

Let me remind you of two or three consequences that flow from this

thought.

1. Lessons for politicians, for all men, as to the true way to cure the

evils of the world: Not by external arrangements; not by better laws;

not by education; not by progress in arts; not by trade, etc.

You must go deeper than these pills to cure an earthquake'--it is the

soul, the individual will that is diseased; and the one cure for the

world's evil is that it should be right with God; and that loyal,

hearty obedience by Christ should be in it.

2. Lessons for Christian men as to hasty externalising of the kingdom:

Theocracies, State Churches, and the like.

3. We pray for a kingdom that will be external. If spirit, then body;

if individuals, then communities.

It is to be all-comprehensive governing:--institutions, arts, sciences.

All spheres of human life are capable of sanctification and will

receive it. A prophet had a vision of a day when the very bells of the

horses should bear the same inscription of holiness to the Lord' as was

engraved on the High Priest's mitre, and when every pot and pan in the

kitchens of Jerusalem should be sacred as the vessels of the Temple.

The fault of Christians in losing sight of this--how all the aspects

are reconciled--and how this must be the completion--the point to which

all tends; how clearly maimed the gospel would be if such were not the

goal.

So much, then, the prayer assumes:--the certainty that the world is

wrong; the certainty that the kingdom is the only thing to set it

right; the certainty that it can set it all right; the certainty that

it will.

4. We pray for a kingdom to come which cannot be fully realised on this

side the grave. Large as are the capabilities of this scene, they are

not large enough for the full display of all the blessedness that lies

in that kingdom. And so it is not all a mistake when men say, Ah, this

world can never do for us'; it is not all an unhealthy dream that says,

I am weary of this; let me die.'

Think of the chorus of voices that present this prayer--the unconscious

cries that have gone up; the voices of sorrow and want. The cry hath

entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth; the creature groaneth

and travaileth; all men unconsciously pray this prayer when they weep

and when they hope. Christian men pray it when they mourn their

rebellious wilfulness and when they feel the weight of all this

anarchic world, or when their work in bringing it back to its King

seems almost vain, the souls underneath the altar pray it when they

cry, How long, O Lord, how long?'

And ah, dear friends--there should come a sadder, humbler cry from us,

each feeling his own sinful heart. To me the glory of that coming, and

the life from the dead which it shall be to the world, will be as

nothing unless I know the King and trust Him. Let us each re-echo the

cry of that dying thief, which He cannot refuse to answer, Lord,

remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.'

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THY WILL BE DONE'

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.'--MATT. vi. 10.

It makes all the difference whether the thought of the name, or that of

the will, of God be the prominent one. If men begin with the will, then

their religion will be slavish, a dull, sullen resignation, or a

painful, weary round of unwelcome duties and reluctant abstainings. The

will of an unknown God will be in their thoughts a dark and tyrannous

necessity, a mysterious, inscrutable force, which rules by virtue of

being stronger, and demands only obedience. There is no more horrible

conception of God than that which makes Him merely or mainly sovereign

will.

But when we think first of God as desiring that His name should be

known, and to that end mirroring Himself in all the great and

beautiful, the ordered whole of creation, and energising through all

the complexities of human affairs, and gathering the scattered

syllables of His name into one full and articulate utterance in the

Word of God, then our thoughts of His will become reverent and loving;

we are sure that the will of the self-revealing God must be

intelligible, we are sure that the will of the loving God must be good.

Then our obedience becomes different, and instead of being slavish is

filial; instead of being reluctant submission to a mightier force, is

glad conformity to the fountain of love and goodness; instead of being

sullen resignation, is trustful reliance; instead of being painful

execution of unwelcome duties, is spontaneous expression in acts which

are easy of the indwelling love. He who begins with Thy will be done'

is a slave, and never really does the will at all; he who begins with

Our Father, hallowed,' is a son, and obeys from the heart.

This, then, is one reason for the order in which the clauses of the

prayer follow each other, perhaps the chief reason.

Let us consider--

I. Obedience is here set forth as the end of all divine revelation.

II. As the issue in man of all religious thought and emotion.

III. As the sum of all Christ's and our desires for men.

IV. As the bond which unites all creation into one.

I. Obedience to the will of God is the end of all divine revelation.

God's name is made known before His will is proclaimed. That order

suggests as to God's will--

1. That it is not mere naked omnipotent authority.

2. That it is not inscrutable.

3. That its scope and direction are to be determined by His name. All

these thoughts are included in this, that it is the will of a loving,

good God, the will of a Father.

How that destroys all harsh, awful ideas such as those of a stony fate,

or a cold necessity, or an omnipotent tyrant, or an inscrutable

sovereign.

How Christianity has been affected by these ideas--extreme Calvinism,

for instance; but it is more profitable to think how the tendency to

them lies in us all.

II. Obedience is the issue of all religion.

The knowledge of the name, and the hallowing of it must go first.

Note--

1. How inward the nature of obedience is. This sequence of petitions

shifts the centre from without to within, from actions to dispositions.

2. How nothing is obedience that is not cheerful and loving. Not

constrained, not sullen, not task-work.

3. How naturally dominant over all life the principles of God's truth

are. Let them be known, and all the rest will follow. They have power

to control all acts, great and small.

4. How impossible practical righteousness is without religion. The Name

is the true basis of morality. We hear a great deal about life rather

than creed; the Gospel is both. The one foundation of theoretical and

practical morals is the will of God.

5. How maimed and spurious is religion without practical obedience.

Religion in the form of thought and of emotion is intended to influence

life.

The ultimate result of God's revelation of Himself and of God's kingdom

among men is the conformity of our life and actions with the Will of

God. That is the test of our religion. Character and conduct are all

important. Here is a lesson for us all as to what the final issue of

religious profession ought to be. Knowledge of God, true reverent

thoughts of Him, submission in spirit to His kingdom--all these have

for their final sphere the full sanctification of the nature and the

free, spontaneous obedience of the life. We are all tempted to separate

between our consciousness and emotions of a religious nature, and our

daily life. Many a man is a good Christian in his heart, with real

religious feeling, but when you get him into the field of the world he

is full of sins. There must always be a disproportion in this world

between convictions, resolutions, and actions; we imperfectly live out

our principles; the force of gravity pulls down the arrow, and however

true the bow and careful the aim and strong the hand, its course will

be a curve, not a straight line.

Our machinery does not work in vacuo, and the force of friction and

atmosphere opposes it and brings it to a standstill. This must be; but

the discrepancy may be indefinitely lessened, and this prayer is a

prophecy and kindles a hope.

III. Obedience is the sum of all Christ's desires for the world.

This is the last loftiest petition, beyond that there is nothing, for

if our wills are conformed to God's, then we are perfect and blessed.

1. The loftiest dignity of man is to obey. We have will: God has will.

Ours is evidently meant to submit, His to rule. He only is what he

ought to be whose whole soul bows to the divine command.

2. The will submitted to God is free, strong, restful. He does not

desire that it should be crushed or absorbed, but freely acting in

obedience. That will is truly free which is delivered from bondage, and

the burden of sin and evil. Submission to God strengthens the will. Sin

overbears it, as we all know. Obedience braces and nerves it.

Submission to God makes it restful. It is the conflict of self-will

which troubles us. Peace is to will as God does; so He flows through

us, and He is the living will that shall endure.'

3. The results of obedience will be perfect blessedness.

God's will is only for our good. His will for men and nations observed

would change the face of the world.

Then this prayer includes everything that ardent lovers of their kind

would desire.

How Christianity reforms from within, giving new life and letting that

work on laws and institutions. Here is a lesson for all social

reformers and for Christian men to see to it that they, for the world,

try to spread the knowledge of His name, and for themselves, seek to be

harmonised with His will.

But this petition sets forth an apparently unattainable example as our

pattern of obedience. As in heaven,' refers perhaps to the visible

universe, which has always left on thoughtful minds the impression of

beauty and order, and is the great revelation in nature of the

omnipotent will of God. There clouds float on in peacefulness obeying

Him, there stars burn and planets roll on their mighty revolutions.

These all continue this day, according to Thine ordinance.'

But that is by no means the exhaustive idea of this clause. We should

not desire, were it possible, that men should be lowered to the level

of the stars, doing a will which they know not, and swayed by a force

which they have no eyes to discern. The obedience, the only true

obedience, is that of spiritual beings who know God and can turn

themselves to contemplate the will which rules their currents, as the

sea looks up to the moon that sways its tides. So the reference is

obviously to higher orders of beings, either higher by creation as

angels, or higher because they have died, and are glorious saints

before the Throne.

This petition, then, is a revelation as well. For the doing of God's

will there must be spiritual beings, like ourselves. If our doing it

like them is the highest last desire which He who came to do that will

can form for us, and is the ultimate goal which, if reached, the

world's history would be crowned, then these spiritual beings must do

it perfectly. Their obedience must be complete. There can be no

interruption to it from sin, no effort in it because of weakness, no

resistance because of temptation, no flaw because of ignorance, no

pause because of weariness, no pain because of rebellious will. Their

obedience must be free, constant, spontaneous, happy. It must cover all

their lives. Their whole being must be a sacrifice and service to the

God whom they behold, and their life must be a life of activity. It is

not the knowledge that floods the perfect spirits in heaven that is

proposed for our example, nor their blessedness, but their service. So

the thoughts of those who regard that heavenly existence only as

idleness are corrected, and we are taught that, while we know little as

to that future life, the conformity to the will of God, which in its

present partial attainment is the secret of the purest blessedness, in

its perfection will be the heaven of heaven.

Then again, there is here the grand idea that the whole creation will

be bound into a unity by obedience to one will. We and they now form

one whole, because now we serve the one Lord. And there comes a time

when there shall be one Lord and His name one; when the omnipresent

energy of His will in the physical universe shall be but a faint shadow

of the universal dominion of His loving will in all His creatures. Then

indeed it will be true, Thou doest according to Thy will in the armies

of heaven and the inhabitants of earth.'

What glorious harmonies will sound then, when all co-operate with God

and with one another, and one purpose, and one will, and one love fills

the whole creation!

The petition has a bearing of this upon the dreams of moralists and

reformers. They were true, they shall be more than fulfilled. Earth

will be no longer separated from heaven, but united with it, and from

one extremity of creation to another will be no creature which does not

obey and rejoice.

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THE CRY FOR BREAD

Give us this day our daily bread.'--MATT. vi. 11.

What a contrast there is between the two consecutive petitions, Thy

will be done, and Give us this day! The one is so comprehensive, the

other so narrow; the one loses self in the wide prospect of an obedient

world, the other is engrossed with personal wants; the one rises to

such a lofty, ideal height, the other is dragged down to the lowest

animal wants.

And yet this apparent bathos is apparent only, and the fact that so

narrow and earthly a petition has its place in the pattern of all

prayer is full of instruction. No less instructive is the place which

it has. A single word about that place may constitute a fitting

introduction to our remarks now. We have already seen how the former

petitions constitute together a great whole. That first part of the

prayer expresses the desires which should ever be foremost in a good

man's soul--those which have to do with God, and point to the

advancement of His glory. It begins, as I said, with the inward, and

advances to the outward, as must ever be the law of progress in the

sanctifying of human souls and life. It begins with heaven and brings

heaven down to earth, that earth may become like heaven, and both

according well may make one music.' Then, in the second part of the

prayer we come to individual wants. These have their legitimate place

in our approaches to God. Prayer is not merely communion with God, not

merely reverent contemplation of His fatherly and holy name, though

that should always be first and chiefest in it. It is not merely the

expression of absorbed contemplation, but of a nature that desires and

is dependent. Nor is it only the utterance of world-wide desires, and

the expression of a being that has conquered self. The perfection of

man is not to have no desires, or to be petrified or absorbed into a

state without a will and without a wish, still less to be elevated into

a condition of absolute possession of all he seeks, without a want. And

the perfection of prayer is not that it should be the utterance of that

impossible emotion, disinterested love' to God, but that it should be

the recognition of our dependence on God, the expression of our many

wants, and the frank telling Him, with wills submitted, or rather

conformed, to His, what we need. To pray is to adore; to pray is also

to ask. We have to say Our Father, and we have also to say, Give us,

being sure that if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our

children, much more does He know how to give good things to them that

ask Him.

So much for the general considerations applicable to the whole of this

second part.

As to the connection of its several petitions with each other, it may

be noticed that it is the exact opposite of the former part. That began

with the highest and came downwards; this begins with the lowest and

goes upwards. That began with the inward and worked outwards; this

begins with the outward and passes inwards. That set forth the heavenly

order in its gradual self-revelation, working the transformation of

earth; this sets forth the earthly order in its gradual appropriation

of Heaven's gifts. The former declares, that foremost in importance and

in God's order are the spiritual blessings which come from knowledge of

His name; the latter, beginning with the prayer for bread, and thence

advancing to deeper necessities, reminds us, that in the order of time

the least important is still the condition of all the rest. The

loftiest pinnacles looking out to the morning sky must have their

foundations rooted in common earth. That was not first which is

spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterwards that which is

spiritual.' This order, then, is in symmetrical opposition to that of

the previous part. There is a rhythmical correspondence in inverted

movement, like the expansion and contraction of the heart, or the rise

and fall of a fountain.

It is worth noticing how these two opposed halves make one whole; and

as the former begins with contemplation of the fatherly greatness in

the heavens, so the latter part, starting with the cry for bread,

climbs slowly up through all the ills of life, and passing from want to

trespass, human unkindness and hatred, and again to personal weakness

and a tempting world, and the evil of sin and the evil of sorrow,

reaches once more after cries and tears the point from which all began,

and rises to heaven and God. The doxology comes circling round to the

invocation, and the prayer, which has winged its weary way through all

weltering floods of human sorrow and want, comes back like Noah's dove,

with peace born of its flight, to its home in God, and ends where it

began. They whose prayer and whose lives start with Our Father which

art in Heaven,' will end with the confidence and the praise, Thine is

the kingdom and the honour.'

Now looking at this petition in itself, I note--

I. The prayer for Bread.

This contains first an important lesson as to what may be legitimately

the subject of our prayers.

The Lord by this juxtaposition condemns the overstrained and fantastic

spiritualism which tramples down earthly wants and condemns desires

rooted in our physical nature as sin. It is a wonderful testimony from

Jesus of the worth of common gifts, that the desire for them should

here stand beside that great one for the doing of God's will. There is

nothing here of the false asceticism which undervalues the life which

now is, nothing of the morbid tone of feeling which despises and

condemns as sinful the due appreciation of and desire for the blessings

of this life. To give predominance to material wants and earthly good

is heathen and unchristian, therefore the petition for these follows

the others. But to despise them and pretend to be indifferent to them

is heathen and unchristian too; therefore the prayer for them finds its

place among the others. So the right understanding of this prayer is a

barrier against the opposite evils of a false sensuousness which

forgets the spirit that is in the flesh, and of a false spirituality

which forgets the flesh that is around the spirit. He who made us

desire truth in the inward parts, made us also to desire our daily

bread, and we observe His order when we do both, and seek the Kingdom

of God, not exclusively, but first.

And not only is this petition the vindication of a healthy naturalism,

but it also shows us that we may rightly make prayers of our desires

for earthly things.

We sometimes hear it said that we have only a right to ask God for such

gifts as holiness and conformity to His will. This has a truth, a great

truth, in it. But it may be overstrained. We are to subdue our wishes,

we are to be more anxious for our soul's health than for our bodily

wants. We are to present our desires concerning all things in this

life, with an implied if it be Thy will,' but while all that is true,

we are also to ask Him for these lower blessings. Our prayers should

include all which we desire, all which we need. Our desires should be

such as we can turn into prayers. If we dare not ask God for a thing,

do not let us seek for it. But whatever we do want, let us go to Him

for it, and be sure that He does not wish lip homage and fine-sounding

petitions for things for which we do not really care, but that He does

desire that we should be frank with Him, making a prayer of every wish,

and seeing that we have neither wishes which we dare not make prayers,

nor prayers which are not really wishes. Let our supplications cover

all the ground of our daily wants, and be true to our own souls. If any

man lack anything, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men life and

breath and all things.

Then still further--the prayer is the recognition of God as the Giver

of daily bread.

Thou openest Thine hand,' says the old psalm, and satisfiest the desire

of every living thing.' There is no part of the divine dealings of

which the Bible speaks more frequently and more lovingly than His

supply of all creatures' wants. It is a grand thought, Who feedeth the

young ravens when they cry, who maketh the grass to grow on the

mountains. The eyes of all wait upon Thee.' There is a magnificent

verse in the 104th Psalm, which regards even the roar of the lion

prowling for its prey in midnight forests as a cry to God--The young

lions seek their meat from God.' As Luther says somewhere in his rough

prose--Even to feed the sparrows God spends more than the revenues of

the French king would buy.' And that universal bounty applies truly to

those whose lot is In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.' For

us it is true. God feeds us. Thou givest meat to them that fear Thee,

Thou wilt ever be mindful of Thy covenant.' In giving us our daily

bread, His hand is hid under second causes, but these should not mask

the truth from us.

God is the life of nature. His will is the power whose orderly working

we call nature's laws. Force is the sign manual of God. There would be

no harvest, no growth, unless to each seed God gave a body as it hath

pleased Him. The existence of bread is the effect of His work. He hath

not left Himself without witness in that He giveth rain from heaven and

fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' as Paul

said to the rough farmer folk of Lycaonia.

The distribution of the bread is of God.

By second causes, our work and other means.

Be it so. Here is a steam engine, in one room away at one end of your

mill; here is a spindle whirring five hundred yards off. What then? Who

thinks that that bit of belting moves the drum round which it turns, or

that the cog-wheel that carries the motion originates it? The motion

here has force at the other end, the effect here has its cause in God.

The nourishment by bread is of God.

Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out

of the mouth of God.'

The reason why any natural substance has properties is by reason of

present will of God; they reside not in itself, but in Him.

All this we say that we believe when we pray this prayer.

How much it conflicts with our modern habit of putting God as far away

from daily life as we can!

The prayer is the consecration of our work for bread.

The indirect way by which it is answered is a great blessing, and it

pledges us to labour.

Orare est laborare. Not, as it is sometimes quoted, as if toil was to

do instead of prayer, but that active life may be consecrated to God,

and all our efforts which terminate in gaining bread for ourselves and

for those we love may become prayer, and be offered to God.

How can we pray for God to give us our daily bread, and then go to seek

it by means which we dare not avow or defend in our prayers? Bless my

cheating, bless my sharp practice, bless my half-heartedness. It is no

part of my business to apply principles to details of conduct, but it

is my business to say--take this prayer for a test, and if you dare not

pray it over what you do in earning your living, ask yourself whether

you are not rather earning your death.

Then the prayer is a pledge of thankful recognition of God in our

blessings.

Ah! dear friends, are we not all guilty in this? How utterly heathenish

is our oblivion of God in our daily life! How far we have come from

that temper which recognises Him in all joys, and begins every new day

with Him! Daily mercies demand daily songs of praise. His love wakens

us morning by morning. It follows us all the day long with its fatherly

benefits. It reveals itself anew every time He spreads our table, every

time He gives us teaching or joy. And our thanksgiving and

consciousness of His presence should be as constant as are His gifts.

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning.' They walk all the day long in

the light of Thy countenance.' I will both lay me down in peace and

sleep.' They ate their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.'

II. The union with our brethren in our prayer.

Give us.' The struggle for existence is represented by many as the very

law of human life. The fight for bread is the great antagonist of

brotherly regard for our fellows. Trade is said to be warfare; and then

others starting from that conception that one man's gains are some

other man's losses, proclaim with undoubted truth on these premises

property is robbery.' But surely this clause of our prayer teaches us a

more excellent way. We are not to be like stiff-necked men who fight

with one another for the drop of brackish water caught in the corner of

a sail, but we are to be as children bowing down together before a

great Father, all sitting at His table where nothing wants, and where

even the pet dogs below it eat of the crumbs.

The main thing is to note how our Lord teaches us here to identify

ourselves with others, to make common cause with them in our petition

for bread. He who rightly enters into the meaning of this prayer, and

feels the unity which it supposes, can scarcely regard his possessions

as given to himself alone, or to be held without regard to other

people. We are all one in need; high and low, rich and poor, we all

hang on God for the same supplies. We are all one in reception of His

gifts. Is it becoming in one who is a member of such a whole, to clasp

his portion in both his hands and carry it off to a corner where he

gnaws it by himself? That is how wolves feast, with one foot on their

bone and a watchful eye all round for thieves, not how men, brethren,

should feast.

I am not here to deal with economical questions, or to apply principles

to details, but surely one may say that this petition contemplates as

possible a better state of things than each for himself,' whether God

is for us all or no, and that it does teach that at all events a man is

part of a whole which has a claim on his possessions. Neither said any

man that aught which he possessed was his own.'

The Christian doctrine of property does not seem to be communism. You

have your property. It is your own. You have the power, and as far as

law is concerned, the right, to do with it none but selfish acts. You

have it, but you are not an owner--only a steward. You have it, but you

hold it not for your own sake, but as a trustee. You have it as a

member of a family, a great community. You have it that you may

dispense to others, you have it that you may help to multiply the bonds

of affection to benefactors and of love to the great Giver.

And this liberality is founded, according to this petition, in our

common relation to God. We do not want charity--we want justice. The

needy cannot enforce their claims, but their cry enters into the ears

of the Lord, and what is withheld from them is kept back by fraud.' The

Bible always puts benevolence and liberality on the ground of their

being a debt. Withhold not good from him to whom it is due.'

So how, beside this prayer, does it look to see two men who have united

in it, the one being Dives clothed and faring sumptuously, and the

other Lazarus with scraps for his food and dogs for his doctors? There

is many a contrast like that to-day. All I have to say is--that such

contrasts are not meant as the product of Christianity and civilisation

and commerce for eighteen hundred years, and that one chief way of

ending them is that we shall learn to feel and live the true communism

which traces all a man's possessions to God, and feels that he has

received them as a member of a community for the blessing of all, even

as Christ taught when He bid us say, Give us our daily bread.'

III. The prayer for bread for to-day.

This carries with it precious truths as to the manner of the divine

gifts and the limit of our cares and anxieties.

God gives not all at once, but continuously, and in portions sufficient

for the day.

As with the manna fresh gathered every morning, so all our gifts from

Him are given according to the present exigencies.

Note the beauty and blessedness of this method of supplying our wants.

It gives to each moment its own special character, it gives to each the

glory of having in it a fresh gift of God. It binds all together in one

long line of brightness made up of an infinite number of points, each a

separate act of divine love, each a glittering sign of His presence. It

brings God very near to all life. It draws us closer to Him, by giving

us at each moment opportunity and need for feeling our dependence upon

Him, by bringing us once again to His throne that our wants may be

supplied. And as each moment, so each day, comes with its new duties

and its new wants. Yesterday's food nourishes us not to-day. To-day's

strength must come from this day's God and His new supplies. And thus

the monotony of life is somewhat broken, and there come to us all the

fresh vigour and the new hope of each returning day, and the merciful

wall of the night's slumber is built up between us and yesterday with

its tasks and its weariness. And fresh elastic hopes, along with

renewed dependence on God, should waken us morning by morning, as we

look into the unknown hours and say, Give us this day our daily bread.'

Then, again, let us learn not to try to abrogate this wise ordinance by

onward-looking anxieties. We have to exercise forethought, and not to

possess it is to be a poor creature, below the ant and the bee. No man

is in a favourable position for intellectual or moral growth who has

not some certainty in his life, and a reasonable prospect of such

perpetuity as is compatible with this changeful state. But that is a

very different thing from the careful, anxious forebodings in which we

are all so prone to indulge. These are profitless and harmful, robbing

us of strength and contributing nothing to our wisdom or to our

security. They are contrary to this law of the divine dealings that we

shall get our rations as we need them, no sooner; that the path will be

opened when we come to it, not till then. God knows the line of march,

and will issue our route each morning. God looks after the commissariat

and saves us the trouble of carrying it.

Let us try not to be over-inquisitive to cast the fashion of uncertain

evils,' nor magnify trouble in the fog of our own thoughts, but limit

our cares to to-day, and let to-morrow alone, for our God will be in it

as He has been in the past. He will never take us where He will not go

with us. Each day will have its own brightness, as each place its own

rainbow. If we are led into dry lands, there will be a fountain opened

in the desert, and He will feed us by His ravens ere we shall want.

Bread shall be given and water made sure. To-morrow shall be as this

day. Then let the veil still hang, nor try to lift it with the hand of

forecasting thought, nor be over-careful to make the future sure by

earthly means, but let present blessings be parents of bright hopes.

Remember Him who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. In

Him the past is unwept for and the future sure. Accept the merciful

limitations on His gifts, and let them be the limitations which you set

to your own desires while you pray, Give us this day our daily bread.'

IV. The prayer for bread suited to our needs.

Daily bread' clearly cannot be the right rendering, for after this day'

that would be weak repetition.

The word is difficult, for it only occurs here and there in Luke.

It may be rendered for the coming (day),' but that can scarcely be

supposed to be our Lord's meaning, when His precept to take no thought

for the morrow is remembered. A more satisfactory rendering is,

sufficient for our subsistence,' the bread which we need to sustain us.

Such a petition points to desires limited by our necessities. What we

should wish, and what we have a right to ask from God, is what we

need--no more and no less.

This does not reduce us all to one level, but leaves Him to settle what

we do want. How different this prayer in the mouth of a king and of a

pauper! But it does rebuke immoderate and unbridled desires. God does

not limit us to mere naked necessaries--He giveth liberally, and means

life to be beautiful and adorned. That which is over and above bread is

to a large extent that which makes life graceful and refined, and I

have no wish to preach a crusade against it; but I have just as little

hesitation in declaring what it is not left to pulpit moralists to say,

that the falsely luxurious style of living among us looks very strange

by the side of this petition. So much luxury which does not mean

refinement; so much ostentatious expenditure which does not represent

increased culture or pleasure or anything but a resolve to be on a

level with somebody else; so much which is so ludicrously unlike the

poor little shrimp of a man or woman that sits in the centre of it all!

Plain living and high thinking are no more.'

My riches consist not in the abundance of my possessions, but in the

fewness of my wants.'

The less a man needs, the nearer is he to the gods.'

So, what a lesson for us all in this age, where everyone of us is

tempted to adopt a scale of what is necessary very far beyond the

truth.

Young and old--dare, if need be, to be poor. Having food and raiment,

let us therewith be content.'

We cannot all become rich, but let us learn to bring down our desires

to, and bound them by, our true wants.

Christ has taught us here to put this petition after these loftier

ones, and He has taught us to pass quickly by it to the more noble and

higher needs of the soul. Do we treat it thus, making it a secondary

element in our wishes? If so, then our days will be blessed, each

filled with fresh gifts from God, and each leading us to Him who is the

true Bread that came down from Heaven.

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FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS'

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.'--MATT. vi. 12.

The sequence of the petitions in the second half of the Lord's Prayer

suggests that every man who needs to pray for daily bread needs also to

pray for daily forgiveness. The supplication for the supply of our

bodily needs precedes the others, because it deals with a need which is

fundamental indeed, but of less importance than those which prompt the

subsequent petitions. God made us to need bread, we have made ourselves

to need pardon. The answer to the later petition is as certain as that

to the earlier. He who gives meat will not withhold forgiveness. Give

and forgive refer to our deepest wants, but how many who feel the one

are all unconscious of the other!

I. The consciousness of sin, of which this petition is the expression.

Debt' and duty' are one word. Owe' and ought' are one word. Duty is

what is due. Ought is what we owe--to some one or other. We are under

obligations all round, which conscience tells us that we have not

fulfilled. The unfulfilled obligation or duty becomes a debt. We divide

our obligations into duties to God, our neighbours, and ourselves; but

the division is superficial, for whatever we owe to ourselves or to

men, we owe also to God, and the non-fulfilment of our obligations to

Him is sin. No man liveth to himself, . . . we live unto God.' Our

consciences accuse us of undone duties to ourselves, the indulgence of

evil tempers, a slack hand over ourselves, a careless husbandry which

leaves furrows full of weeds, failure to bend the bow to the uttermost,

to keep the mirror bright. It accuses us of undone duties to our

neighbours, unkindness, neglect of opportunities of service, and many

another ugly fault. Duties undone are debts not only to ourselves or to

our fellows, but to God. The great Over-lord reckons offences against

His vassals as crimes against Himself.

That graver aspect of our faults as being sins may seem a gloomy

thought, but it is really one full of blessing, for it lodges the true

power of remission of our burdensome debts in the hands of the one true

creditor, whom the prayer has taught us to call Our Father.'

That consciousness of sin should be as universal as the sense of bodily

hunger; but, alas! it is too often dormant. It is especially needful to

try to awake it in this generation, when the natural tendency of the

heart to ignore it is strengthened by talk of heredity and environment,

and by the disposition to think of sin with pity rather than

reprobation. Men are apt to regard a consciousness of sin as morbid.

They will acknowledge failure or imperfection, but there is little

realisation of sin, and therefore little sense of the need for a

deliverer. If men are ever to be brought to a saving grip of Jesus

Christ, they must have learned a far more heart-piercing consciousness

of their sin than this morally relaxed age possesses.

II. The cry to which that consciousness gives voice.

We often ask for forgiveness; have we any definite notion of what we

are asking for? When we forgive one another, he who forgives puts away

alienation of heart, every cloud of suspicion from his mind, and his

feeling and his conduct are as if there had never been a jar or an

offence, or are more tender and loving because of the offence that is

now forgiven. He who is forgiven has, on his part, a deeper shame for

the offence, which looks far darker now, when it is blotted out, than

it did before forgiveness. Both are eager to show love, not in order to

erase the past, but because the past is erased.

When a father forgives his child, does that merely or chiefly mean that

he spares the rod; or does it not much rather mean that he lets his

love flow out to the little culprit, undammed back by the child's

fault? And when God forgives He does so, not so much as a judge but

rather as the Father. It is the father's heart that the child craves

when it cries for pardon. The remission of punishment is an element,

but by no means the chief element, in man's forgiveness, and that is

still more true as to God's. There are present, and for the most part

outward, consequences of a forgiven man's sin which are not averted by

forgiveness, and which it is for his good that he should not escape.

But when the assurance of God's unhindered love rests on a pardoned

soul, those consequences of its sins which it has to reap cease to be

penal and become educative, cease to be the expressions only of God's

hatred of evil, and become expressions of His love to the forgiven

evil-doer. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commit

iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men . . . but My mercy

shall not depart from him.'

III. The startling addition to the cry.

As we forgive.' Is, then, our poor forgiveness the measure or condition

of God's? At first sight that addition seems to impose a limit on His

pardon which might well plunge us into despair. But reflection on the

words brings to light more comforting, though solemnly warning,

thoughts.

We learn that our human forgiveness is the faint reflection of the

light of His. We have a right to infer His gentleness, forbearance, and

forgiveness from the existence of such gracious qualities in ourselves.

God is all that is good in men. Whatsoever things are reverend,

whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are lovely--all

these are in Him, and all as they are seen in men are from Him. He that

formed the eye, shall not He see?' We forgive, and will not He?

In a very real sense our forgiving is the condition of our being

forgiven. We are accustomed to hear that faith and repentance are

conditions of receiving the divine forgiveness. But the very same

disposition which, when directed to God, produces faith and repentance,

when directed to men, produces a forgiving temper. A deep sense of my

own unworthiness, and of having no ground of right to stand on, will

surely lead me to be lenient and placable to others. We cannot cut our

lives into halves, and be inwardly filled with contrition, and

outwardly full of assertion of our rights. We cannot plead with God to

do for us what we will not do for others. Our prayer for forgiveness

must, if it is real, influence our whole behaviour; and if it is not

real, it will not be answered.

The possession of God's forgiveness will make us forgiving. Forgiving

one another, even as also God in Christ hath forgiven you. Be ye

therefore imitators of God, as beloved children.'

Our continuous possession and conscious enjoyment of God's forgiveness

will be contingent on our forgivingness. He who took his fellow-servant

by the throat and half choked him in his determination to exact the

last farthing of his debt was, by the act, cancelling his own discharge

and piling up a mountain of debt, against himself. Our consciousness of

forgiveness will be most clear and satisfying when we are forgiving

those who trespass against us. We shall pardon most spontaneously and

fully when our hearts are warm with the beams of God's pardon.

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LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION'

And lead us not into temptation.'--MATT. vi. 13.

The petition of the previous clause has to do with the past, this with

the future; the one is the confession of sin, the other the

supplication which comes from the consciousness of weakness. The best

man needs both. Forgiveness does not break the bonds of evil by which

we are held. But forgiveness increases our consciousness of weakness,

and in the new desire which comes from it to walk in holiness, we are

first rightly aware of the strength and frequency of inducements to

sin. A man may by mere natural conscience know something of what

temptation is, but only he understands its strength who resists it.

The sense of forgiveness and the new desires and love thereby

developed, lead to the falling of the mask from the deceitful forms

that gleam around us. He who is forgiven has his eyesight purged, and

can see that these are not what they seem, but demons that lure us to

our destruction. It is true that the sign of the Cross compels the foul

thing to appear in its own true form. Then started up in his own shape

the fiend.' The love which comes from forgiveness and the new

sympathies which it engenders are the Ithuriel's spear. What a

wonderful change passes upon the siren tempters when we believe that

Christ has pardoned us, and have learned to love Him! Then the fishtail

is seen below the sunlit waters.

Forgiveness is one of the chief means of teaching us our sin. The

removal of all dread of personal consequences, which it effects, leaves

us free to contemplate with calmed hearts the moral character of our

actions. The revelation of God's love which is made in forgiveness

quickens our consciences as well as purges them, and our standard of

purity is raised. The effort to live rightly, which is the sure result

of God's love believed, first teaches us thoroughly how wrong we are.

We know the strength of the current when we try to pull against it.

Looking to God as our Father, our blackness shows blacker against the

radiant purity of His white light.

Forgiveness does not at once and wholly annihilate the tendency to

transgress. True, the belief that God has forgiven supplies the

strongest motives for holiness, and the new life which comes to every

man who so believes will by degrees conquer all the lingering garrisons

of the Philistines which hold scattered strong-posts in the land. But

though this be so, still the purifying process is a slow and gradual

one, and evil may be forced out of the heart while yet it is in the

blood. The central will may be cleansed while yet habits continue to be

strong, and the power of resistance, new-born as it is, may be weak in

act though omnipotent in nature. All sin leaves some tendency to

recurrence. The path which one avalanche has hollowed lies ready for

another. It is true, on the one side, that no purity is so bright and

no obedience so steadfast as that of the man who has been cleansed and

reclaimed from rebellion. But it is also true that, on the road to that

ultimate purity, a pardoned man has to struggle daily with the bitter

relics of his old self, to wage war against evils the force of which he

never knew till he tried to resist them, against sins which were all

sleek, and velvety, and purring, as long as he fondled and stroked

them, but which flash out sharp claws when he would fling them from

their dens in his heart. Forgiveness does not at once conquer sin, and

forgiveness leads to deeper consciousness of sin. Hence the order of

petitions here. Following on the prayer for pardon, comes that for

shelter from and in temptation which arises from deep consciousness of

our own weakness and liability to fall.

Temptation has two parts in it--the circumstances which lead to sin,

the desire which is addressed by them. There must be tinder as well as

spark, if there is to be flame. Fire falling on water or upon bare rock

will kindle nothing. God sends the one, we make the other.

The Prayer:--

I. Expresses our recognition of God as ordering all circumstances.

There is the general faith that His Providence orders our lot, and the

specific that God orders and brings about temptations.

To tempt is to present inducements to sin, but a secondary significance

is to do so maliciously, and with desire that we should fall. It is in

this secondary sense that James denies that God tempts any man. We

tempt ourselves, or evil tempts us. But God does tempt in so far as He

presents outward circumstances which become occasions of falling or of

standing, as we take them. He sends temptations, He sends trials, and

the two only differ in name, and in what is implied in the word, of the

disposition of the sender. Christ was led into the wilderness by the

Spirit to be tempted. If God does not in malice tempt, still He does in

mercy try. God sends trials; we make them temptations.

II. Implies that our chiefest wish is holiness, our greatest dread sin.

This is the only negative petition.

What would be our deprecatory prayers? Lead us not into sorrow, loss,

poverty, disease, death?

How we fill our prayers with womanish shriekings and fears!

This petition can come only from a man whose will is resigned and fixed

on God. One thing he fears, and that is to sin.

The one thing to be desired is not outward well-being, but inward

character.

Think of our lives: what do we dread most?

III. Expresses our self-distrust.

It is from consciousness of our weakness that we pray thus. The

language at first sight seems to breathe only a wish to be exempt from

temptation. If that were its meaning, it were contrary to Christ's

teaching and to the whole tenor of Scripture. But such a wish is

included in it, and corresponds to one tone of mind, and to what ought

always to be our feeling. We rightly shrink from temptation because we

know our own weakness. That is the only allowable ground; if we do it

from indolence, or dread of trouble, we are wrong. If flesh shrinks

from pain, we are carnal and walk as men.' If we desire simply to have

a smooth path, then we have yet to learn what our Master meant when He

said, In the world ye shall have tribulation.' His servants should

count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations.'

But if we rightly understand our own weakness, we shall dread to meet

the enemy, because we know how often circumstances make all the

difference between saint and sinner.

IV. Expresses our reliance on God if temptation comes.

I take to be tempted' as being presentation of inducement to sin. I

take to enter into temptation' as the further step of consenting to it.

Perhaps there may be hovering in the words of the petition a

half-conscious allusion to a captive being led into a prison.

What we should chiefly desire is that God would lead us not into, but

through and out of, temptation. To pray simply for exemption from trial

is--

1. To ask what is impossible.

All scenes of life, all stages, both sexes, all relations, all

professions, are and ever will be full of inducements to sin.

Whether any given circumstance will tempt you or not depends on what

you are. If there is nothing adhesive on you, it will not stick.

2. To ask what would not be for our good.

Effect of conquered temptation on the Christian life.

Effect on character. The old belief that the strength of a slain enemy

passed into his slayer is true in regard to a Christian's overcome

temptations.

Effect on grasp of truth.

Effect on consciousness of relation to God.

Effect on Future.

So then we ought to desire not so much exemption from temptation, as

strength in it.

And He will always be at our side to grant us this.

We should seek not freedom from furnace, but His presence in it; not to

be guided away from the dark valley, but through it. His prayer is our

model; His life is our pattern, who was tempted though He were the

Son'; His strength is our hope. He is able to succour them that are

tempted.'

We identify ourselves in such a prayer with all who have sinned, and

knowing that we are men of like passions, and that we may fall like

them, we cry lead us not.'

He who offers this prayer from such motives will best and most

willingly meet temptation when it comes. The soldier who goes into the

field with careful circumspection, knowing the enemy's strength and his

own weakness, is the most likely to conquer. It is the presumptuous

men, confident in their own strength, who are sure to get beaten.

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DELIVER US FROM EVIL'

But deliver us from evil.'--MATT. vi. 13.

The two halves of this prayer are like a calm sky with stars shining

silently in its steadfast blue, and a troubled earth beneath, where

storms sweep, and changes come, and tears are ever being shed. The one

is so tranquil, the other so full of woe and want. What a dark picture

of human conditions lies beneath the petitions of this second half!

Hunger and sin and temptation, and wider still, that tragic word which

includes them all--evil. Forgiveness and defence and deliverance--what

sorrows these presuppose! Each step of these latter supplications seems

to carry us deeper into the shadow and the darkness, each to present a

darker aspect of what human life really is; and now that we have

reached the last, we have an all-comprehensive cry which holds within

its meaning every ill that flesh is heir to.

But seeing that we have to do with a prayer, we have also to do with a

prophecy. We know that if we ask anything according to His will, He

heareth us, and therefore the sadder the want which is expressed, the

fuller of hope is the prayer. This petition gives a dark picture of

human wants, but whatsoever thing we pray about or against, we thereby

profess to believe to be contrary to God's will, and to be certain of

removal by Him; and when our Lord commanded us to say Our Father, . . .

deliver us from evil,' He gave us the lively hope that all which is

included in that terribly wide word should be swept away, and that He

would break every yoke and let His oppressed go free. The whole sum of

human sorrow is gathered into one petition, that we may all feel that

every item of it is capable of attenuation and extinction; and so our

prayer, in the very clause which seems to sound the lowest depth,

really rises to the loftiest height, and the words which sound likest a

wail over all the misery that is done under the sun, have in them the

notes of triumph. The sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest

thought.' The most jubilant and confident prayer is that which feels

most keenly the burden of evil, and falling with its weight of sins

upon the great world's altar-stairs,' cries to God for deliverance.

Consider, then:--

I. The width of this petition.

What is evil?

Well, we leave God to decide what it is, but also we have no reason

that I can see for limiting the impressive width of the word. It is a

profound insight into the nature of evil which, in our own language and

in other tongues, uses one word to express both what we call sin, and

what we call sorrow. And I know not why we should suppose that our Lord

does not include both of these here. There is what we call physical

evil, pain, sorrow, meaning thereby whatever wars against our

well-being and happiness. There is what we call moral evil, sin,

meaning thereby whatever wars against our purity. Both are evil. Men's

consciences tell them so of the one. Men's sensibilities tell them so

of the other.

You cannot sophisticate a man into believing that he is not suffering

when his flesh is racked or his heart wounded. It is evil to be in

pain. It is evil to carry a heavy heart. It is evil to be stripped of

what we have long been accustomed to lean upon. It is evil to be

crushed down by loss and want. It is evil to stand by the black hole

that swallows the coffin that holds the light of our eyes. It is evil

to have the arrows of calumny or hate sticking in our quivering

spirits. It is evil to be battered with the shocks of change and doom

in the world, to have to toil at ungrateful tasks beyond our strength.

The life which turns the child's rounded features into the thin face

lined and wrinkled, and the child's elastic run into the slow, heavy

tread, is after all a life which in its outward aspects is a life of

evil.

And many a man who has had little sympathy with what seem to him the

hazy platitudes of the rest of the prayer, learns to pray this clause,

and is always ready to pray it. For we may be sure of this, that they

who make the world their all are they who feel its evils most keenly.

From how many lips unused to prayer are cries every hour going up in

this sorrowful world which really mean, deliver us from evil'!

But it is not only these external evils which the prayer includes. It

means every kind of sin, all dominion of what is contrary to God's

will.

And the petition is deliver,' pull us out, drag us from. It is a cry

for the entire emancipation or utter extinction of evil in its effect

upon us.

So this petition in its clear recognition of evil sets forth man's

condition distinctly, and is opposed to that false stoicism which tries

to argue men out of their senses, and convince them that the fire which

burns them is only a painted fire. Christianity has nothing in common

with that insensibility to suffering which it is sometimes supposed to

teach. Christ wept, and bade the daughters of Jerusalem weep also.

Christianity has deep words to say about evil and pain as being

salutary and for our good, and about submission to God's will as being

better than wild wishes to be delivered now and at once from all pain

and sorrow. But it begins with full admission that evil is evil, and

all its teachings presuppose that. Job was tormented by the

well-meaning platitudes of his friends, who lifted up their hands in

holy horror that he did not lie on his dunghill, as if it had been a

bed of roses; and Job, who felt all the sorrow of his losses and ground

out many a wrong saying between his teeth, was justified because he had

held by the truth that his senses taught him, that pain was bitter and

bad, and by the other which his faith taught him, that God must be

good. He could not reconcile them. We can in part; but our Lord has

taught us in this prayer that it is not to be done by denying or

sophisticating facts. Then let us use this prayer in all its breadth,

and feel that it covers all which makes our hearts heavy, and all which

makes our consciences sore.

From all evil and mischief--plague, pestilence, and famine, as well as

envy, hatred, and hypocrisy--from sin, from the crafts and assaults of

the devil,--Good Lord, deliver us.' In all time of our tribulation; in

all time of our wealth, in the hour of death, and in the day of

judgment,--Good Lord, deliver us.'

II. The unity and source of the evil.

The singular number suggests that all evil, multiform as it seems, is

at bottom one. It is a great weltering coil, but wilderness and tangle

as it appears, there is a tap root from which it all comes, like a

close-clinging mass of ivy which is choking the life out of an

elm-tree. If that root were grubbed up, all would fall. It is like some

huge sea monster floating many a rood,' but there is only one life in

it. The hydra has a hundred heads, but one heart. And the place in the

prayer in which this clause comes suggests what that is--sin.

That place implies that all human sorrows and sufferings are

consequences of human evil. And that is true inasmuch as many of them

are distinctly and naturally its results. Disease is often the result

of dissipation, poverty of indolence, friendlessness of selfishness.

How many of the miseries of our great cities, how many of the miseries

of nations, result from criminal neglect and injustice! Man's

inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.' Ah! if all men were

saying from the heart, Thy will be done,' how many of their griefs

would be at an end! And it is true that sorrows are the consequences of

sin inasmuch as suffering has been introduced by God into the world

because of sin. He has been forced by our rebellion to use judgments,

and that to bring us back.

And it is true that sorrows are the consequences of sin inasmuch as the

sting is taken out of them when our sins are forgiven and we love God.

Then they so change their characters as scarcely to deserve to be

called by their old name, and the paradox, sorrowful yet always

rejoicing,' becomes a sober fact of experience.

III. The divine opposition to evil.

This prayer implies that all evil is contrary to His will. The one kind

is so, absolutely and always. The other is a method to which He has had

recourse, but not that which, if things had gone right, He would have

adopted.

So this prayer breathes confidence that God will overcome both kinds.

How much there is to make us believe that evil is eternal.

How apt we are to fall into despair, to lose heart for ourselves and

our fellows; to say that it has always been so, and it always will be

so.

For all social reformers here is encouragement.

For ourselves, when we seem to do so little in setting ourselves right,

here is confidence.

But it must be God who conquers the world's evil.

Our most potent weapon in the struggle with our own and the world's

evil is the earnest offering of this petition.

Think of the failure of godless schemes; how often we have been on the

verge of political and other millenniums.

Only the God, who cures sin, can cure the world's ills.

We are not to substitute praying for working. God may answer our prayer

by setting us to work.

Remember that you pledge yourselves to work for your fellows by that

Us, and to try to reduce, were it by ever so little, the sum of human

misery.

IV. The manner of God's deliverance from evil. God delivers us by

Christ, that is the sum of all.

He delivers us from sin by His answers to the previous petitions.

He delivers us from suffering by teaching us how to bear it, and by

showing us the meaning of it. The evil in evil is taken away. There

shines a brightness round about the devouring fire (Ezek. i. 4). All

things work together for good.'

Finally, He delivers by taking us to Himself.

This prayer goes beyond present experience. It is the yearning for full

redemption. It is the last which is answered. But there lies in it a

not indistinct prophecy of that great and blessed time when we shall be

like Him, and delivered from all evil.

For ourselves and for the world it carries the assurance that neither

sorrow nor sin shall be permitted to deform for ever the face of this

fair creation; but that the day comes when God's name being everywhere

hallowed, and His will done on earth, and His kingdom set up, and all

our wants supplied, and all our sins forgiven, and all temptations

taken out of the way, evil of every kind shall be scourged out of God's

universe, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return with joy upon their

heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'

Then shall this mighty prayer be answered, the prayer of God's children

in all ages, the prayer which He offers before the Throne who on earth

prayed, Not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that

Thou shouldest keep them from the evil'; the prayer which the

white-robed souls offer when they cry, How long, O Lord, how long?' the

prayer which, all unconsciously, the sobs, and cries, and sorrows of

six thousand years have been offering; the prayer which is every hour

being answered in hourly mercies, and multitudes of forgivenesses and

gracious guiding; the prayer which has been steadily tending towards

its fulfilment, through all the ages during which God's name has been

growing in men's love, and His will more and more obeyed, and His

kingdom more and more fully come; the prayer which will be at last

completely realised when all His children shall stand before His Throne

happy and good, and the noise of earth's evil shall sound only in the

ear of memory, like the murmur of some far-off sea heard from the

sacred mountain, or the remembrance of the tempest when all the winds

are still.

If our prayer is, Deliver us from evil,' our life's experience will be

that He delivered us from so great a death and will deliver,' our dying

word will be thanksgiving to the angel who delivered us from all evil,'

and our death will bring the full deliverance for which while here we

pray, and admit us into that region of unmingled good and blessing and

purity, whose distant brightness we, tossing on the unquiet sea, behold

from afar and long to possess. After this manner pray ye,' and to you

the promise will be blessedly fulfilled, Because he hath set his love

upon Me, therefore will I deliver him. I will set him on high, because

he hath known My name' (Ps. xci. 14).

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THINE IS THE KINGDOM'

Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen.'--MATT. vi. 13.

There is no reason to suppose that this doxology was spoken by Christ.

It does not occur in any of the oldest and most authoritative

manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel. It does not seem to have been known to

the earliest Christian writers. Long association has for us intertwined

the words inextricably with our Lord's Prayer, and it is a wound to

reverential feeling to strike out what so many generations have used in

their common supplications. No doubt this doxology is appropriate as a

conclusion, and serves to give an aspect of completeness. It sounds

cold and cheerless to end our prayer with evil.' But the question is

not one of feeling or of our notions of fitness, but purely one of

criticism, and the only evidence which has any right to be heard in

settling the text of the New Testament is dead against this clause. If

we regard that evidence, we are obliged to say that the doxology has no

business here. How it stands here is a question which may be answered

satisfactorily. When the Lord's Prayer came to be used in public

worship, it was natural to append to it a doxology, just as in chanting

the psalms it became the habit to repeat at the end of each the Gloria.

This doxology, originally written on the margin of the gospel, would

gradually creep into the text, and once there, was naturally retained.

It does not follow that, because Christ did not speak it, we ought not

to use it. It should not be in the Bible, but it may well be in our

prayers. If we think that our Lord gave us a pattern rather than a

form, we are quite justified in extending that pattern by any additions

which harmonise with its spirit. If we think He gave us a form to be

repeated verbatim, then we ought not to add to it this doxology.

At first sight it seems as if the prayer without it were incomplete. It

contains loving desires, lowly dependence, humble penitence, earnest

wishes for cleansing, but there appears none of that rapturous praise

which is also an element in all true devotion. And this may have been

one reason for the addition of the doxology. But I think that that

absence of praise and joy is only apparent; the first clause of the

prayer expresses the highest form of both. The doxology, if you will

think of it, adds nothing to the contemplation of the divine character

which the prayer has already taught us. It is only a repetition at the

close of what we had at the beginning, and its conception, lofty and

grand as it is, falls beneath that of Our Father.' We might almost say

that the doxology is incongruous with the prayer as presenting a less

blessed, spiritual, distinctively Christian thought of God. That would

be going too far, but I cannot but feel a certain change in tone, a

dropping from the loftiest elevation down to the celebration of the

lower aspects of the divine. Kingdom, power, and glory' are grand, but

they do not reach the height of ascription of praise which sounds in

the very first words of the prayer.

Properly speaking, too, this doxology is not a part of the prayer. It

expresses two things: the devout contemplation of God which the whole

course of the petitions has excited in the soul--and in that aspect it

is the Church's echo to the Lord's Prayer; and the confidence with

which we pray--and in that aspect it is rather the utterance of

meditative reflection asking of itself its reasons for hope and

stirring itself up to lay hold on God.

Notice, then--

I. The meaning of the doxology.

Kingdom, power, and glory correspond to kingdom, will, and hallowing in

the first part. The order is not the same, but it is still

substantially identical.

Thine the kingdom.' All earthly things, the whole fates of men here,

are ruled by Him. The prayer asked that it might be so; here we declare

that it is so already, not, of course, in the deepest sense, but that

even now and here He rules with authority. Thy kingdom is an

everlasting kingdom,' and this conviction is inseparable from our

Christianity. How hard it is to believe it at all times, from what we

see around us! The temptation is to think that the kingdom is men's, or

belongs to blind fate, or chance, and our own evil hearts ever suggest

that the kingdom is our own. Satan said, All is mine, and I will give

it Thee.'

The affairs of the world seem so far from God, we are so tempted to

believe that He is remote from it, that nations and their rulers and

the field of politics are void of Him. We see craft and force and

villainy ruling, we see kingdoms far from any perception that society

is for man and from God. We see Dei grati� on our coins, and by the

grace of the Devil' for real motto. We see long tracks of godless crime

and mean intrigue, and here and there a divine gleam falling from some

heroic deed of sacrifice. We see king and priest playing into each

other's hands, and the people destroyed, whatever be the feud. But we

are to believe that the world is the kingdom of God; to learn whence

comes all human rule, and to be sure that even here and now Thy kingdom

is an everlasting kingdom.'

Thine the Power.' Not merely has He authority over, but He works indeed

through all--the whole world and all creatures are the field of the

ever present energy of God. That is a simple truth, deep but clear,

that all power comes from Him. He is the cause of all changes, physical

and all other. Force is the garment of the present God, and among men

all power is from Him. His will is the creative word.

Thine the Glory.' God's glory is the praise which comes from the

accomplishment of His purpose and will. This is the end of all Creation

and Manifestation. The thought of Scripture is that all things are for

the greater glory of God. It may be a most cold-blooded and cruel

doctrine, or it may be a most blessed one. All depends on what is our

conception of the character of the God whose self-revelation is His

glory.

An almighty Devil is the God of many people. But we have learned to say

Our Father,' and hence this thought is blessed. Unless we had so

learned, the thought that His end was His glory would make Him a

selfish tyrant. But since we know Him to be our Father, we know that

His Glory is the revelation of His Love, His Fatherhood; that when we

say that He does all things for His own glory, we say that He does all

things that men may know His character as it is, and to know Him is

life eternal.'

Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory': whatsoever we may

have lost and suffered in the past; whatsoever fiery baptism and strife

of arms or of principles we may yet have to go through; whatsoever

shocks of loss and sorrow may strike upon our own hearts; whatsoever

untraversed seas our nation or our race may have to embark upon, One

abides, the same One remains ours and is ever with us. We may have to

face storm and cloud, and neither sun nor stars may appear'; we may

have to fling out the best anchors we can find, if haply they may hold

on anything, and may wearily wish for the day.' But the Lord sitteth

upon the flood,' and in the thickest of the night, when we lift our

wearied eyes, we shall see Him coming to us across the storm, and the

surges smoothing themselves to rest for His pavement, and the waves

subside into their caves at His voice.

Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory.' Then the world and

we shall be guided right and kept safe, and whatsoever is true and good

shall rule, and the weak cause shall be the conquering, and all false

fame shall fade like morning mist, and every honest desire and effort

for man's blessedness shall have eternal honour. God is King; God is

mighty; God's name shall have glory; then for us there is Hope

invincible in spite of all evil. Courage to stand by His truth and His

will, endless patience and endless charity, are our fitting robes, the

livery of our King. Because He is our Father, He will deliver us and

our brethren from all evil, and by His all-powerful Love will found His

universal kingdom and get the glory due unto His name, the glory of

loving and being loved by all His children.

II. The force of the doxology in its place here.

It reminds us that the ground of our confidence is in God's own

character. We do not need to make ourselves worthy to receive. We

cannot move Him, but He is self-moved, and so we do not need to be

afraid. Nor is our prayer to be an attempt to bend His will.

Our confidence digs deep down to build on the rock of the ever-living

God, whose is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.' We

flee to Him for a refuge against ourselves. We bring nothing. We look

to His own character, which will always be the same, and to His past,

which is the type and prophecy for all His future. He is His own

reason, His own motive, His own end.

When we ground our prayers on Him, then we touch ground, and in

whatever weltering sea of trouble we may be buffeted, we have found the

bottom and can stand firm.

But the Amen' which closes the doxology is not the empty form which it

has now become. It means not only, So may it be! but also, So will it

be! It is not only the last breathing of desire, but also the

expression of assured expectancy and confidence; not merely be it so,

but confident expression of assurance that it will be so.

How much of our prayer flies off into empty air because there is no

expectation in it! How much which has no certainty of being answered in

it! How much which is followed by no marking of the future to discern

the answer! We should stand praying like some Grecian statue of an

archer, with hand extended and lips parted and eye following the arrow

of our prayer on its flight till it touches the mark. We have a right

to be confident that we shall be heard. We should apply the Amen to all

the petitions of the prayer. So it becomes a prophecy, and the

Christian man is to live in the calm expectation that all the petitions

will be accomplished. For the world they will be, for us they may be.

It is for each of us to decide for ourselves whether they will be

answered in and for us.

The place of the doxology here suggests that all prayer should lead to

thankful contemplation of God's character.

We have seen how the prayer begins with contemplation, and then passes

into supplication. Thus all prayer should end as it began. It has a

circular motion, and starting from the highest heavens and coming down

to earth, is thither drawn again and rests at the throne of God, whence

it set out, like the strong Spirits before His throne who veil their

faces while they gaze upon the glory, and then fly forth to help human

sorrows and satisfy human hearts, and then on unwearied pinions winging

their way to their first station, meekly sink their wings of flight,

and veil their faces again with their wings. The rivers that flow

through broad lands, bringing blessing and doing humble service in

drinking-cup and domestic vessel, came in soft rain from heaven, and

though their bright waves are browned with soil and made opaque with

many a stain, yet their work done, they rest in the great ocean, and

thence are drawn up once more to the clouds of heaven. So with our

prayers; they ought to start from the contemplation of our God, and

they ought to return thither again.

And as this is the last word of our prayers, so may we not say that it

represents the perpetual form of fellowship with God? Prayers for

bread, and pardon, and help, and deliverance, are for the wilderness.

Prayers for the hallowing of His name, and the coming of His kingdom,

and the doing of His will, are out of date when they are fulfilled; but

for ever this voice shall rise before His throne, and that last new

song, which shall ring with might as of thunder and sweetness as of

many harps from the thousand times ten thousand, shall be but the

expansion and the deepening of the praise of earth. Then every creature

which is in heaven, and on the earth and under the earth and in the

sea, shall be heard saying, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and

power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for

ever and ever."'

So we finish these meditations. I have felt all along how poorly my

words served me to say even what I saw, and how poorly my vision saw

into the clear depths of the divine prayer. But I hope that they may

have helped you half as much as they have myself, to feel more strongly

how all-comprehensive it is. I said at the beginning, and I repeat with

more emphasis now, that there is everything in this prayer--God's

relations to man, man's to God and his fellows, the foundation stones

of Christian theology, of Christian morals, of Christian society, of

Christian politics. There is help for the smallest wants and light for

daily duties; there is strength for the hour of death and the day of

judgment. There is the revelation of the timeless depths of our

Father's heart; there is the prophecy of the furthest future for

ourselves and our brethren. No man can exhaust it. Every age may find

in its simple syllables lessons for their new perplexities and duties.

It will not be outgrown in heaven. But, thank God, we do not need to

exhaust its meaning in order to use it aright. Jesus interprets our

prayers, and many a dumb yearning, and many a broken sob, and many a

passionate fragment of a cry, and many an ignorant desire that may

appear to us very unlike His pattern for all ages, will be accepted by

Him. He inspires, presents and answers every prayer offered through Him

to the Father in heaven. He counts the poorest prayer to be after this

manner,' if it comes from a heart seeking the Father, owning its sin,

longing dimly for deliverance and purity, and hoping through its tears

in the great and loving tenderness of the Father in heaven who has sent

His Son, that through Him we might cry Abba, Father.

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FASTING

Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad

countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto

men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 17. But

thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18. That

thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in

secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee

openly.'--MATT. vi. 16-18.

Fasting has gone out of fashion now, but in Christ's time it went along

with almsgiving and prayers, as a recognised expression of a religious

life. The step from expression to ostentation is a short one, and the

triple repetition here of almost the same words in regard to each of

the three corruptions of religion, witnesses to our Lord's estimate of

their commonness. We are exposed to them just as the Pharisees of His

day were. If there is less fasting now than then, Christians still need

to take care that they do not get up a certain sad countenance' for the

sake of being seen of men, and because such is understood to be the

proper thing for a religious man. They have to take care, too, not to

parade the feelings, of which fasting used to be the expression, as,

for instance, a sense of their own sinfulness, and sorrow for the

nation's or the world's sins and sorrows. There are deep and sorrowful

emotions in every real Christian heart, but the less the world is

called in to see them, the purer and more blessed and purifying they

will be. The man who has a sidelong eye to spectators in expressing his

Christian (or any other) emotion, is very near being a hypocrite.

Expressing emotion with reference to bystanders, is separated by a very

thin line from feigning emotion. The sidelong glance will soon become a

fixed gaze, seeing nothing else, and the purpose of fasting will slip

out of sight. The man who only wishes to attract attention easily

succeeds in that shabby aim, and has his reward, but misses all the

true results, which are only capable of being realised when he who

fasts is thinking of nothing but his own sin and his forgiving God.

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TWO KINDS OF TREASURE

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust

doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20. But lay up

for yourselves treasures in heaven.'--MATT. vi. 19-20.

The connection with the previous part is twofold.

The warning against hypocritical fastings and formalism leads to the

warning against worldly-mindedness and avarice. For what

worldly-mindedness is greater than that which prostitutes even

religious acts to worldly advantage, and is laying up treasure of men's

good opinion on earth even while it shams to be praying to God? And

there is a close connection which the history of every age has

illustrated between formal religious profession and the love of money,

which is the vice of the Church. Again, the promise of rewarding openly

naturally leads on to the positive exhortation to make that reward our

great object.

The connection with what follows is remarkable. The injunction and

prohibition of the text refer to two species of the same genus, one the

vice of avarice, the other the vice of anxiety.

I. The Two Treasures.

These are--on earth, all things which a man can possess;--in heaven,

primarily God Himself, the reward which has been spoken of in previous

verses, viz. God's love and approbation, a holy character, and all

those spiritual and personal graces, beauties, perfections and joys

which come to the good man from above.

This command and prohibition require of Christ's disciples--

1. A rectification of their judgment as to what is the true good of

man.

(a) Sense and flesh tend to make us think the visible and material the

best.

(b) Our peculiar position here in a great commercial centre powerfully

reinforces this tendency.

(c) The prevailing current of this age is all in the same direction.

The growth of luxury, the increase of wealth, and set of thought,

threaten us with a period when not only religious thought will fail,

but when all faith, enthusiasm, all poetry and philosophy, the very

conception of God and duty, all idealism, all that is unseen, will be

scouted among men. Naturalism does not fulfil its own boast of dealing

with facts; there are more facts than can be seen. So the first thing

is to settle it in our minds, in opposition to our own selves and to

prevailing tendencies, that truth is better than money, that pure

affections and moderate desires and a heart set on God are richer

wealth than all external possessions.

2. Desire that follows the corrected judgment. It is one thing to know

all this, another to wrench our wishes loose from earth.

3. A practical life that obeys the impulse of the desire. Christ's

command and prohibition here do not refer only to a certain course of

action, but to a certain motive and purpose in action, and to actions

drawn from these. If we obey Christ we shall lead lives obviously

different from those which are based upon an estimate which we are to

reject; but the main thing is to live and work with an eye to the

eternal, not the temporal, results of our doings. We are to administer

our lives as God does His providence, using the temporal only as means

to an end, the eternal. We are to live to be God-like, to love God, and

be loved by Him.

There is here the idea of which we are somewhat too much afraid, that

our life on earth adds to the rewards of blessedness in heaven. The

idea of reward is emphatically and often inculcated in Scripture,

however much a mistaken jealousy for the doctrines of Grace' may be

chary of it. We need only recall such words as They shall walk with Me

in white, for they are worthy'; or, Laying up in store for themselves a

good foundation'; or, Thou shalt have treasure in heaven.' If people

would only think of heaven less carnally, and would regard it as the

perfection of holiness, there would be no difficulty in the notion of

reward. Men get there what they have made themselves fit for here.

Their works do follow them.'

II. The foes of the earthly, which are powerless against the heavenly.

The imagery implies a comparatively simple state of society and

primitive treasures. Moths gnaw rich garments. Rust, or more properly

corruption, would get into a man's barns and vineyards, hay-crops and

fruits. Thieves would steal the hoard that he had laid by, for want of

better investment. Or to generalise, corruption, the natural process of

wearing away, natural enemies proper to each kind of possession, human

agency which takes away all external possessions--these multifarious

agents co-operate to render impossible the permanent possession of any

treasure on earth.'

On the other hand, what a man has laid up in heaven, and what he is

partially here, have no tendency to grow old. Men never weary of God,

never find Him failing, never exhaust truth, never drink the love of

God to the dregs, never find purity palling upon the taste, Age cannot

wither, nor custom stale, "their" infinite variety.'

Treasure in heaven' has no enemies which destroy it. Every earthly

possession has its own foes, every earthly joy has its own destructive

opposite; but nothing touches this treasure in heaven.

It has nothing to fear from men. Nobody can take it out of a man's soul

but himself. The inmost circle of our life is inviolable. It is

incorruptible and undefiled and fadeth not away, for it all comes from

the eternal God and our eternal union to Him. He is our portion for

ever.

III. The madness of fastening the heart down to earth.

The heart must be in heaven in order to find its true home. It is

unnatural, contrary to the constitution of the heart' that it should be

fettered to earth.

If it is, it will be restless and unsatisfied.

If it is, it will be at the mercy of all these enemies.

If it is, what will happen when the man is no longer on earth? What

shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own

soul?'

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HEARTS AND TREASURES

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'--MATT. vi.

21.

Your treasure' is probably not the same as your neighbour's. It is

yours, whether you possess it or not, because you love it. For what our

Lord means here by treasure' is not merely money, or material good, but

whatever each man thinks best, that which he most eagerly strives to

attain, that which he most dreads to lose, that which, if he has, he

thinks he will be blessed, that which, if he has it not, he knows he is

discontented.

Now, if that is the meaning of treasure,' then this great saying of nay

text is, as a matter of course, true. For what in each case makes the

treasure is precisely the going out of the heart to grapple it, and it

is just because the heart is there that a thing is the treasure.

Now, I need not do more than remind you, I suppose, that in Scripture

heart' means a great deal more than it does in our modern usage, for we

employ it as an expression for the affections, whereas the Bible takes

it as including the whole inner man. For instance, we read, As a man

thinketh in his heart, so is he'; and of the thoughts and intents of

the heart.' So then the affections, as with us, but also thoughts,

purposes, volitions, are all included in the word; and as one passage

of Scripture says, Out of it are the issues of life.' It is the central

reservoir, the central personality, the indivisible unit of the

thinking, willing, feeling, loving person which I call myself.' So what

Christ says is that where a man's treasure lies, not merely his

affections will twine round it, but his whole self will be, as it were,

implicated and intertwisted with it, so as that what befalls it will

befall him.

Now, further, notice that this saying, so obviously true, is introduced

by a for,' and that it is the broad basis on which rest the obligation

and the wisdom of the double counsel which has preceded, on the one

hand, the warning against choosing perishable and uncertain good for

our treasure, and mixing ourselves up with that, and on the other the

loving counsel to choose for ourselves the wealth which is perpetual,

unprecarious, and certain.

So I think we may look at these words from a threefold point of view,

and see in them a mirror that will show us ourselves, a dissuasive and

a persuasive. Let us take these three aspects.

I. Here, then, is a mirror that a man may hold up before himself, and

find out something about himself by it.

For, like other general statements of the same sort, you can turn this

saying round about, and take it the other way, and not only say, as the

text says, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' but,

where your heart is, there is your treasure.' A man's real god is the

thing that he counts best, and for which he works most earnestly, and

which, as I said, he most longs to have, and trembles to think he will

lose. That is his god, and his treasure, whatever his professions may

be. Where your heart is, there is your treasure.

Now, of course, for the larger part of the lives of all of us, there

are certain lines laid down by our circumstances, our trades, our

various duties, on which the train of our thoughts and efforts must

run. But the question is, When I am set free from the constraint of my

daily avocations and pressing duties, and am at liberty to go as I

like, where do I go? When the weight is taken off the sapling in the

nursery garden, which has been hung on it to turn it into a

weeping-tree, its elastic stem springs to the erect position. Where do

I spring to when the weights are taken off? The mother bird will hover

over her nest. Where her treasure is, there is her maternal instinct.

The needle follows the drawing of the pole-star; the sunflower turns to

the sun. Being let go, they went to their own company.' Where do you

go? The reins laid upon the horse's neck, it will trot straight home to

its stable; the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib,'

and our instincts are not less sure than theirs. You go home' when you

are left to yourselves; where do you go?

We call ourselves Christians. If our treasure is in Christ, our hearts

will turn to Him. And what does that mean? Hearts,' as I said, mean

thoughts. Now, can you and I say, In the multitude of my thoughts

within me, Thy comforts delight my soul'? Does there come stealing into

my mind often and often the blessed contemplation of my wealth in Jesus

Christ? The river of thought brings down, in its continual flow, much

mire and sand. Does it bring any gold? Do I think about Christ, and

find it to be my refreshment to do so? An old mystic said, If I can

tell how often I have thought of God to-day, I have not thought of Him

often enough.' Where your treasure is, there will your thoughts be

also.'

The heart means love. Where do my affections turn when I am set free?

The heart means the will. Is my will all saturated with, and so made

pliant by, the will and commandment of Jesus Christ? If He is my

treasure, then thoughts, affection, obedience will all turn to Him, and

the current of my being, whatever may be the surface-ripple--ay, or the

surface-storm--will be ever sliding surely, though it may be silently,

towards Himself. Ah! brethren, if we would be honest with ourselves and

look into this mirror, we should have cause to be ashamed, some of us,

of our very profession of being Christians, and all of us to feel that

we have far too much heaped up for ourselves other treasures and

forgotten our true wealth, and we should all have to pray, Unite my

heart to fear Thy name.' The Assyrians had a superstition that a demon,

if he saw his own reflection in a mirror, would fly. I think if some of

us professing Christians saw ourselves, as the looking-glass of my text

might give us to see ourselves, we should shudderingly depart from that

self, and seek to have a better self formed within us. Where your

treasure is, there will your heart be also.'

II. Now let me ask you to look at this saying, in the connection in

which our Lord adduced it, as being a dissuasive.

He applies it to both branches of His previous advice. He had just

said, Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust

doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.' These are

very primitive methods of depriving men of their treasures, arguing a

comparatively simple state of society. The moth is that which destroys

wealth in garments, which was a great part of ancient Eastern wealth.

Rust rather means corrosion, or corruption, and applies to the other

great kind of primitive wealth, in food and the stores of the harvest.

And the thieves who dig through the mud wall of the house, and carry

away the owners' little hoard of gold and silver, point also to a

primitive condition of society. But whatever may be the special force

of these different words, they suggest to us this, that all that is

here has its own particular and special enemy which wars against its

permanence. There are bacteria of all sorts, every vegetable has its

own kind. Every growth has to fear the gnawing of some foe. And so

every treasure that I can gather into my heart, excepting one, is

threatened by some kind of danger.

No man can have lived as long in a great commercial community, as some

of us have done, without knowing that there are a great many besides

professional and so-called thieves in it, that take away the gold and

silver. How many instances I can look back upon, of lords of the

exchange and magnates of trade, who carved their names, as they

thought, in imperishable marble on the doors of their warehouses, and

then became bankrupt and fugitive, and were lost sight of. We all know

the uncertainty of riches.

And are the other kinds of treasure that we cleave to more reliable?

Have they not their moths and their rusts? Is it pleasure? Well, I say

nothing about the diseases that fill the bones of many a young man who

flings himself into dissipation; but I remind you of just this one

thing, that all that pleasure tends to become flat, stale, and

unprofitable. That which the poet said of his own class, that it begins

in gladness, and thereof cometh in the end despondency and madness,' is

true of every delight of sense, ay! and of more than sense, of taste

and of intellect. As the Book of Proverbs has it, the end of that mirth

is heaviness.'

Brethren, the moth and the rust claim as their prey all treasures

except one. Is it love-pure, blessed, soul-filling, soul-resting as it

is? Yes, and on a hundred walls in any city there hangs, and in a

thousand hearts there hangs, that great picture where the feeble form

of Love is trying to repel from entrance into the rose-covered portal

of the home the inevitable and mighty shrouded form of Death. Is it

culture? Whether there be tongues they shall cease; whether there be

knowledge it shall vanish away.' The last illuminator and teacher,

which is Death, antiquates and brushes aside, as of no use in the new

conditions, most of the knowledge which men, wisely in a measure, but

foolishly if exclusively, have sought to acquire for themselves here

below.

And when the moth and the rust come, and the separating, bony fingers

of the skeleton Death filch away at last your treasure, what about you

who are wrapped up with it, implicated in it; so grown into it, and it

into you, that to wrench you from it opens your veins, and you bleed to

death? There is a pathetic inscription in one of the rural churches of

this country, in which two parents record the death of their only

child, and add, All our hopes were in this frail bark, and the

shipwreck is total.' I have heard of a man that might have been saved

from a foundering ship, but he lashed his money-bags round him, and he

sank along with them. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be

also,' pierced by all the wounds, gnawed by all the moths, rotted by

all the corruption that affects it, and when the thief, the last great

thief of all, comes, you will only have to say, They have taken away my

gods, and what have I more?' And the answer out of the waste places of

an echoing universe will be, Nothing! Nothing!'

III. Now, lastly, let me show you the persuasive in my text.

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' therefore, says

Christ, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth

nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and

steal.' If my treasure is in heaven it is secure. And oh! brethren, we

need for our blessedness, we need for our rest, we need for our peace

and joy, to know that the thing which we count best shall never be

taken away from us, and we cannot have that certainty in regard to any

treasure except the treasure that is in God. All outward things which

we say we possess are incompletely possessed, because they remain

outside us. However intertwined with them, we are separate from them,

and we are just so much intertwined with them that the separation from

them is agony, even if it is not death. What we need is to be so

incorporated with, and infused into, what is our treasure, that we are

quite sure that as long as we last it will last, and that nothing can

rend it from us. I bear all my goods with me,' said the old heathen. We

should be able to say more than that. I carry all my good in me,

because my good is God, who is in the heavens, and though in the

heavens, dwells in the hearts that love Him. Then in all changes, life,

or death, or things present or things to come, height or depth, or any

other creature,' we can afford to smile on, and say: You cannot take my

wealth from me, for I am in God, and God is in me.'

Further, if our hearts are in heaven, then heaven will be in our

hearts, and here we shall know the joy and the peace that come from

sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,' even whilst on earth.

There is no blessedness, no stable repose, no victorious independence

of the buffets and blows of life, except this, that my heart is lifted

above them all, and, I was going to say, is inhaled and sucked into the

life of Jesus Christ. Then if my heart is where my treasure is, and He

is my treasure,' my life is hid with Christ in God.' If my heart is in

heaven, heaven is in my heart.

Further, my text is a promise as well as a statement of a present fact.

Where your treasure now is there will your whole self one day be. A man

who has by God's grace, through faith and love and the wise use of

things temporal, chosen God his chief good, and possessed in some

degree the good which he has chosen, even Jesus Christ in his heart,

that man bears in himself the pledge and the foretaste of eternal life.

So the old psalmist found out, who lived in a time when that future

world was shrouded in far thicker clouds of darkness than it is to us,

for when he had risen to the height of saying, My flesh and my heart

faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever,'

he immediately sprang to this assurance--an assurance of faith before

it was a fact certified by Revelation--Thou wilt guide me by Thy

counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' The possession of Christ

for our treasure, which possession always follows on our estimating Him

as such, and desiring to have Him, that possession bears in its bosom

the germ of the assurance that, whatever befalls my physical life, I

shall not be less immortal than my treasure, and that where my heart

to-day, by aspiration and desire and faith and love, has built its

nest, thither I shall follow in His own time. They that have laid up

treasure in heaven will at last be brought to the enjoyment of the

treasure that they have laid up, and to the possession of the

inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not

away.'

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ANXIOUS CARE

Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. 25. Therefore I say unto you. Take no

thought for your life.'--MATT. vi. 24-25.

Foresight and foreboding are two very different things. It is not that

the one is the exaggeration of the other, but the one is opposed to the

other. The more a man looks forward in the exercise of foresight, the

less he does so in the exercise of foreboding. And the more he is

tortured by anxious thoughts about a possible future, the less clear

vision has he of a likely future, and the less power to influence it.

When Christ here, therefore, enjoins the abstinence from thought for

our life and for the future, it is not for the sake of getting away

from the pressure of a very unpleasant command that we say, He does not

mean to prevent the exercise of wise and provident foresight and

preparation for what is to come. When this English version of ours was

made, the phrase taking thought' meant solicitous anxiety, and that is

the true rendering and proper meaning of the original. The idea is,

therefore, that here there is forbidden for a Christian, not the

careful preparation for what is likely to come, not the foresight of

the storm and taking in sail while yet there is time, but the constant

occupation and distraction of the heart with gazing forward, and

fearing and being weakened thereby; or to come back to words already

used, foresight is commanded, and, therefore, foreboding is forbidden.

My object now is to endeavour to gather together by their link of

connection, the whole of those precepts which follow my text to the

close of the chapter; and to try to set before you, in the order in

which they stand, and in their organic connection with each other, the

reasons which Christ gives for the absence of anxious care from our

minds.

I mass them all into three. If you notice, the whole section, to the

end of the chapter, is divided into three parts, by the threefold

repetition of the injunction, Take no thought.' Take no thought for

your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your

body, what ye shall put on.' The reason for the command as given in

this first section follows:--Is not the life more than meat, and the

body than raiment?' The expansion of that thought runs on to the close

of the thirtieth verse. Then there follows another division or section

of the whole, marked by the repetition of the command, Take no

thought,'--saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or,

Wherewithal shall we be clothed?' The reason given for the command in

this second section is--(for after all these things do the Gentiles

seek): for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these

things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God.' And then follows a third

section, marked by the third repetition of the command, Take no

thought--for the morrow.' The reason given for the command in this

third section is--for the morrow shall take thought for the things of

itself.'

Now if we try to generalise the lessons that lie in these three great

divisions of the section, we get, I think, first,--anxious thought is

contrary to all the lessons of nature, which show it to be unnecessary.

That is the first, the longest section. Then, secondly, anxious thought

is contrary to all the lessons of revelation or religion, which show it

to be heathenish. And lastly, anxious thought is contrary to the whole

scheme of Providence, which shows it to be futile. You do not need to

be anxious. It is wicked to be anxious. It is of no use to be anxious.

These are the three points,--anxious care is contrary to the lessons of

Nature; contrary to the great principles of the Gospel; and contrary to

the scheme of Providence. Let us try now simply to follow the course of

thought in our Lord's illustration of these three principles.

I. The first is the consideration of the teaching of Nature. Take no

thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor

yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than

meat, and the body than raiment?' And then comes the illustration of

the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field.

The whole of these verses fall into these general thoughts: You are

obliged to trust God for your body, for its structure, for its form,

for its habitudes, and for the length of your being; you are obliged to

trust Him for the foundation--trust Him for the superstructure. You are

obliged to trust Him, whether you will or not, for the greater--trust

Him gladly for the less. You cannot help being dependent. After all

your anxiety, it is only directed to the providing of the things that

are needful for the life; the life itself, though it is a natural

thing, comes direct from God's hand; and all that you can do, with all

your carking cares, and laborious days, and sleepless nights, is but to

adorn a little more beautifully or a little less beautifully, the

allotted span--but to feed a little more delicately or a little less

delicately, the body which God has given you. What is the use of being

careful for food and raiment, when down below these necessities there

lies the awful question--for the answer to which you have to hang

helpless, in implicit, powerless dependence upon God,--Shall I live, or

shall I die? shall I have a body instinct with vitality, or a body

crumbling amidst the clods of the valley? After all your work, your

anxiety gets but such a little way down; like some passing shower of

rain, that only softens an inch of the hard-baked surface of the soil,

and has no power to fructify the seed that lies feet below the reach of

its useless moisture. Anxious care is foolish; for far beyond the

region within which your anxieties move, there is the greater region in

which there must be entire dependence upon God. Is not the life more

than meat? Is not the body more than raiment?' You must trust Him for

these; you may as well trust Him for all the rest.

Then, again, there comes up this other thought: Not only are you

compelled to exercise unanxious dependence in regard to a matter which

you cannot influence--the life of the body--and that is the greater;

but, still further, God gives you that. Very well: God gives you the

greater; and God's great gifts are always inclusive of God's little

gifts. When He bestows a thing, He bestows all the consequences of the

thing as well. When He gives a life, He swears by the gift, that He

will give what is needful to sustain it. God does not stop half way in

any of His bestowments. He gives royally and liberally, honestly and

sincerely, logically and completely. When He bestows a life, therefore,

you may be quite sure that He is not going to stultify His own gift by

retaining unbestowed anything that is wanted for its blessing and its

power. You have had to trust Him for the greater; trust Him for the

less. He has given you the greater--no doubt He will give you the less.

The life is more than meat, and the body than raiment.' Which of you,

by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye

thought for raiment?'

Then there is another thought. Look at God's ways of doing with all His

creatures. The animate and the inanimate creation are appealed to, the

fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, the one in reference to

food and the other in reference to clothing, which are the two great

wants already spoken of by Christ in the previous verses. I am not

going to linger at all on the exquisite beauty of these illustrations.

Every sensitive heart and pure eye dwell upon them with delight. The

fowls of the air,' the lilies of the field,' they toil not, neither do

they spin'; and then, with what an eye for the beauty of God's

universe,--Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of

these!' Now, what is the force of this consideration? It is this--

There is a specimen, in an inferior creation, of the divine care which

you can trust, you men who are better than they.' And not only that:--

There is an instance, not only of God's giving things that are

necessary, but of God's giving more, lavishing beauty upon the flowers

of the field. I do not think that we sufficiently dwell upon the moral

and spiritual uses of beauty in God's universe. That everywhere His

loving, wooing hand should touch the flower into grace, and deck all

barren places with glory and with fairness--what does that reveal to us

about Him? It says to us, He does not give scantily: it is not the mere

measure of what is wanted, absolutely needed, to support a bare

existence, that God bestows. He taketh pleasure in the prosperity of

His servants.' Joy, and love, and beauty, belong to Him; and the smile

upon His face that comes from the contemplation of His own fairness

flung out into His glorious creation, is a prophecy of the gladness

that comes into His heart from His own holiness and more ethereal

beauty adorning the spiritual creatures whom He has made to flash back

His likeness. The flowers of the field are so clothed that we may learn

the lesson that it is a fair Spirit, and a loving Spirit, and a

bountiful Spirit, and a royal Heart, that presides over the bestowments

of creation, and allots gifts to men.

But notice further, how much of the force of what Christ says here

depends on the consideration of the inferiority of these creatures who

are thus blessed; and also notice what are the particulars of that

inferiority. We read that verse, They sow not, neither do they reap,

nor gather into barns,' as if it marked out a particular in which their

free and untoilsome lives were superior to ours. It is the very

opposite. It is part of the characteristics that mark them as lower

than we, that they have not to work for the future. They reap not, they

sow not, they gather not;--are ye not much better than they? Better in

this, amongst other things, that God has given us the privilege of

influencing the future by our faithful toil, by the sweat of our brow

and the labour of our hands. These creatures labour not, and yet they

are fed. And the lesson for us is--much more may we, whom God has

blessed with the power of work, and gifted with force to mould the

future, be sure that He will bless the exercise of the prerogative by

which He exalts us above inferior creatures, and makes us capable of

toil. You can influence to-morrow. What you can influence by work, fret

not about, for you can work. What you cannot influence by work, fret

not about, for it is vain. They toil not, neither do they spin.' You

are lifted above them because God has given you hands that can grasp

the tool or the pen. Man's crown of glory, as well as man's curse and

punishment, is, In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.' So

learn what you have to do with that great power of anticipation. It is

meant to be the guide of wise work. It is meant to be the support for

far-reaching, strenuous action. It is meant to elevate us above mere

living from hand to mouth; to ennoble our whole being by leading to and

directing toil that is blessed because there is no anxiety in it,

labour that will be successful since it is according to the will of

that God who has endowed us with the power of putting it forth.

Then there comes another inferiority. Your heavenly Father feedeth

them.' They cannot say Father!' and yet they are fed. You are above

them by the prerogative of toil. You are above them by the nearer

relation which you sustain to your Father in heaven. He is their Maker,

and lavishes His goodness upon them: He is your Father, and He will not

forget His child. They cannot trust: you can. They might be anxious, if

they could look forward, for they know not the hand that feeds them;

but you can turn round, and recognise the source of all blessings. So,

doubly ought you to be guarded from care by the lesson of that free

joyful Nature that lies round about you, and to say, I have no fear of

famine, nor of poverty, nor of want; for He feedeth the ravens when

they cry. There is no reason for distrust. Shame on me if I am anxious,

for every lily of the field blows its beauty, and every bird of the air

carols its song without sorrowful foreboding, and yet there is no

Father in heaven to them!'

And the last Inferiority is this; To-day it is, and to-morrow it is

cast into the oven.' Their little life is thus blessed and brightened.

Oh, how much greater will be the mercies that belong to them who have a

longer life upon earth, and who never die! The lesson is not--These are

the plebeians in God's universe, and you are the aristocracy, and you

may trust Him; but it is--They, by their inferior place, have lesser

and lower wants, wants but for a bounded being, wants that stretch not

beyond earthly existence, and that for a brief span. They are blessed

in the present, for the oven to-morrow saddens not the blossoming

to-day. You have nobler necessities and higher longings, wants that

belong to a soul that never dies, to a nature which may glow with the

consciousness that God is your Father, wants which look before and

after,' therefore, you are better than they'; and shall He not much

more clothe you, O ye of little faith?'

II. And now, in the second place, there is here another general line of

considerations tending to dispel all anxious care--the thought that it

is contrary to all the lessons of Religion, or Revelation, which show

it to be heathenish.

There are three clauses devoted to the illustration of this thought:

After all these things do the Gentiles seek'; your heavenly Father

knoweth that ye have need of all these things'; seek ye first the

kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be

added unto you.'

The first clause contains the principle, that solicitude for the future

is at bottom heathen worldly-mindedness. The heathen tendency in us all

leads to an overestimate of material good, and it is a question of

circumstances whether that shall show itself in heaping up earthly

treasures, or in anxious care. These are the same plant, only the one

is growing in the tropics of sunny prosperity, and the other in the

arctic zone of chill penury. The one is the sin of the worldly-minded

rich man, the other is the sin of the worldly-minded poor man. The

character is the same in both, turned inside out! And, therefore, the

words, ye cannot serve God and Mammon,' stand in this chapter in the

centre between our Lord's warning against laying up treasures on earth,

and His warning against being full of cares for earth. He would show us

thereby that these two apparently opposite states of mind in reality

spring from that one root, and are equally, though differently, serving

Mammon.' We do not sufficiently reflect upon that. We say, perhaps,

this intense solicitude of ours is a matter of temperament, or of

circumstances. So it may be: but the Gospel was sent to help us to cure

worldly temperaments, and to master circumstances. But the reason why

we are troubled and careful about the things of this life lies here,

that our hearts have taken an earthly direction, that we are at bottom

heathenish in our lives and in our desires. It is the very

characteristic of the Gentile (that is to say, of the heathen) that

earth should bound his horizon. It is the very characteristic of the

worldly man that all his anxieties on the one hand, and all his joys on

the other, should be cribbed, cabined and confined' within the narrow

sphere of the visible. When a Christian is living in the foreboding of

some earthly sorrow coming down upon him, and is feeling as if there

would be nothing left if some earthly treasure were swept away, is that

not, in the very root of it, idolatry--worldly-mindedness? Is it not

clean contrary to all our profession that for us there is none upon

earth that we desire besides Thee'? Anxious care rests upon a basis of

heathen worldly-mindedness.

Anxious care rests upon a basis, too, of heathen misunderstanding of

the character of God. Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need

of all these things.' The heathen thought of God is that He is far

removed from our perplexities, either ignorant of our struggles, or

unsympathising with them. The Christian has the double armour against

anxiety--the name of the Father, and the conviction that the Father's

knowledge is co-extensive with the Father's love. He who calls us His

children thoroughly understands what His children want. And so, anxiety

is contrary to the very name by which we have learned to call God, and

to the pledge of pitying care and perfect knowledge of our frame which

lies in the words our Father.' Our Father is the name of God, and our

Father intensely cares for us, and lovingly does all things for us.

And then, still further, Christ points out here, not only what is the

real root of this solicitous care--something very like

worldly-mindedness, heathen worldly-mindedness; but He points out what

is the one counterpoise of it--seek first the kingdom of God.' It is of

no use only to tell men that they ought to trust, that the birds of the

air might teach them to trust, that the flowers of the field might

preach resignation and confidence to them. It is of no use to attempt

to scold them into trust, by telling them that distrust is heathenish.

You must fill the heart with a supreme and transcendent desire after

the one supreme object, and then there will be no room or leisure left

for anxious care after the lesser. Have inwrought into your being,

Christian man, the opposite of that heathen over-regard for earthly

things. Seek first the kingdom of God.' Let all your spirit be

stretching itself out towards that divine and blessed reality, longing

to be a subject of that kingdom, and a possessor of that righteousness;

and the cares that infest the day' will steal away from out of the

sacred pavilion of your believing spirit. Fill your heart with desires

after what is worthy of desire; and the greater having entered in, all

lesser objects will rank themselves in the right place, and the glory

that excelleth' will outshine the seducing brightness of the paltry

present. Oh! it is want of love, it is want of earnest desire, it is

want of firm conviction that God, God only, God by Himself, is enough

for me, that makes me careful and troubled. And therefore, if I could

only attain unto that sublime and calm height of perfect conviction,

that He is sufficient for me, that He is with me for ever,--the

satisfying object of my desires and the glorious reward of my

searchings,--let life and death come as they may, let riches, poverty,

health, sickness, all the antitheses of human circumstances storm down

upon me in quick alternation, yet in them all I shall be content and

peaceful. God is beside me, and His presence brings in its train

whatsoever things I need. You cannot cast out the sin of foreboding

thoughts by any power short of the entrance of Christ and His love. The

blessings of faith and felt communion leave no room nor leisure for

anxiety.

III. Finally, Christ here tells us, that thought for the morrow is

contrary to all the scheme of Providence, which shows it to be vain.

The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto

the day is the evil thereof.'

I interpret these two clauses as meaning this: To-morrow has anxieties

enough of its own, alter and in spite of all the anxieties about it

to-day by which you try to free it from care when it comes. Every

day--every day will have its evil, have it to the end. And every day

will have evil enough to task all the strength that a man has to cope

with it. So that it just comes to this: Anxiety,--it is all vain. After

all your careful watching for the corner of the heaven where the cloud

is to come from, there will be a cloud, and it will rise somewhere, but

you never know beforehand from what quarter. The morrow shall have its

own anxieties. After all your fortifying of the castle of your life,

there will be some little postern left unguarded, some little weak

place in the wall left uncommanded by a battery; and there, where you

never looked for him, the inevitable invader will come in. After all

the plunging of the hero in the fabled waters that made him

invulnerable, there was the little spot on the heel, and the arrow

found its way there? There is nothing certain to happen, says the

proverb, but the unforeseen. To-morrow will have its cares, spite of

anything that anxiety and foreboding can do. It is God's law of

Providence that a man shall be disciplined by sorrow; and to try to

escape from that law by any forecasting prudence, is utterly hopeless,

and madness.

And what does your anxiety do? It does not empty to-morrow, brother, of

its sorrows; but, ah! it empties to-day of its strength. It does not

enable you to escape the evil, it makes you unfit to cope with it when

it comes. It does not bless to-morrow, but it robs to-day. For every

day has its own burden. Sufficient for each day is the evil which

properly belongs to it. Do not add to-morrow's to to-day's. Do not drag

the future into the present. The present has enough to do with its own

proper concerns. We have always strength to bear the evil when it

comes. We have not strength to bear the foreboding of it. As thy day,

thy strength shall be.' In strict proportion to the existing exigencies

will be the God-given power; but if you cram and condense to-day's

sorrows by experience, and to-morrow's sorrows by anticipation, into

the narrow round of the one four-and-twenty hours, there is no promise

that as that day thy strength shall be.' God gives us (His name be

praised!)--God gives us power to bear all the sorrows of His making;

but He does not give us power to bear the sorrows of our own making,

which the anticipation of sorrow most assuredly is.

Then: contrary to the lessons of Nature, contrary to the teachings of

Religion, contrary to the scheme of Providence; weakening your

strength, distracting your mind, sucking the sunshine out of every

landscape, and casting a shadow over all the beauty--the curse of our

lives is that heathenish, blind, useless, faithless, needless anxiety

in which we do indulge. Look forward, my brother, for God has given you

that royal and wonderful gift of dwelling in the future, and bringing

all its glories around your present. Look forward, not for life, but

for heaven; not for food and raiment, but for the righteousness after

which it is blessed to hunger and thirst, and wherewith it is blessed

to be clothed. Not for earth, but for heaven, let your forecasting gift

of prophecy come into play. Fill the present with quiet faith, with

patient waiting, with honest work, with wise reading of God's lessons

of nature, of providence, and of grace, all of which say to us, Live in

God's future, that the present may be bright: work in the present, that

the future may be certain! They may well look around in expectation,

sunny and unclouded, of a blessed time to come, whose hearts are

already fixed, trusting in the Lord.' He to whom there are a present

Christ, and a present Spirit, and a present Father, and a present

forgiveness, and a present redemption, may well live expatiating in all

the glorious distance of the unknown to come, sending out (if I may use

such a figure) from his placid heart over all the weltering waters of

this lower world, the peaceful seeking dove, his meek hope, that shall

come back again from its flight with some palm-branch broken from the

trees of Paradise between its bill. And he that has no such present has

a future dark, chaotic, a heaving, destructive ocean; and over it there

goes for ever--black-pinioned, winging its solitary and hopeless

flight--the raven of his anxious thoughts, which finds no place to

rest, and comes back again to the desolate ark with its foreboding

croak of evil in the present and evil in the future. Live in Christ,

the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever'; and His presence shall

make all your past, present, and future--memory, enjoyment, and

hope--to be bright and beautiful, because all are centred in Him.

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JUDGING, ASKING, AND GIVING

Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2. For with what judgment ye judge,

ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured

to you again. 3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy

brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of

thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye! 5. Thou hypocrite,

first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see

clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. 6. Give not that

which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine,

lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

7. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and

it shall be opened unto you: 8. For every one that asketh receiveth;

and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be

opened. 9. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will

he give him a stone? 10. Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a

serpent? 11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto

your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give

good things to them that ask Him? 12. Therefore all things whatsoever

ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is

the law and the prophets.'--MATT. vii. 1-12.

I. How can we help judging,' and why should we not judge'? The power of

seeing into character is to be coveted and cultivated, and the absence

of it makes simpletons, not saints. Quite true: but seeing into

character is not what Jesus is condemning here. The judging' of which

He speaks sees motes in a brother's eye. That is to say, it is

one-sided, and fixes on faults, which it magnifies, passing by virtues.

Carrion flies that buzz with a sickening hum of satisfaction over

sores, and prefer corruption to soundness, are as good judges of meat

as such critics are of character. That Mephistophelean spirit of

detraction has wide scope in this day. Literature and politics, as well

as social life with its rivalries, are infested by it, and it finds its

way into the church and threatens us all. The race of fault-finders we

have always with us, blind as moles to beauties and goodness, but

lynx-eyed for failings, and finding meat and drink in proclaiming them

in tones of affected sorrow. How flagrant a breach of the laws of the

kingdom this temper implies, and how grave an evil it is, though

thought little of, or even admired as cleverness and a mark of a very

superior person, Christ shows us by this earnest warning, embedded

among His fundamental moral teachings.

He points out first how certainly that disposition provokes

retaliation. Who is the Judge that judges us as we do others? Perhaps

it is best to say that both the divine and the human estimates are

included in the purposely undefined expression. Certainly both are

included in fact. For a carping spirit of eager fault-finding

necessarily tinges people's feelings towards its possessor, and he

cannot complain if the severe tests which he applied to others are used

on his own conduct. A cynical critic cannot expect his victims to be

profoundly attached to him, or ready to be lenient to his failings. If

he chooses to fight with a tomahawk, he will be scalped some day, and

the bystanders will not lament profusely. But a more righteous tribunal

than that of his victims condemns him. For in God's eyes the man who

covers not his neighbour's faults with the mantle of charity has not

his own blotted out by divine forgiveness.

This spirit is always accompanied by ignorance of one's own faults,

which makes him who indulges in it ludicrous. So our Lord would seem to

intend by the figure of the mote and the beam. It takes a great deal of

close peering to see a mote; but the censorious man sees only the mote,

and sees it out of scale. No matter how bright the eye, though it be

clear as a hawk's, its beauty is of no moment to him. The mote

magnified, and nothing but the mote, is his object; and he calls this

one-sided exaggeration criticism,' and prides himself on the accuracy

of his judgment. He makes just the opposite mistake in his estimate of

his own faults, if he sees them at all. We look at our neighbour's

errors with a microscope, and at our own through the wrong end of a

telescope. We see neither in their real magnitude, and the former

mistake is sure to lead to the latter. We have two sets of weights and

measures: one for home use, the other for foreign. Every vice has two

names; and we call it by its flattering and minimising one when we

commit it, and by its ugly one when our neighbour does it. Everybody

can see the hump on his friend's shoulders, but it takes some effort to

see our own. David was angry enough at the man who stole his

neighbour's ewe lamb, but quite unaware that he was guilty of a meaner,

crueller theft. The mote can be seen; but the beam, big though it is,

needs to be considered.' So it often escapes notice, and will surely do

so, if we are yielding to the temptation of harsh judgment of others.

Every one may be aware of faults of his own very much bigger than any

that he can see in another, for each of us may fathom the depth of our

own sinfulness in motive and unspoken, unacted thought, while we can

see only the surface acts of others.

Our Lord points out, in verse 4, a still more subtle form of this harsh

judgment, when it assumes the appearance of solicitude for the

improvement of others, and He thus teaches us that all honest desire to

help in the moral reformation of our neighbours must be preceded by

earnest efforts at mending our own conduct. If we have grave faults of

our own undetected and unconquered, we are incapable either of judging

or of helping our brethren. Such efforts will be hypocritical, for they

pretend to come from genuine zeal for righteousness and care for

another's good, whereas their real root is simply censorious

exaggeration of a neighbour's faults; they imply that the person

affected with such a tender care for another's eyes has his own in good

condition. A blind guide is bad enough, but a blind oculist is a still

more ridiculous anomaly. Note, too, that the result of clearing our own

vision is beautifully put as being, not ability to see, but ability to

cure, our fellows. It is only the experience of the pain of casting out

a darling evil, and the consciousness of God's pitying mercy as given

to us, that makes the eye keen enough, and the hand steady and gentle

enough, to pull out the mote. It is a delicate operation, and one which

a clumsy operator may make very painful, and useless, after all. A

rough finger or a harsh spirit makes success impossible.

II. Verse 6 comes in singular juxtaposition with the preceding warning

against uncharitable judgments. Christ's calling men dogs and swine

does not sound like obeying His own precept. But the very shock which

the words give at first hearing is part of their value. There are men

whom Jesus, for all His gentleness, has to estimate thus. His pitying

eyes were not blind to truth. It was no breach of infinite charity in

Him to see facts, and to give them their right names; and His previous

precept does not bid us shut our eyes, or give up the use of common

sense. This verse limits the application of the preceding one, and

inculcates prudence, tact, and discernment of character, as no less

essential to His servants than the sweet charity, slow to suspect and

sorrowful to expose a brother's fault. The fact that His gentle lips

used such words may well make us shudder as we think of the deforming

of human nature into pure animalism which some men achieve, and which

is possible for all.

The inculcation of discretion in the presentation of the truth may

easily be exaggerated into a doctrine of reserve which is more

Jesuitical than Christian. Even when guarded and limited, it may seem

scarcely in harmony with the commission to preach the gospel to every

creature, or with the sublime confidence that God's word finds

something to appeal to in every heart, and has power to subdue the

animal in every man. But the divergence is only apparent. The most

expansive zeal is to be guided by prudence, and the most enthusiastic

confidence in the universal power of the gospel does not take leave of

common sense. There are people who will certainly be repelled, and

perhaps stirred to furious antagonism to the gospel and its messengers,

if they are not approached with discretion. It is bad to hide the

treasure in a napkin; it is quite as bad to fling it down before some

people without preparation. Jesus Himself locked His lips before Herod,

although the curious ruler asked many questions; and we have sometimes

to remember that there are people who will not hear the word,' and who

must first be won without the word.' Heavy rains run off hard-baked

earth. It must first be softened by a gentle drizzle. Luther once told

this fable: The lion made a great feast, and he invited all the beasts,

and among the rest, a sow. When all manner of costly dishes were set

before the guests, the sow asked, "Have you no bran?" Even so, said he,

we preachers set forth the most dainty dishes,--the forgiveness of

sins, and the grace of God; but they turn up their snouts, and grub for

guilders.'

This precept is one side of the truth. The other is the adaptation of

the gospel to all men, and the obligation on us to preach it to all. We

can only tell most men's disposition towards it by offering it to them,

and we are not to be in a hurry to conclude that men are dogs and

swine.

III. It may be a question whether, in verse 8, the emphasis is to be

laid on every one' or on that asketh,' or, in other words, whether the

saying is an assurance that the universal law will be followed in our

case, or a statement of the universal condition without which no

receiving is possible, and, least of all, the receiving of the gifts of

the kingdom by its subjects. In either case, this verse gives the

reason for the preceding exhortation. Then follows the tender

illustration in which the dim-sighted love of earthly fathers is taken

as a parable of the all-wise tenderness and desire to bestow which move

the hand of the giving God. There is some resemblance between an

Eastern loaf and a stone, and some between a fish and a serpent.

However imperfect a father's love, he will neither be cruel enough to

cheat his unsuspecting child with what looks like an answer to his wish

but is useless or hurtful, nor foolish enough to make a mistake. All

human relationships are in some measure marred by the faults of those

who sustain them. What a solemn attestation of universal sinfulness is

in these words of Christ's, and how calmly He separates Himself by His

sinlessness from us! I do not know that there is anywhere a stronger

scriptural proof of these two truths than this one incidental clause,

ye, being evil.' I wonder whether the people who pit the Sermon on the

Mount against evangelical Christianity are ready to take this part of

it into their creeds. It is noteworthy, also, that the emphasis is

laid, not on the earthly father's willingness, but on his knowing how

to give good gifts. Our Lord seems to think that He need not assure us

of the plain truth that of course our Father in heaven is willing, just

because He is our Father, to give us all good; but He heartens us with

the assurance that His love is wisdom, and that He cannot make any

mistakes. There are no stones mingled with our bread, nor any serpents

among the fish. He gives good, and nothing but good.

IV. The great precept which closes the section is not only to be taken

as an inference from the immediately preceding context, but as the

summing up of all the duties to our neighbours, in which Christ has

been laying down the law of the kingdom from Matthew v. 17. This

general reference of the therefore' is confirmed by the subsequent

clause, this is the law and the prophets'; the summing up of the whole

past revelation of the divine will, and therefore in accordance with

our Lord's previous exposition of the relation between His new law and

that former one. As Luther puts it in his vigorous, homely way, With

these words He now closes His instructions given in these three

chapters, and ties it all up in a little bundle.'

But a connection may also be traced with the preceding paragraph. There

our desires were treated as securing God's corresponding gifts. Here

our desires, when turned to men, are regarded, not as securing their

corresponding conduct, but as obliging us to action. By taking our

wishes as the rule of our dealings with others, we shall be like God,

who in regard to His best gifts takes our wishes as the rule of His

dealings with us. Our desires sent heavenward procure blessings for us;

sent earthward, they prescribe our blessing of others. That is a

startling turn to give to our claims on our fellows. It rests on the

principle that every man has equal rights, therefore we ought not to

look for anything from others which we are not prepared to extend to

others. A. should give B. whatever A. thinks B. should give him. Our

error is in making ourselves our own centre, and thinking more of our

claims on others than of our obligations to them. Christ teaches us

that these are one. Such a principle applied to our lives would

wonderfully pull down our expectations and lift up our obligations. It

is really but another way of putting the law of loving our neighbours

as ourselves. If observed, it would revolutionise society. Nothing

short of it is the law of the kingdom, and the duty of all who call

themselves Christ's subjects.

This is the inmost meaning, says Jesus, of the law and the prophets.

All former revelations of the divine will in regard to men's relations

to men are summed in this. Of course, this does not mean, as some

people would like to make it mean, that morality is to take the place

of religion, but simply that all the precepts touching conduct to men

are gathered up, for the subjects of the kingdom, in this one. Love

worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of

the law.'

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OUR KNOCKING

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it

shall be opened unto you.'--MATT. vii. 7.

In the letter to the church at Laodicea, we read, Behold, I stand at

the door and knock.' The image is there employed to set forth the

tenderness and patience of the exalted Christ, who condescends to sue

for entrance into every human heart, and comes in with His hands full

of blessing. Now, it is very striking, I think, that the same symbol is

employed in this text in reference to our duty. There is such a thing

as our knocking at some door for entrance and blessing. What is that

knocking?

The answer which is popularly given, I suppose, is that all these three

injunctions in our text, Ask--seek--knock,' are but diverse aspects of

the one exhortation to prayerfulness. And that may, perhaps, exhaust

their meaning; but I am rather disposed to think that it is possible to

trace a difference and a climax in them. To ask is obviously to apply

to a person who can give, and that is prayer. To seek is not, as I

think, quite the same thing, but rather expresses the idea of effort,

the personal effort which ought to accompany and will accompany all

real prayer. And to knock possibly adds to the conception of prayer and

of effort, the idea, as common to both of them, of a certain

persistency and continuity born of earnestness. So that we have here,

as I think, a threefold statement of the conditions under which certain

great blessings are given, and a threefold exhortation as to our

Christian duty.

I. In considering these words I would first inquire to whom such

exhortations are rightly addressed.

Now, it is to be remembered that these words occur in that great

discourse of our Lord's which is called the Sermon on the Mount. And

for the right understanding of that great embodiment of Christian

morality, and of its relations to the whole body of Christian truth, it

is, I think, very needful to remember that the Sermon on the Mount is

addressed to Christ's disciples, that it is the promulgation of the

laws of the kingdom by the King for His subjects; that it presupposes

discipleship and entrance into the kingdom, and has not a word to say

about the method of entrance. So that, though very many of its

exhortations are but the republication in nobler form of the common

laws of morality which are binding upon all men, and may be addressed

to all men, the form in which they appear in that Sermon, the

connection in which they stand, the height to which they are elevated,

and the motives by which they are enforced, all limit their application

to men who are truly followers and disciples of Jesus Christ. And this

consideration especially bears on these words of our text.

The first exhortation which Christianity addresses to a man is not

ask.' The first duty that a man has to discharge in regard to Christ

and His grace, and the revelation that is in Him, is neither to seek

nor to knock, but it is to take and to open. Christ knocks first, and

when He knocks we should say, Come in, Thou blessed of the Lord.'

To bid a man pray, when he should be exhorted to believe, is to darken

the clearness of the divine counsel, and to narrow the fulness of the

divine grace. God does not wait to be asked for His mercy and His

pardon. Like the dew on the grass, He tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth

for the sons of men.' Before we call, He answers; and to say to people,

Pray!' Seek!' Knock!' when the one thing to say is Take the gifts that

God sent you before you asked for them,' is folly, and has often led to

a course of painful and profitless struggling, which was all

unnecessary and wide of the mark. It is like telling a man to pray for

rain when the reservoirs at his side are full, and every flower is

bending its chalice, charged with the blessing. It is needless to tell

a man to seek for the treasure that is lying there at his side, and to

which he has only to turn his eyes and stretch out his hands. It is

folly to exhort a man to beat at a door that is standing wide open. The

door of God's grace is thus wide open, and the treasure of God's mercy

has come down, and the rain of God's forgiving love has dropped upon

all of us, and made the wilderness to rejoice.

And so my message to some of you, dear brethren, is to say that you

have nothing whatever to do, primarily, with this text. You have

neither to ask, nor to seek, nor to knock, but to listen to Him, whose

gentle hand knocks at your hearts, and to open the door and let Him

come in with His grace and mercy.

II. And now, in the next place, let me ask you to consider in what

region of life these promises are true.

They sound at first as if they were dead in the teeth of the facts of

life. Is there any region of experience in which to ask is to receive,

to seek is to find, and in which every door flies open at our touch? If

there be, it is not in the ordinary work-a-day world in which you and I

live, where we all have to put up with a great many bitter

disappointments and refused requests, where we have all searched long

and sorely for some things that we have not found, and the search has

aged and saddened us.

It seems to be perfectly certain that the distinct purpose which our

Lord here has in view, is to assert that the law of His Kingdom is the

direct opposite of the law of earthly life, and that the sad

discrepancy between desire and possession, between wish and fact, is

done away with for His followers. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt,'

is the charter of His Kingdom.

Now, dear brethren, it does not want much wisdom to know that that

would be a very questionable blessing indeed, if it were taken to apply

to the outward circumstances of our lives. There are a good many

people, in all ages, and there are some people in this day, who set

themselves up for very lofty and spiritual Christians who have made

deep discoveries as to the power of prayer, and who seem to understand

by it just exactly this, that if a man will only pray for what he

wishes instead of working for it, he will get what he wishes. And I

make bold to say that all forms of so-called higher experience which

involve anything like that thought are, instead of being an exaltation,

a degradation, of the very idea of Christian prayer. For the meaning of

prayer is not that I shall force my will upon God, but that I shall

bend my will to His.

There is one region, and one only, in which it is true, absolutely,

unconditionally, without limitation, and always, that what we ask we

get, what we seek we find, and that the door at which we knock shall be

opened unto us; and that is not the region of outward, questionable,

and changeful good.

Why, the very context of these words shows us that. It dwells upon the

discrimination of an earthly father in answering his child's requests;

and says: he knows how to give good gifts,' and so will your heavenly

Father.' And it takes an illustration which we may extend in that same

direction when it says, If a child ask a loaf, will the father give him

a stone? or if he ask for a fish, will he give him a serpent?' We may

turn the question and say: If the child ask for a serpent because he

fancies that it is a fish, will his father give him that? Or if he cast

his eye upon a thing which he imagines to be a loaf when it is only a

stone, will his father let him break his teeth upon that? Surely no! He

knows how to give good gifts, and an essential condition of that divine

knowledge of how to give good gifts is the knowledge of how to refuse

mistaken and foolish wishes.

So let us be thankful that His divine providence does not spoil His

children, and make them, as all spoiled children are, a curse and a

misery to themselves and to everybody round about them; but He

disciplines them by a gracious No' as well as by a frank, glad Yes,'

and often refuses the petition and grants the deeper-lying meaning of

the same.

Therefore, I say that the region in which this great and liberal

charter of entire response to our desires has force is simply and only

the spiritual region in which the highest good is. You may grow as

Christian men just as fast and just as far as you choose. A fuller

knowledge of God's truth, a more entire conformity to Christ's pattern,

a deeper communion with God--they are all possible for every one of us

in any measure to which we choose to set our expectations, and to shape

our desires and our actions. Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.'

The stretch of the jaws determines the size of the portion that is put

into them; and He Himself who is the only real limit of His gifts, in

His endless fulness, always imparts to you and me just as much of

Himself as we like and wish to take. Ye are not straitened in Me, ye

are straitened in yourselves.'

And oh! brethren, what a solemn light such thoughts as that throw on

the low attainments of our average Christianity! So many of us, like

Gideon's fleece, dry in the midst of the dew that comes down from

heaven! So many of us in the midst of the blessed sunshine of His

grace, standing like deep gorges on a mountain in cold shadow! How much

you have lying at hand; how little of it you take for your own!

Suppose one of those old Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century had

been led into some of those rich Mexican treasure-houses, where all

round him were massive bars of gold and gleaming diamonds and precious

stones, and had come out from the abundance with sixpence-worth in His

palm, when he might have loaded himself with ingots of pure and

priceless metal. That is what some of you do, when Jesus Christ puts

the key of His storehouse in your hands and says to you, Go in and help

yourselves,' You stop as soon as you are within the threshold. You do

little more than take some insignificant corner nibbled off the great

solid mass of riches that might belong to you, and bear that away. The

only conclusion is that you do not care much about His wealth. Dear

brethren, you professing Christian people that are listening to me, if

life is scant in your veins, if your faith is, as it is with many of

you, all but dead, if your Christian character is very little better

than the character of the people round you, if your religion does not

give you any happiness, nor do other people much good, if your love is

so cold that it has almost expired, and your hopes dim, there is no

creature in heaven or earth or hell that is to blame for it but

yourselves. Ye have not because ye ask not; ye ask and have not because

ye ask amiss.'

III. And that brings me to the last question, namely, on what

conditions these promises depend.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it

shall be opened.' I said at the beginning of these remarks that I

traced a difference between these three commands, and I take that

difference for granted now as the basis of the few words I have to say.

The first condition is--desires presented to Him who can grant them. To

ask implies the will of a person that will hear and respond and has the

power to bestow. That Person is God in Christ. Go and ask Him. We all

know that prayer is essential, and so I do not need to dwell upon it;

go and ask Him, and you will get what you need.

Do you ever pray, you professing Christian people? I do not mean with

your mouths, but with your hearts; do you ever pray to be made less

worldly? Do you ever wish to be so? Do you ever really desire that your

love of this present should be diminished? Have you any appetite for

righteousness? Does it seem to you to be a good thing that you should

have less pleasure in the present and more joys in the future? Would

you like to be a devouter Christian than you are? I very much question

it about many of you. I am not hitting at individuals, but I am

speaking about the average type of professing Christians in this

generation.

If you desire it you will ask it. Is there any place in any of your

rooms where there is a little bit of carpet worn white by your knees?

Or do you pray when you are half asleep at night, and before you are

well awake in the morning, and scramble through a prayer as the

necessary preliminary to going to the work that really interests you,

the work of your trade or business? Ask, and ye shall receive.'

The second condition is effort. Seek, and ye shall find.' There are a

great many things in this world that cannot be given to a wish. There

are a great many things in the Kingdom of Grace that Jesus Christ

cannot give to a mere wish. There must be my own personal effort if I

am to secure that which I desire. That is the reason why so many

prayers seem to go unanswered. Think of the thousands of supplications

that will go up in churches and chapels to-day for spiritual blessings.

How comes it that such an enormous proportion of these prayers will

never be answered at all? Well, if a man stand at the butts and shoot

his arrow at a target, and does not care enough for its fate to stand

there long enough to see whether it hits the bull's eye, the

probability is that it will never reach its aim. And if men pray, and

pray, and pray, in public, and then come out of their churches and

chapels and not only forget all about their prayers but never expect an

answer to them, and do nothing in their lives in accordance therewith,

is there any wonder that they are not answered? Men repeat the Lord's

Prayer every morning, and ask God day by day lead us not into

temptation,' and then go out into daily life, and are willing to fling

themselves into temptation, and go through the very thick of the fire

of it, if there is a ten pound note on the other side of the flame. And

men ask God that He will help them to grow in grace' and Christian

character, and seldom do a single thing that they know will promote

that growth. All such prayer is vain and unresponded to. With prayer

there must go effort.

And then, lastly, the third condition is continuity or persistence.

Knock, and it shall be opened unto you,' Then there is such a thing as

a delay in these answers that you have been speaking about,' you say.

No! there is no delay, but there is such a thing as the beginning of a

long task; and therefore there is such a thing as the necessity for

persistent and continuous perseverance even in the offering of the

desires, which to express is to have satisfied; and in putting forth of

the efforts in which to seek is to find. 'Tis a lifelong task ere the

lump be leavened.' Eternal life is a gift, but the building of a

Christian character is the result of patient, continuous, well-directed

efforts to the appropriation and employment of the gift that we have

received. Forty-and-six years was this temple in building,' they said,

and it was not finished then. It will take more than forty-and-six

years to build up in my poor heart, full of rubbish and of evil, a

temple to the Holy Ghost.

I need not insist upon the virtue of perseverance; that is a

commonplace written on the head of all copybooks, but let me remind you

that in the Christian life, as much as in any other, that virtue is

needful, and unless a man is content to do as Abraham Lincoln said,

Keep pegging away' at the duties of Christian life with continual

effort, there is no promise and no possibility that that man shall grow

in grace.

Now, two last words: one is, we want nothing more for the largest and

most blessed possession of the true riches and eternal joys of the

kingdom than the application to our Christian life of the very same

qualities, virtues, excellences, which we need for the successful

prosecution of our daily business. Dear brethren, draw for yourselves

the contrast between the eagerness with which you pursue that, and the

tepidity with which you pursue this. You know that effort and

perseverance are wanted there, and you do not grudge them; they are

wanted just as much here. Do you put them forth? Some of you are all

fire in the one place, and are all frost in the other. You Christian

men and women, give the kingdom as much as you give the world, and you

will be strong and growing Christians; but if you will not, do not

wonder that you are so feeble as you are.

And the last remark I make is--this great symbol of my text which is

used in reference to our Lord's condescending beseechings for the

entrance into our hearts, and is also used, as we have seen, in

reference to our own continuity of prayerful effort, is used in another

and very solemn application, in words of His Many will seek to enter

in, and shall not be able, when once the Master of the house is risen

up, and hath shut to the door; and will begin to stand without and to

knock at the door, saying, Lord! Lord! open to us; and He'--He who said

Knock, and it shall be opened'--He shall answer and say to you, I know

you not whence ye are.' That you may escape that repulse, oh my friend!

do you open your heart now to the knocking Christ, and then, then, and

not till then, Ask!' that you may be filled with the treasures of His

love, seek!' that you may find the rich provision He has laid up for us

all, knock!' that door after door in the many mansions of the Father's

House may be opened unto you; until at last an entrance is ministered

abundantly into the everlasting kingdom, and you go in with the King to

the eternal feast.

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THE TWO PATHS

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the

way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in

thereat: 14. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which

leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'--MATT. vii. 13-14.

A frank statement of the hardships and difficulties involved in a

course of conduct does not seem a very likely way to induce men to

adopt it, but it often proves so. There is something in human nature

which responds to the bracing tonic of the exhortation: By doing thus

you will have to face many hardships and many difficulties which you

may avoid by leaving it alone; but do it, because it is best in the

long run, being right from the beginning.' So the story of the martyrs'

fires has lighted many a man to the faith for which the martyr was

burned. Many a youth has been led to take the shilling and enlist by

reading accounts of wounds and battles and sufferings.

Our Lord will have no soldiers in His army on false pretences. They

shall know exactly what they have to reckon on if they take service

with Him. And thus, in the solemn and familiar words of my text, He

enjoins each of us to become His disciples; and that not only

because--as is sometimes supposed--of the blessing that lies at the end

for His servants, but because of the very things on the road to the end

which, at first sight, seemed difficulties. For you will observe that

in my text the exhortation, Enter ye in at the strait gate,' is

followed by two clauses, each of which begins with a for'; the one

being a description of the road that is to be shunned; the other, an

account of the path that is to be followed. In each description there

are four contrasted particulars: the gate, strait or wide; the road,

narrow or broad; the travellers, many or few; and the ends, life or

destruction.

Now, people generally read these words as if our Lord was saying,

Though the one path is narrow and rugged and steep and unfrequented,

yet walk on it, because it leads to life; and though the other presents

the opposite of all these characteristics, yet avoid it, because

pleasant and popular as it is, its end is destruction.' But that is not

what He says. All four things are reasons for avoiding the one and

following the other; which, being turned into plain English, is just

this, that we ought to be Christian people precisely because there are

difficulties and pains and sacrifices in being so, which we may ignobly

shirk if we like. It is not, Though the road be narrow it leads to

life, therefore enter it; but Because it is narrow, and leads to life,

therefore blessed are the feet that are set upon it.

Let us, then, look at these four characteristics, and note how they all

enforce the merciful summons which our Lord is addressing to each of

us, as truly as He did to the hearers gathered around Him on the

mountain: Enter ye in at the strait gate.'

I. The gates.

The gate is in view here merely as a means of access to the road, and

the metaphor simply comes to this, that it is more difficult to be a

Christian man than not to be one, and therefore you ought to be one.

Now, what makes a Christian? We do not need to go further than this

Sermon on the Mount for answer. The two first of our Lord's Beatitudes,

as they are called, are Blessed are the poor in spirit,' and Blessed

are they that mourn.' These two carry the conditions of entrance on the

Christian life. There must be consciousness of our own emptiness,

weakness, and need; there must be penitent recognition of our own

ill-desert and lamentation over that. These two things, the

consciousness of emptiness, and the sorrow for sin, make--I was going

to say--the two door-posts of the narrow gate through which a man has

to press. It is too narrow for any of his dignities or honours. A camel

cannot go through the eye of a needle, not only because of its own

bulk, but because of the burdens which flap on either side of it, and

catch against the jambs. All my self-confidence, and reputation, and

righteousness, will be rubbed off when I try to press through that

narrow aperture. You may find on a lonely moor low, contracted openings

that lead into tortuous passages--the approaches to some of the ancient

Picts' houses,' where a feeble folk dwelt, and secured themselves from

their enemies. The only way to get into them is to go down upon your

knees; and the only way to get into this road--the way of

righteousness--is by taking the same attitude. No man can enter

unless--like that German Emperor whom a Pope kept standing in the snow

for three days outside the gate of Canossa--he is stripped of

everything, down to the hair-shirt of penitence. And that is not easy.

Naaman wanted to be healed as a great man in the court of Damascus. He

had to strip himself of his offices, and dignities, and pride, and to

come down to the level of any other leper. You and I, dear brother,

have to go through the same process of stripping ourselves of all the

adventitious accretions that have clung to us, and to know ourselves

naked and helpless, before we can pass through the gate.

Further, we have to go in one by one. Two cannot pass the turnstile at

the same time. We have to enter singly, as we shall have to pass

through the other dark gates, across the wild which no man knows,' at

the end of life.

Because it is strait, it is a great deal easier to stop outside, as so

many of those to whom I speak are doing. For that, you have nothing to

do but to drift and let things drift. No decision nor effort is needed;

no coming out of yourselves. It is all as easy as it is for a wild

animal to enter in between the broadly extending palisades that

converge as they come nearer the trap, so that the creature is snared

before he knows. The gate is wide: that is the sure condemnation of it.

It is always easy to begin bad and unworthy things, of all sorts. And

there is nothing easier than to keep in the negative position which so

many of my audience, I fear me, are in, of not being a Christian.

But, on the other side, it is not so hard as it looks to go in, and it

is not so easy as it seems to stop out. For there are two men in every

man--a better and a worse; and what pleases the one disgusts the other.

The choice which each of us has to make is whether we shall do the

things that are easiest to our worst self, or those that are easiest to

our best self. For in either case there will be difficulties; in either

case there will be antagonisms.

But it is good for us to make the effort, apart altogether from the

end. If there were no life eternal at the far end of the road which at

this end has the narrow gate, it would contribute to all that is

noblest and best in our characters, and to the repression of all that

is ignoble and worst, that we should take that lowly position which

Christ requires, and by the heroism of a self-abandoning faith, fling

ourselves into His arms.

Remember, too, that the strait gate, by reason of its very straitness,

is in the noblest sense wide. If there were anything else required of a

man than simply self-distrust and reliance on Jesus Christ, then this

great Gospel that I am feebly trying to preach would be a more

sectional and narrower thing than it is. But its glory is that it

requires nothing which any man is unable to bring, that it has no

invitation for sections, classes, grades of culture or intelligence or

morality, but that in its great cosmopolitanism and universality it

comes to every man; because it treats all as on one level, and requires

from each only what all can bring--knowledge of themselves as sinners,

and humble trust in Jesus Christ as a Saviour. It is narrow because

there is no room for sin or self-righteousness to go in; it is wide as

the world, and, like the capacious portals of some vast cathedral,

ample enough to receive without hustling, and to accommodate without

inconvenience, every soul of man.

II. Notice the contrast of the two roads, which, in like manner, points

the exhortation to choose the better.

The one is broad; the other is narrow. Which, being turned into plain

English, is just this--that the Christian course has limitations which

do not hamper the godless man; and that on the path of godlessness or

Christlessness there is a deceptive appearance of freedom and

independence which attracts many.

Narrow is the road.' Yes, if you are to be a Christian, you must have

your whole life concentrated on, and consecrated to, one thing; and,

just as the vagrant rays of sunshine have to be collected into a focus

before they burn, so the wandering manifoldnesses of our aims and

purposes have all to be brought to a point, This one thing I do,' and

whatsoever we do we have to do it as in God, and for God, and by God,

and with God. Therefore the road is narrow because, being directed to

one aim, it has to exclude great tracts on either side, in which people

that have a less absorbing and lofty purpose wander and expatiate at

will. As on some narrow path in Eastern lands, with high, prickly-pear

hedges on either side, and vineyards stretching beyond them, with

luscious grapes in abundance, a traveller has to keep on the road,

within the prickly fences, dusty though it may be, and though his

thirsty lips may be cracking.

I remember once going to that strange island-fortress off the Normandy

coast, which stands on an isolated rock in the midst of a wide bay. One

narrow causeway leads across the sands. Does a traveller complain of

having to keep it? It is safety and life, for on either side stretches

the tremulous sand, on which, if a foot is planted, the pedestrian is

engulfed. So the narrow way on which we have to journey is a highway

cast up, on which no evil will befall us, while on each hand away out

to the horizon lie the treacherous quicksands. Narrowness is sometimes

safety. If the road is narrow it is the better guide, and they who

travel along it travel safely. Restrictions and limitations are of the

essence of all nobleness and virtue. So did not I because of the fear

of the Lord.'

Set side by side with that the competing path. Wide? Yes! Do as you

like'--that is sufficiently wide. And even where that gospel of the

animal has not become the guide to a man, there are many occupations,

pursuits, recreations which men who lack the supreme concentration and

consecration that come through over mastering love to Jesus Christ who

has redeemed them, may legitimately in their own estimation do, but

which no Christian man should do.

But, as I said before about the gates, it is not so easy as it looks to

walk the broad road, nor so hard as it seems to tread the narrow one.

For her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace';

and, on the other hand, licentiousness and liberty are not the same

thing, and true freedom is not to do as you like, but to like to do as

you ought. Besides, the path which looks attractive, and tempts to the

indulgence of many appetites and habits which a Christian man must

rigidly subdue, does not continue so attractive. Earthly pleasures have

a strange knack of losing their charm, and, at the same time,

increasing their hold, with familiarity. Many a man who has plunged

into some kind of dissipation because of the titillation of his senses

which he found in it, discovers that the titillation diminishes and the

tyranny grows; and that when he thought that he had bought a joy, he

has sold himself slave to a master.

So, dear friends, and especially you young people, let me beseech you

to be suspicious of courses of conduct which come to you with the

whisper, pleasant, sweet.' If you have two things before you, one of

which is easy and the other hard, ninety times out of a hundred it will

be safe for you to choose the hard one, and the odd ten times it will

be at least as well for you to choose it. Thus we travel to the stars.'

As one of our poets has it, the path of duty is the way of glory,' and

those that scorn delights and live laborious days,' and listen not to

the voices that say Come and enjoy this,' but to the sterner voice that

says Come and bear this'--these will

Find the stubborn thistles bursting

Into glossy purples that outredden

All voluptuous garden roses.'

So, because the road is narrow, therefore choose it. Because the other

path is wide, I beseech you to avoid it.

III. Note the travellers.

On the one road there are few,' on the other, by comparison,'many.'

That was true in Christ's time, and although the world is better since,

and many feet have trodden the narrow way, and have found that it leads

to life, yet I am afraid it is so still.

Now, did you ever think, or do you believe, that the fact of a course

of conduct, or of an opinion, being the conduct or the opinion of a

majority, is pro tanto against it? What everybody says must be true,'

says the old proverb, and I do not dispute it. What most people say is,

I think, most often false. And that is true about conduct, as well as

about opinion. It is very unsafe to take the general sense of a

community for your direction. It is unsafe in regard to matters of

opinion, it is even more unsafe in regard to matters of conduct. That

there are many on a road is no sign that the road is a right one; but

it is rather an argument the other way; looking at the gregariousness

of human nature, and how much people like to save themselves the

trouble of thinking and decision, and to run in ruts; just as a

cab-driver will get upon the tram-lines when he can, because his

vehicle runs easier there. So the fact that, if you are going to be

Christ-like Christians, you will be in the minority, is a reason for

being such.

You young men in warehouses, and all of you in your different spheres

and circles, do not be afraid of being singular. And remember that

Jesus Christ, and one man with Him, though it is Athanasius contra

mundum, are always in the majority.

Now that is good, bracing teaching, apart altogether from Christianity.

But I wish to bring it to bear especially in that direction. And so I

would remind you that after all, the solitude in which a man may have

to walk, if he sets Christ before him, and tries to follow Him with His

cross upon his shoulders, is only an apparent solitude. For, look,

whose footsteps are these on my path, not without spots of blood, where

the tender feet have trod upon thorns and briars? There has been

Somebody here before me. Who? Let him take up his cross and follow Me.'

And if we follow Him, the solitude will be like that in which the two

sad disciples walked on the Resurrection day, when a third came and

joined Himself to them. So a second will come to each of us, if we are

alone, and our hearts will burn within us. Nor shall we need to wait

till the repose of the evening and the breaking of bread, before we

know that it is the Lord'; nor, known and recognised, will He vanish

from our sides.

Dear brethren, because few there be that go in thereat,' and walk

thereon, I beseech you to go in through the door of faith, and to walk

in the way of Christ, who has left us an ensample that we should follow

in His steps. If of thee it can be said, as the great Puritan poet said

of one virgin pure, that thou

--Wisely hast shunned the broad way and the green,

And with those few art eminently seen

That labour up the hill of heavenly truth,'--

his assurance to her will be applicable to thee, and

--Thou, when the Bridegroom, with His feastful friends,

Passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night,

Hast gained thy entrance.'

IV. That leads me to the last point--viz. the contrasted ends of these

two paths.

Christ assumes the right to speak decisively and authoritatively with

regard to the ultimate issues of human conduct, in a way which, as I

believe, marks His divinity, and which no man can venture upon without

presumption. Of the one path He declares without hesitation that it

leads to life; of the other He affirms uncompromisingly that it leads

to destruction.' Now, I dare not dwell upon these solemn thoughts with

any enfeebling expansion by my own words, but I beseech you to lay them

to heart--only take the simple remark, as a commentary and an

exposition of the solemn meaning of these issues, that life does not

mean mere continuous existence, but, as it generally does upon His

lips, means that which alone He recognises as being the true life of

such a creature as man--viz. existence in union with Himself, the

Source of life; and that, conversely, destruction does not mean merely

the cessation of being, or what we call the destruction of

consciousness and the annihilation of a soul, but that it means the

continued consciousness of a soul rent away from Him in whom alone is

life, and which therefore has made shipwreck of everything, and has

destroyed itself.

There are the issues, then, before us, and I dare not blur the clear

distinction which Jesus Christ draws. I listen to Him, and accept His

word, and I press upon you, dear brethren, that the main thing about a

road is, after all, where it leads us; and I ask you to remember that

your life-path--as I try to remember that mine--is tending to one or

other of these two issues. The one path may be, and is, rough and steep

though its delights are nobler, more poignant, and more permanent than

any that can be found elsewhere. Steadily climbing like some mountain

railway, it reaches at last the short tunnel on the summit level, and

then dashes out into the blinding blaze of a new sunshine. The other

goes merrily enough, at first, downhill, but at last it comes to the

edge of the abyss, and there it stops, but the traveller does not. He

goes over; and nobody can see the darkness into which he falls.

Dear friends, Christ says, I am the Way.' Do you go to Him and cry, See

if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me into the way

everlasting.'

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THE TWO HOUSES

Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I

will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. . .

. 25. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them

not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon

the sand.'--MATT. vii. 24, 25.

Our Lord closes the so-called Sermon on the Mount, which is really the

King's proclamation of the law of His Kingdom, with three pairs of

contrasts, all meant to sway us to obedience. The first is that of the

two ways: one broad, and leading down to abysses of destruction; the

other narrow, and leading up to shining heights of life. The second is

that of the two trees, one good and one bad, each bearing fruit

according to its nature; by which our Lord would teach us that conduct

is the outcome and revelation of character, and the test of being a

follower of His. The third is that of our text, the two houses on the

two foundations, and their fate before the one storm; by which our Lord

would teach us that the only foundation on which can be built a life

that will stand the blast of final judgment is His sayings and Himself.

Now, there are many very important and profound links of connection and

relation between these three contrasted pictures, but I only point to

one thing here, and that is that in all of them Jesus Christ most

decisively divides all His hearers--for it is about them that He is

speaking--into two classes: either on the broad road or on the narrow,

not a foot in each; either the good tree or the bad; either the house

on the sand or the house on the rock. Such a sharp division is said

nowadays to be narrow, and to be contradicted by the facts of life, in

which the great mass of men are neither very white nor very black, but

a kind of neutral grey. Yes, they are--on the surface. But if you go

down to the bottom, and grasp the life in its inmost principles and

essential nature, I fancy that Jesus Christ's narrowness is true to

fact. At all events, there it is.

Now, following out the imagery of our text, I wish to bring before you

the two foundations, the two houses, the one storm, the two endings.

I. The two foundations: Rock, Sand.

Now, to build on the Rock, Jesus Christ Himself explains to us as being

the same thing as to hear and do His sayings. The one representation is

plain fact, the other is metaphor which points precisely in the same

direction. It is scarcely a digression if I pause for a moment, and

point you to the singular and unique attitude which this Carpenter's

Son of Nazareth takes up here, fronting the whole race with that

whosoever,' and alleging that His sayings are an infallible law for

conduct, and that He has the right absolutely to command every man,

woman, and child of the sons and daughters of Adam. And the strange

thing is that the best men have admitted His claim, have recognised

that He had the right, and have seen that His precepts are the very

ideal of human conduct, and, if they have ventured to criticise at all,

their criticism has only been that the precepts are too good to be

obeyed, and contemplate an ideal that is unreachable in human society.

Be that as it may, there stands the fact that this Man, in this Sermon

on the Mount, which so many people say has no doctrinal teaching in it,

assumes an attitude which nothing can warrant and nothing explain

except the full-toned belief that in Him we have God manifest in the

flesh.

But what I desire to point to now is the significance of this demand

that He makes, that we shall take His sayings as the foundation of our

lives. The metaphor is a very plain one, by which the principles that

underlie or dominate and mould our conduct are regarded as the

foundation upon which we build the structure of our lives. But the

Sermon on the Mount is not all of these sayings of Mine.' It is

fashionable in certain quarters to-day to isolate these precepts, and

to regard them as being the part of Christian Revelation by which men

who set little store by theological subtleties, and reject the

mysteries of the Incarnation and the Atonement, may still abide. But I

would have you notice that it is absurd to isolate this Sermon on the

Mount, or to deal with it as if it were the very centre of the

Christian Revelation. It is nothing of the sort. Beautiful as it is,

wonderful as it is as a high ideal of human conduct, it is a law still,

though it is a perfect law; and it has all the impotences and all the

deficiencies that attach to a law, if you take it and rend it out of

its place, and insist upon dealing with it as if it stood alone. There

is not a word in it that tells you how to keep its precepts. There is

no power in it, or raying from it, to make a man obey any one of its

commandments. It comes radiant and beautiful, but imperative, and just

because no man keeps it to the full, its very beauty becomes menacing,

and it stands there over against us, showing us what we ought to be,

and, by consequence, what we are not. And is that all that Jesus Christ

came into the world to do? God forbid! If He had only spoken this

Sermon on the Mount--which some of you take for the Alpha and the Omega

of Christianity as far as you are concerned--He would not have been

different in essence from other teachers,--though high above them in

degree,--who speak to us of the shining heights of duty that we are to

scale, but leave us grovelling in the mire.

The Sermon on the Mount, with its stringent requirements, absolutely

demands to be completed by other thoughts and other sayings of Mine.'

And so I remind you, not only that there are other sayings of Mine' to

be kept than it, but also that there is no keeping of it without

keeping other sayings first. For the highest of Christ's commandments

is Believe also in Me,' and you have to take Him as your Redeemer and

Saviour from death before you will ever thoroughly accept Him as your

Guide and Pattern for life. We must first draw near to Him in humble

penitence and lowly faith, and then there comes into our hearts a power

which makes it possible and delightsome to keep even the loftiest, and

in other aspects the hardest, of those sayings of Mine.' So, brethren,

the obedience of which this text speaks is second, and the building of

ourselves on Jesus Christ Himself, by faith in Him, is first. Only when

we build on Him as our Saviour shall we build our lives upon Him in

obedience to His commands.

Behold! I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried corner-stone,

a sure foundation, and he that believeth shall not make haste'; and

long after the prophet said that, the Apostle catches up the same

thought when he says, Other foundation can no man lay than that is

laid. Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon.' Jesus Christ is

the foundation of our lives, if we have any true life at all. He ought

to be the foundation of all our thinking. His word should be the

absolute truth, His life the final all-satisfying, perfect revelation

of God, to our hearts. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge.' The facts of His Incarnation, earthly life, Death,

Resurrection, Ascension, and present Sovereignty--these facts, with the

truths that are deduced from them, and the great glimpses which they

afford into the heart of God and the depths of things, are the

foundations of all true thinking on moral and social and religious

questions, and on not a few other questions besides. Christ in His

Revelation gives us the ultimate truth on which we have to build.

He is also the foundation of all our hope, the foundation of all our

security, the foundation of all our effort and aspiration. His Cross

goes before the nations and leads them, His Cross stands by the

individual, and anodynes the sense of guilt, and breaks the bondage and

captivity of sin, and stirs to all lofty emotions and holy living, and

moves ever in the van like the pillar of cloud and fire, the Pattern of

our lives and the Guide of our pilgrimage. It is Christ Himself who is

the foundation, and His death and sacrifice which are the sure basis of

our hope, safety, and blessedness; and it is only because He Himself is

the Foundation, and what He has done for us is the basis of hope and

blessedness, that He has the right to come to us and say, Take My

commandments as the foundation on which you build your lives.'

The Rock of Ages cleft for us, is the Rock on which we build if we are

Christians; the other man built his house upon the sand. That is to

say, shifting inclinations, short-lived appetites, transitory aims,

varying judgments of men, the fashions of the day in morality, the

changing judgments of our own consciences--these are the things on

which men build, if they are not building upon Jesus Christ. Like a

vessel that has a raw hand at the helm, you sometimes head one way, and

then the puff of wind that fills your sails dies down, or the sails

that were flat as a board belly out a little, or you are caught in some

current, and round goes the bowsprit on another tack altogether. How

many of us are pursuing the objects which we pursued five-and-twenty

years ago, if we have numbered so many years? What has become of aims

that were everything to us then? We have won some of them, and they

have turned out not half as good as we thought they would be. The hare

is never so big when it is in the bag as when it is hurrying across the

fields. We have missed some of them, and we scarcely remember that we

once wanted them. We have outlived a great many, and they lie away

behind us, hull down on the horizon, and we are making for some other

point that, in like manner, if we reach it, will be left behind and be

lost. There is nothing that lasts but God and Christ, and the people

that build their lives upon them.

I press upon all your hearts that one simple thought--what an absurdity

it is for us to choose for our life's object anything that is

shorter-lived than ourselves!--and how long-lived you are you know.

They tell us that sand makes a very good foundation under certain

circumstances. I believe it does, but what if the water gets in? What

about it then? But in regard to all these transitory aims and

short-lived purposes on which some of you are building your lives,

there is a certainty that the water will come in some day. So, friend,

dig deeper down, even to the Eternal Rock. That is the only foundation

on which an immortal man or woman like you is wise to build your life.

Are you doing it?

II. Let me say a word, in the next place, about the two houses.

The one is built upon the rock. That just means, of course--and I need

not enlarge upon that--a life which is based upon, and shaped after,

the commandments of Jesus Christ, His Pattern and Example. And that

life will stand. Now, of course, the ideal would be that the whole of

His sayings should enter into the whole of our lives, that no

commandment of that dear Lord should be left unobeyed, and that no

action of ours should be unaffected by His known will. That is the

ideal, and for us the task of wisdom is daily to draw nearer and nearer

to that ideal, and to bring the whole of our lives more and more under

the sway and sanctifying influence of the whole sum of Christ's

precepts. Of course, on the other side, the life that is built on the

sand is the life which is not thus regulated by Christ's will and known

commandments.

But I desire rather to bring out, in a word or two, some of the lessons

that may be gathered from this general metaphor of a man's life as a

house. And the first that I would suggest is this:--Have you ever

thought of your life as being a whole, with a definite moral

characteristic stamped upon it? I look upon the men and women that I

come across in the world, and I cannot help seeing that a great many of

them have never got into their heads the idea that their life is a

whole. A house? No. A cartload of bricks, tumbled down at random, would

be a better metaphor. A chain? No! A heap of links not linked. Many of

you live from hand to mouth. Many of you have such unity in your life

as comes from the pressure of the external circumstances of your trade

or profession. But for anything like the living consciousness that life

is a whole, with a definite moral character for which you are

responsible, it has never dawned upon your mind. And so you go on

haphazard, never bringing reflection to bear upon the trend and drift

of your days; doing what you must do because your occupation is this,

that, or the other thing; doing what you incline to do in the matter of

recreation; now and then sporadically, and for a minute or two,

bringing conscience to bear, and being very uncomfortable sometimes

when you do. But as for recognising the mystic solemnity of all these

days of yours in that they are welded together, and are all tending to

one end, and that each passing moment contributes its infinitesimal

share to the awful solemn whole--that has seldom entered your minds,

and for a great many of you it has never had any effect in restraining

or stimulating or regulating your conduct.

Then there is another consideration which this metaphor suggests--viz.

that the house is built up by slow degrees, brick upon brick, course by

course, day by day, and moment by moment. It is slow work, but certain

work. Let every man take heed how he buildeth,' and never despise the

little things. Very small bricks make a large house.

Then there is another consideration that I would suggest, and that is,

you have to live in the house that you build. Your deeds make the house

that Christ is here speaking of. Like the chrysalis that spins out of

its own entrails the cocoon in which it lies, so are you spinning, to

vary the metaphor, what you lodge in, until you eat your way through

it, and pass into the next stage of being. Our deeds seem transient,

but although we are building on the sand we are building for Eternity,

because, though the deeds are transient in appearance, they abide.

They abide in memory. Some of you know how true that is. Black memories

haunt some of us, and there could be for some no worse hell than that

God should say, Son, remember.' You have to live in the house that you

build. The deeds abide in habit. They abide in limiting and determining

what we can be and do in the future; and in a hundred other ways that I

must not touch upon. Only, I bring to you this question, and I pray God

that you may listen to it and answer it: What are you building? A shop?

That is a noble ambition, is it not? A pleasure-house? That is worse. A

prison? Some of you are rearing for your incarceration a jail where you

will be tied and held by the cords of your sins, and whence you will be

unable to break out. Or are you building a temple? If you are building

on Christ it is all right. Only take heed what you build on that

foundation.

III. Now let me say a word, in the next place, about the storm.

I need not dwell upon the picturesque force of our Lord's description,

so true to the sudden inundations of Eastern lands, and as true to the

sudden floods of Northern countries when the snows melt. The house is

attacked on all sides. From above, the rain comes down to beat on the

roof, the wind rages round the walls, the flood comes swirling round

the eaves from beneath, and if the house stands upon a cliff, the

polished rock turns the flood off innocuous, but if it stands upon

sand, the furious rush of waters eats a way beneath and undermines the

whole.

But you will notice that the description of the storm is repeated in

both cases, and is verbatim the same in each. And the lesson from that

is just this--let no Christian man fancy that he is not going to be

judged according to his works, for he is. The storm that comes, which I

take distinctly to mean the final judgment which falls upon all men,

beats against the house that is built upon the rock. For every one of

us, Christian or not Christian, must all appear before the Judgment

Seat of Christ, that we may receive according to the deeds done in the

body.' Christian people, do not fancy that the great doctrine of

forgiveness of sins and acceptance in the Beloved, means that you have

not to stand His judgment according to your works. According to the

other metaphor of the Apostle, working out the same idea with some

changes in figure, the Christian man who builds upon the foundation

gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble,' has his work tried

by fire.' So all of us have to face that prospect, and I beseech you to

face it wisely. A sensible builder calculates the strain to which his

work will be exposed before he begins to put it up. Or if he does not

there will befall it the same fate that years ago befell that

unfortunate Tay Bridge, where, by reason of girders too feeble, and

piers not solid enough, and rivets left out where they should have been

put in, one December night the whole thing went over into the water

below. You have to stand the hurtling black storm. Take into account

the strain which your building will have to resist, and build

accordingly.

IV. And now, lastly, one word about the two endings.

It stood'; it fell'; that is all. A life of obedience to Christ is

stable, a life not based on Christ vanishes; and these two statements

are true because whatsoever a man does for himself, apart from God in

Christ, he is sowing to corruption, and he will reap corruption. As I

said, nothing lasts but God, and what is done according to the will of

God. And when the storm conies, whether the builder was a Christian man

or not, all which was not thus built on Christ will be swept away, as

the flimsy habitation of Eastern people, made of bamboos and oiled

paper, are whirled away before the typhoon. All that was not built upon

Christ--and much of you Christian people's lives is not built on

Christ--will have to go.

And what about the builders? If any man's work abide he will receive a

reward.' Their works do follow them.' If any man's work is burned, he

himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.' And if any man has reared a

structure of a life ignoring Jesus Christ, and with no connection with

Him, then house and builder will perish together.

Jesus Christ does not speak in my text about the righteousness or the

unrighteousness of these two courses of conduct. He does not say, a

good man does so-and-so, or a bad man does the other thing,' but he

says: A wise man builds his house on the Rock, and a foolish man builds

his on the sand. To live by faith and obedience is supreme wisdom.

Every life which is not built upon Christ is the perfection of folly.

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THE CHRIST OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people

were astonished at His doctrine: 29. For He taught them as one having

authority, and not as the scribes.'--MATT. vii. 28-29.

It appears, then, from these words, that the first impression made on

the masses by the Sermon on the Mount was not so much an appreciation

of its high morality, as a feeling of the personal authority with which

Christ spoke. Had the scribes, then, no authority? They ruled the whole

life of the nation with tyrannical power. They sat in Moses' seat, and

claimed all manner of sway and control. And yet when people listened to

Jesus, they heard something ringing in His voice that they missed in

the rabbis. They only set themselves up, in their highest claims, as

being commentators upon, and the expositors of, the Law. Their language

was Moses commanded'; Rabbi this said so-and-so; Rabbi that said

such-and-such.' But as even the crowd that listened to Him detected,

Jesus Christ, in these great laws of His kingdom, adduced no authority

but His own; stood forth as a Legislator, not as a commentator; and

commanded, and prohibited, and repealed, and promised, on His own bare

word. That is a characteristic of all Christ's teaching; and, as we see

from my text, to the apprehension of the first auditors, it was deeply

stamped on the Sermon on the Mount.

I purpose to turn to that Sermon now, and try if we can make out the

points in it which impressed these people, who first heard it, with the

sense that they were in the presence of an autocratic Voice that had a

right to speak, and which did speak, with absolute and unexampled

authority.

And I do that the more readily because I dare say you have all heard

people that said Oh! I do not care about the dogmas of Christianity;

give me the Sermon on the Mount and its sublime morality; that is

Christianity enough for me.' Well, I should be disposed to say so

pretty nearly too, if you will take all the Sermon on the Mount, and

not go picking and choosing bits out of it. For I am sure that if you

will take the whole of its teaching you will find yourself next door

to, if not in the very inmost chamber of, the mysticism of the Gospel

of John and the theology of Paul.

I. I ask you, then, to note that the Sermon claims for Jesus Christ the

authority of supremacy above all former revelation and revealers.

Think not,' says He, that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets;

I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' And then He goes on, in five

cases, to illustrate, in a very remarkable way, the authority that He

claimed over the former Law, moulding it according to His will.

Now I do not propose to do more than suggest, in a sentence, two points

that I think of importance. Observe that remarkable form of speech, I

am come.' May we not fairly say that it implies that He existed before

birth, and that His appearance among men was the result of His own act?

Does it not imply that He was not merely born, but came, choosing to be

born just as He chose to die? In what sense can we understand the

Apostle's view that it was an infinite and stupendous act of

condescension in Christ to be found in fashion as a man,' unless we

believe that by His own will and act He came forth from the Father and

entered into the world, just as by His own will and act He left the

world and went unto the Father?

But I do not dwell upon that, nor upon another very important

consideration. Why was it that Jesus Christ, at the very beginning of

His mission, felt Himself bound to disclaim any intention of destroying

the law or the prophets? Must not the people have begun to feel that

there was something revolutionary and novel about His teaching, and

that it was threatening to disturb what had been consecrated by ages?

So that it was needful that He should begin His career with this

disclaimer of the intention of destruction. Strange for a divine

messenger, if He simply stood as one in the line and sequence of divine

revelation, to begin His work by saying, Now, I do not mean to

annihilate all that is behind Me!' The question arises how anybody

should have supposed that He did, and why it should ever have been

needful for Him to say that He did not.

But I pass by all that, and ask you to think how much lies in these

words of our Lord: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' They imply

a claim that His life was a complete embodiment of God's law. Here is a

man beginning His ministry as a religious teacher, with the assertion,

stupendous, and, upon any other lips but His, insane arrogance, that He

had come to do everything which God demanded, and to set forth before

the world a living Pattern of the whole obedience of a human nature to

the whole law of God. Who is He that said that? And how do we account

for the fact that nineteen centuries have passed, and, excepting in the

case of here and there a bitter foe whose hostility had robbed him of

his common sense, no lip has ventured to say that He claimed too much

for Himself when He said, I am come to fulfil the law'; or that He

falsely read the facts of His own experience and consciousness when He

declared, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.'

Still further, here our Lord claims specifically and expressly to

fulfil not only law but prophets. That is to say, He sets Himself forth

as the Reality which had filled the imaginations and the hearts of a

whole nation for centuries; as the living Reality which had been meant

by all those lofty words of seers and prophets in the past. He declares

that all those rapturous forecastings, all those dim anticipations, all

those triumphant promises, were not left to swing in vacuo, or to float

about unfulfilled, but that He stood there, the actual Realisation of

them all; and in Him, wrapped up as in a seed, the Kingdom of Heaven

was among men.

And still further, He claims not only personal purity and completeness,

and the fulfilment of all prior and prophetic anticipation, but also He

claims to have, and He exercises, the power of moulding, expanding,

interpreting, and in some cases brushing aside, laws which He and they

alike knew to be the laws of God. I do not need to specify in detail

the instances which are contained in this Sermon on the Mount. But I

simply ask you to consider the formula with which our Lord introduces

each of His references to that subject. Ye have heard that it hath been

said to them of old time' so-and-so,--and then follows a command of the

Mosaic law; but I say unto you' so-and-so,--and then follows a

deepening or a modification or a repeal, of statutes acknowledged by

Him and His hearers to be divine. He certainly claims to speak with the

same right and authority as the old Law did. He as certainly claims to

speak with incomparably higher authority than Moses did, for the latter

never professed to give precepts of his own. He was not the Lawgiver,

as he is often called, but only the messenger of the Lawgiver. But

Christ is Himself the fountain of the laws of His Kingdom. Nor only so,

but He puts Himself without apology or explanation in front of Moses

and asserts power to modify, to set aside, or to re-enact with new

stringency, the precepts of the divine law.

One supposition alone accounts for Christ's attitude to law and

prophets in this Sermon, and that is that the Eternal Wisdom and

Personal Word of God, which at sundry times and in divers manners'

spake to the old world by Moses, itself at last, in human form and

personal guise, came here on earth and spake to us men. It is the same

Voice that breathed through the prophets of old, and that spake on the

lips of the Christ of Nazareth; the same Eternal Word who manifested

Himself in a fiery law' on Sinai, and in words of no less majesty and

of deepened gentleness, when He gathered the people round about Him,

and said to them, It hath been said to them of old time, . . . but I

say unto you . . . '

Here is the sum and climax of all revelation, the last word of the

divine mind and will and heart, to the world. Moses and Elias stand

beside Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, witnesses of His

superiority and servants at His feet, and they vanish into mist and

darkness, and leave there, erect, white-robed, solitary, the unique

figure of the One Lawgiver and the perfect Revealer of God to men.

And this is the authority which struck even on the unsusceptible hearts

of the listening crowds.

II. Still further, let me ask you to consider how, in this same great

Sermon, He claims the authority of One who is unique in His relation to

the Father.

You will find that in it there occurs very frequently the expression,

your Father which is in Heaven'; or sometimes with the variation, thy

Father which is in Heaven,' or, which seeth in secret.' But you will

also find that whilst our Lord speaks about My Father which is in

Heaven,' He never says our Father'; excepting in the exception which

proves the rule when He is putting into the lips of His disciples the

great formula of prayer which we call the Lord's Prayer'; and there

speaking as through their consciousness, and teaching them their

lesson, He says Our Father,' not as if He Himself were praying, but as

if He were telling them how to pray. But when He speaks out of His own

consciousness He speaks of My Father' and your Father,' never of our

Father.'

And that corresponds with other phenomena in Scripture in our Lord's

own language where you find that always He draws this broad

distinction. He never associates Himself with us in His Sonship. He

ever asserts that He is the Son of God. Even when He wishes to speak

with the utmost tenderness, He bids the weeping Mary hear the message,

I go unto My Father and your Father.' This doctrine is thought by many

to be one of those which they get rid of by professing the Christianity

of the Sermon on the Mount. But it is there as plainly as in other

parts of Scripture. If we accept all which it teaches, we cannot escape

from the belief that He is the only begotten and well-beloved Son of

the Father; and also that through Him and in Him we, too, may receive

the adoption of sons.

Dear friends, I press this upon you as no mere piece of hard

theological doctrine, but as containing in it the very essentials of

all spiritual life for each of us, that all our spiritual life must

come by participation in Christ, and that we enter into an altogether

new and blessed relation to God when, laying our humble and penitent

hands on the head of that dear Sacrifice that died on the Cross for as,

we through Him cease to be children of wrath and become heirs of God.

To as many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become the

children of God, even to them that believe in His name,' but His

Sonship stands unique and unapproachable, though it is the foundation

from which flows all the sonship of the whole family in heaven and in

earth. Moses and the prophets, teachers and guides, Apostles and

Helpers, they are all but the servants of the family; this is the Son

through whom we receive the adoption of sons.

III. We have in this great discourse the authority of One who is

absolute Lord and Master over men.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord! Lord! shall enter into the

Kingdom of Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! have we

not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?'

Whoso heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him

to a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.'

Jesus Christ here comes before the whole race, and claims an absolute

submission. His word is to control, with authoritative and

all-comprehensive scrutiny and power, every aim of our lives, and every

action. In His name we may be strong, in His name we may cast out

devils, in His name we may do many wonderful works. If we build upon

Him we build upon a rock; if we build anywhere else we build upon the

sand.

Strange, outrageous claims for a man to make! Give me the Sermon on the

Mount, and keep your doctrinal theology,' say people. But I want to

know what kind of morality it is that is all traceable up to this--Do

as I bid you, My will is your law; My smile is your reward; to obey Me

is perfection.' I think that takes you a good long way into theology.'

I think that the Man who said that--and you all know that He said

it--must he either a good deal more or a good deal less than a perfect

man. If He is only that He is not that; for if He is only that, He has

no business to tell me to obey Him. He has no business to substitute

His will for every other law; and you have no business--and it will be

at the peril of your manhood if you do--to take any man, the Man Christ

or any other, as an absolute example and pattern and master.

My brethren, Christ's claim to absolute obedience rests upon His divine

nature and on His redeeming work. He has delivered us from our enemies,

and therefore He commands us. He has given Himself for us, and

therefore He has a right to say, Give yourselves to Me.' He is God

manifest in the flesh, and therefore absolute power becomes His lips,

and utter submission is our dignity. To say to Him Lord, Lord,' carries

us whole universes beyond saying to Him, Rabbi, Rabbi.'

IV. And now, lastly, we have in this great discourse the authority of

our Lord set forth as being the authority of Him who is to be the Judge

of the world.

Then will I profess unto you I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that

work iniquity.' He, the meek, the humble, who never claimed for Himself

anything except what His consciousness compelled Him to assert, who

desired only that men should know Him for what He was, because it was

their life so to know Him, here declares that the whole world is to be

judged by Him, that He has such knowledge of men as will pierce beneath

the surface of professions and will be undazzled by the most stupendous

miracles, and beneath the eloquent words of many a preacher and the

wonderful works of many a so-called Christian philanthropist, will see

the hidden rottenness that they never saw, and, tearing down the veil,

will reveal men at the last to themselves.

That is no human function, that is no work that belongs to a mere

teacher, pattern, martyr, sage, philosopher, or saint. That is a divine

work; and the authority of Him whose final word to each of us will

settle beyond appeal our fate, and reveal beyond cavil our character,

is a divine authority. He has a right to command because He is going to

judge; and the lips that declare the law are the lips that will read

the sentence.

So, my brethren, do you take the whole Christ for yours, the Son of

God, the crown and end of revelation, the sinless and the perfect, who

died on the Cross for our salvation, and loves and pities, and is ready

to help every one of us; who, therefore, commands us with an absolute

authority, and who one day comes to be our Judge? If you turn to Him

and ask Him, Art Thou He that should come?' let Him speak for Himself,

and He will answer you: I that speak unto thee am He.' When He asks

each of us, as He does now, Whom sayest thou that I am?' oh that we may

all answer, with the assent of our understandings, with the love of our

hearts, with the submission of our wills, Thou art the Christ, the Son

of the living God.'

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THE TOUCH THAT CLEANSES

When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him.

1. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if

Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. 3. And Jesus put forth His hand,

and touched him, saying, I will; he thou clean. And immediately his

leprosy was cleansed. 4. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no

man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift

that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.'--MATT. viii. 14.

THE great collection of Jesus' sayings, which we call the Sermon on the

Mount, is followed by a similar collection of Jesus' doings, which we

call miracles. It is significant that Matthew puts the words first and

the works second, as if to teach us the relative importance of the two.

Some one has said that miracles are the bell rung before the sermon,'

but Matthew thinks that the sermon comes first. He masses together nine

miracles (the raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the woman

with the bloody issue being so closely connected that they may be

regarded as one) which are divided into three groups of three each, and

are separated by three sections of more general character, like three

landings in a broad flight of stairs, or three breaks in a procession

(ch. viii. 18-22; ix. 9-17, 35-38).

The first triplet comprises miracles of bodily healing, and shows Jesus

as the great physician, curing leprosy, palsy, and fever, three types

of disease which have their analogues in the moral world. The cure of

the leper comes first, apparently not from chronological reasons, but

because leprosy had been made by the Old Testament legislation the

symbol of sin. The story is found in all the Synoptic Gospels, with

slight variations, which make more impressive their verbal identity in

reporting the leper's appeal and the Lord's answer.

A leper had to keep apart from men and was shunned by them, but this

one ventured to mingle with the great multitudes' that followed' Jesus,

till he reached His side. He must have known something of Christ to

have approached Him with a flicker of long-absent hope in his heart. No

doubt he had heard of some of the earlier miracles; and no doubt the

crowd recoiled from him so that he could easily reach Jesus. When he

got there he worshipped, or, as Luke puts it, fell on his face,' and

made his appeal. It would be all the more piteous, because it was

spoken in that feeble, hoarse voice characteristic of leprosy, and it

was in itself most pathetic. The poor creature has won his way to a

surprising confidence, dashed with a yet more surprising diffidence and

doubt. He is sure of the power, but not of the willingness, of this

wonderful healer. Thou canst,' does not make him confident, because it

is weakened by If Thou wilt.' Faith, desire, humility, and

submissiveness are beautifully smelted together in the wistful words,

which are all the more prevalent a prayer, because they do not venture

to take the form of prayer. To tell Jesus that His will was all that

was needed to heal him was, as it were, to throw the responsibility for

this continued misery on Him who could so easily deliver, if He only

willed to do it. But the hope which gleamed before his poor eyes was

only a gleam, obscured by his ignorance of Jesus' disposition towards

him. The lowly acquiescence, with which he leaves Jesus to decide

whether he is to be freed from his horrible, living death, is very

beautiful, and speaks of a patient, disciplined spirit, as well as of a

profound insight into our Lord's authority. The leper does cling to the

hope that Jesus does will to heal him, but he will not rebel if he is

left shut up in his prison-house. Surely in such a blending of trust,

yearning, and acceptance of that Will, whatever it involved, there was

the germ of discipleship. Surely there was, at least, the beginning of

a living union with Jesus, which would heal more than the leprosy of

the flesh.

Mark gives the precious addition to the narrative, of a glimpse into

the heart of Jesus, when he tells us that, moved with compassion,' He

put forth His hand and touched him.' Swift and, we may almost say,

instinctive was the outgoing of pity from the heart, which was so

pitiful because it was so pure, and laid on itself every man's sorrow

because it carried no burden of its own sin or self-regard. That touch

had deep meaning, but it was not done for the sake of a meaning. It was

the spontaneous expression of love, and revealed the delicate quickness

of perception of another's feelings which flows from love only. The

leper had almost forgotten what the touch of a hand felt like. He had

lived, ever since his disease was manifest, apart from others, had

perhaps lost the embraces of wife and children, had walked alone in

crowds, and had a heart-chilling circle cleared round him everywhere.

But now this Man stretches His hand across the dreary gulf, and lets

him feel once more the sweetness of a warm and gentle touch. It was

half the cure; it was the complete clearing away of the last film of

the cloud of doubt as to the will of Jesus. It answered the if' by

something that spoke louder than any word. And, though it was not meant

for anything but the silent voice of pity and love, we do not rob it of

its beautiful spontaneity when we see, in the touch of that pure hand

on the rotting feculence of leprosy, a parable of the Incarnation, in

which He lays hold on our flesh of sin and is yet without

sin--contracts no defilement by contact, but by touching cleanses the

foulness on which He lays His white fingers. By that touch He

proclaimed Himself the priest, to whom the Law gave the office of

laying his hand on the leper.

But the great word accompanying the touch is majestic in its brevity

and absolute claim to absolute power. Jesus accepts the leper's lofty

conception of His omnipotent will, as He always accepted the highest

conceptions that any formed of His person or authority. The sovereign

utterance, I will,' claims possession of the divine prerogative of

affecting dead matter by the mere outgoing of His volition. Not only is

it true of Him that He spake and it was done,' but He willed and it was

done; and these are the hall-marks of divine power. Neither the touch

of His hand nor the word of His lips cleansed the leper, but simply the

exercise of His will, of which word and touch were but audible and

visible tokens for sense to grasp. The form of the poor husky croak for

help determined the form of the answer, and the correspondence is

marked by all the evangelists as a striking instance of Christ's loving

way of echoing our petitions in His replies, and moulding His gifts to

match our desires. Thunder in heaven wakes echoes on earth, but more

wonderful is it that the thin voice of our supplications, when we

scarcely dare to shape them into prayers, should wake a voice from the

throne, which, though it is mighty as the voice of many waters' and

sweet as that of harpers harping with their harps,' deigns to echo our

poor cries.

The prohibition to speak of the cure till the priests had pronounced it

real and complete is more stringent in Mark, who also tells how utterly

it was disregarded. Its reason was obviously the wish to comply with

the law, and also the wish to get the official seal to the cure. Jesus

did desire the miracle to be known, but not till it was authoritatively

certified by the priest whose business it was to pronounce a sufferer

clean. It was for the leper's advantage, too, that he should have the

official certificate, since he would not be restored to society without

it. One does not wonder that the prohibition was disregarded in the

uncontrollable delight and wonder at such an experience. The leper was

eloquent, as we all can be, when our hearts are engaged, and his

blessing refused to be hid. Alas, how many of us, who profess to have

been cleansed from a worse defilement, find no such impulse to speak

welling up in ourselves! Alas, how superfluous is the injunction to

hundreds of Christ's disciples: See thou say nothing to any man'!

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THE FAITH WHICH CHRIST PRAISES

The centurion answered and said: Lord, I am not worthy that Thou

shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant

shall be healed. 9. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers

under me: and I say to this man, Go! and he goeth; and to another, Come

I and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this; and he doeth it.'--MATT.

viii. 8-9.

This miracle of the healing of the centurion's servant is the second of

the great series which Matthew gives us. It is perhaps not accidental

that both the first and the second miracles in his collection point out

our Lord's relation to outcasts from Israel. The first of them deals

with a leper, the second with the prayer of a heathen. And so they both

contribute to the great purpose of Matthew's Gospel, the bringing out

of the nature of the kingdom and the glory of the King.

My object now is to deal with the whole of the incident of which I have

read the most important part. We have in the story three things: the

man and his faith; Christ's eulogium upon the faith, and declaration of

its place in His kingdom; and the answer to the faith. Look, then, at

these three in succession.

I. We consider, first, the man and his faith.

He was a heathen and a Gentile. The Herod, who then ruled over Galilee,

had a little army, officered by Romans, of whom probably this centurion

was one; the commander, perhaps, of some small garrison of a hundred

men, the sixtieth part of a legion, which was stationed in Capernaum.

If we look at all the features of his character which come out in the

story, we get a very lovable picture of a much more tender heart than

might have been supposed to beat under the armour of a mercenary

soldier set to overawe a sullen people. He loveth our nation,' say the

elders of the Jews,--not certainly because of their amiability, but

because of the revelation which they possessed. Like a great many

others in that strange, restless era when our Lord came, this man seems

to have become tired of the hollowness of heathenism, and to have been

groping for the light. His military service brought him into contact

with Judaism and its monotheism, and his heart sprang to that as the

thing he had been seeking. He hath built us a synagogue,' thereby

expressing his adhesion to, or at least his lofty estimate of, the

worship which was there carried on. Just as, if an English officer in

India were, in some little village or other, to repair a ruined temple,

he would win the hearts of all the people, because they would think he

was coming over to Brahminism; so this soldier was felt to be nearer to

the Jews than his official position might have suggested.

Then, there was in him a beautiful human kindliness, which neither the

rough military life, nor that carelessness about a slave--which is one

of the worst fruits of slavery, had been able to sour or destroy. He

was tenderly anxious about his servant, who, according to Luke's

expression, was dear to him.' Then we get as the crown of all the

beauty of his character, the lowliness of spirit which the little brief

authority' in which he was dressed' had not puffed up. I am not worthy

that Thou shouldest come under my roof.' That lowliness is emphasised

in Luke's version of the story, which is more detailed and particularly

accurate than Matthew's summary account. By it we learn that he did not

venture to come himself, but sent His messengers to Jesus. If we take

Matthew's version, there is another lovely trait. He does not ask

Christ to do anything. He simply spreads the necessity before Him, in

the confidence that His pitying love lies so near the surface that it

was sure to flow forth, even at that light touch. He will not

prescribe, he tells the story, and leaves all to Him. Christ's answer,

I will come and heal him,' throbs with the consciousness of power, and

is gentle with tenderness, quick to interpret unspoken wishes, and not

slow to answer, unless it is for the wisher's good to be refused. When

He was asked to go, because the asker considered that His presence was

necessary for His power to have effect, He refused; when He is not

asked to go, He volunteers to do so. He is moved to apparently opposite

actions by the same motive, the good of the petitioner, whose weak

faith He strengthens by refusal, whose strong faith He confirms by

acquiescence. And that is the law of His conduct always, and you and I

may trust it absolutely, He may give, or retain ungiven, what we

desire; in either case, He will be acting in order that our trust in

Him may be deepened.

That brings us to the remarkable and unique conception of our Lord's

manner of working and power to which this centurion gives utterance. I

also' (for the true text of Matthew has that also,' as the Revised

Version shows), I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under

me, and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he

cometh; to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. Speak thou with a word

only and my servant shall be healed.' A centurion was likely to

understand the power of a word of command. His whole training had

taught him the omnipotence of the uttered will of the authoritative

general, and although he was but an officer over a poor sixtieth part

of a legion, yet in some limited measure the same power lay in him, and

his word could secure unhesitating submission. One good thing about the

devilish trade of war is that it teaches the might of authority and the

virtue of absolute obedience. And even his profession, with all its

roughness and wickedness, had taught the centurion this precious

lesson, a jewel that he had found in a dunghill, the lesson that, given

the authoritative lip, a word is omnipotent. The commander speaks and

the legion goes, though it be to dash itself to death.

So he turns to Christ. Does he mean to parallel or to contrast his

subordination and Christ's position? The also,' which, as I remarked,

the Revised Version has rightly replaced in the text here, is in favour

of the former supposition, that he means to parallel Christ's position

with his own. And it is much more natural to suppose that a heathen

man, with little knowledge of Christ and of the depths of the divine

revelation in the past, should have attained to the conception of Jesus

as possessing a real but subordinate and derived authority, than to

suppose that he had grasped, at that early stage, the truth which

Christ's nearest friends took long years to understand, and which some

of them do not understand yet, viz. that Christ possessed as His own

the power which He wielded.

But if we take this point of view, and consider that the centurion's

conception falls beneath the lofty Christian ideal of Christ's power in

the universe, as it is set forth to us in the New Testament, even then

His words set forth a truth. For if we believe on the one hand in the

divinity of our Lord and Saviour, we also believe that the Son is

subject to the Father' and listen to His own words when He says, All

power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.' So that whatever

difference there may be between His relation to the power which He

wields and that of a prophet or miracle-worker, who derives his power

from Him, this is true, that Christ's power, too, is a power given to

Him. But the other side is one that I desire to emphasise in a few

words, viz. that the centurion's conception falls short of the truth,

inasmuch as, if we believe in Christ's witness to Himself, we must

believe that the power which acted through His word, dwelt in Him, in

an altogether different relation to His person from that in which an

analogous power may have dwelt in any other man. He spake and it was

done, He commanded and it stood fast.' Diseases fled at His word. By

the breath of His mouth He slew' these enemies of men. He rebuked the

storm, and the howling of the wind and the dashing of the waves were

less loud than His calm voice. He flung a word into the depths of the

grave, strangely speaking to, and yet more strangely heard by, the dull

cold ear of death, and Lazarus, dazzled, stumbles out into the light.

Who is this, that commandeth the waves, and the seas, and the

sicknesses, and they obey Him? My brother, I pray that you and I, in

these days of hesitation, when many a truth is clouded by doubt, may be

able to answer with the full assent and consent of understanding and

heart, this is God manifest in the flesh.'

And remember that this prerogative of dealing with physical nature, by

the bare forth-putting of His word, is not only a doctrine of

Christianity, but that more and more physical investigation is coming

to the unifying of all forces in one, and to the resolving of that one

into the force of a will, and that all that will, as the Christian

scheme teaches us, is lodged in Jesus Christ. His lip speaks, and it is

power. He moves in nature, in providence, in history, in grace, because

in Him abides now in the form of a man, that same everlasting Word

which was with the Father, and by whom all things were made. The

centurion bows before the Commander, and the Christ says, as Captain of

the Lord's host am I now come.' Such, then, is the faith of this

soldier taught him by the Legion.

II. Now a word next as to our Lord's eulogium on his faith.

Jesus Christ accepts and endorses the centurion's estimate of Him, as

He always accepts the highest place offered Him. No one ever proffered

to Jesus Christ honours that He put by. No one ever brought to Him a

trust which He said was either excessive or misdirected. Speak the word

and my servant shall be healed,' said the centurion. Contrast Christ's

acceptance of this confidence in his power with Elijah's Am I a God, to

kill and to make alive, that they send this man to me to recover him of

his leprosy?' Or contrast it with Peter's Why look ye so earnestly on

us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to

walk?' Christ takes as His due all the honour, love, and trust, which

any man can give Him--either an exorbitant appetite for adulation, or

the manifestation of conscious divinity.

And He marvelled.' Twice we read in Scripture that Christ

wondered--once at this heathen's faith, so strongly grown, with so few

advantages of culture; once at Jewish unbelief, so feeble and

fruitless, after so much expenditure of patience and care. But passing

from that, notice how much lies in these sad and yet astonished words

of His: Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not

in Israel.' Then, He came seeking faith from this people whom God had

cared for during centuries. The one fruit that He desired was trust in

Him. That is what He is seeking for in us--not lives of profession, not

orthodoxy of conception, not even fruits in work, but before all this,

and productive of all that is good in any of them, He desires to find

in our hearts the child's trust that casts itself wholly on His

Omnipotent word, and is sure of an answer. This man's faith was great,

great in the rapidity of its growth, great in the difficulties which it

had overcome, great in the clearness of its conception, great in the

firmness of its affiance, great in the humility with which it was

accompanied. Such a faith He seeks as the thirsty traveller seeks

grapes in the wilderness, and when He finds it growing in our hearts,

then He is satisfied and glad.

Still further, there is brought out the dignity of faith as being not

only the great desire of Christ's heart for each of us, but also as

being the one means of admission into the kingdom. I say unto you, many

shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham

and Isaac and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the children of the

Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness.' Strange that Matthew's,

the Jewish gospel, should record that saying. Strange that Luke's, the

universal human gospel, should omit it. But it was relevant to

Matthew's great purpose to make very plain this truth--which the nation

were forgetting, and which was gall and wormwood to them,--that

hereditary descent and outward privileges had no power to open the door

of Christ's Kingdom to any man, and that the one thing which had, was

the one thing which the centurion possessed and the Jews did not, a

simple trust in that divine Lord.

My brethren, there are many of us who attach precisely the same value

as these Jews did, in slightly different forms, to external connection

with religion and religious institutions. What blunts the sharpest

words that come from pulpits, and prevents them from getting to hearts

and consciences, is just that pestilent old Jewish error, that because

men have always had a kind of outward hold on the Kingdom, therefore

they do not need the teaching that the publicans and the harlots want.

My dear friend, nothing binds a man to Christ but trust. Nothing opens

the doors of His Kingdom, either here on earth or yonder, but reliance

upon Him. And although you were steeped to the eye-brows in religious

privileges, and high in place in His church, it would avail nothing.

The Kingdom of Christ is a Kingdom into which faith, and faith only,

admits a man. Therefore from the furthest corners of the world Christ's

sad prescience saw the Gentiles flocking, and the Jews who trusted in

externals, cast out.

I need not dwell on the two halves of the picture here, the radiant

glow of the one, the tragic darkness of the other. The feast expresses

abundance, joy, rest, companionship. They shall come' says Christ; then

He is there, and sitting at the head of the table; and the Master's

welcome makes the feast. On the other hand, that which is without the

banqueting hall is dark. That darkness is but the making visible of the

nature of the men. Hell comes out of a man before it surrounds him.

They were sometime darkness,' and now they are in the darkness. I say

no more about that, I dare not; but I pray you to remember that the

lips which said this spake that He did know'; and to take heed lest,

speculating and arguing, and sometimes quarrelling, about the nature

and the duration of future retribution, we should lose our sense of the

awfulness and certainty of the fact.

III. So one word lastly as to the answer that faith brings.

Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.' He heals

at a distance, and shapes His gift by the man's desire. The form of the

vase that is dipped into the sea settles the quantity and the shape of

the water that is taken out. There is a wide truth in that, on which I

do not now enlarge. The measure of my faith is the measure of my

possession of Christ. He puts the key of the treasure-house into our

hands and says, Go in, and take as much as you like'; and some of us

come out with a halfpenny as all that we care to bring away. You are

starving, some of you, whilst you are sitting in a granary bursting

with plenty. Suppose a proclamation were made, There will be given away

gold to anybody that likes to come. Let them bring a purse, and it will

be filled.' How large a purse do you think you would like to take? A

sack, I should think. Christ says that to you; and you bring a tiny

thing like what they keep sovereigns in, that will scarcely hold a

farthing, with such a narrow throat is it provided, and so small its

interior accommodation. Ye have not because ye ask not.' Open thy mouth

wide and I will fill it.'

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SWIFT HEALING AND IMMEDIATE SERVICE

And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother

laid, and sick of a fever. 15. And He touched her hand, and the fever

left her: and she arose and ministered unto them.'--MATT. viii. 14-15.

Other accounts give a few additional points.

Mark:--

That the house was that of Peter and Andrew.

That Christ went with James and John.

That He was told of the sickness.

That He lifted her up.

Luke, physician-like, diagnoses the fever as great.' He also tells us

that the sick woman's friends besought Jesus and did not merely tell'

Him of her. May we infer that to His ear the telling of His servants'

woes is a prayer for His help? He does not mention Christ's touch,

which Mark here and elsewhere delights to record, and which Matthew

also specifies. He fixes attention on the all-powerful word which was

the vehicle of Christ's healing might.

Both evangelists put this miracle in its chronological order, from

which it appears that it was done on the Sabbath day, which explains

our verse 16, when the even was come.'

I. The scene of the miracle.

The domestic privacy of the great event seems to have struck the

evangelists. It stands between the narrative of Christ's public work in

the synagogue, and the story of the eager crowds who came round the

doors. So it gives us a glimpse of the uniformity of that life of

blessing as being the same in public and in private.

Again, it suggests the characteristic absence of all ostentation in His

works. We can scarcely suppose this miracle done for the sake of

showing His divinity. It was pure goodness and sympathy which moved

Him.

It occurred in a household of His disciples. There, too, sorrow will

come. But there, if they tell Him of it, His help will not be far away.

This is one of the few miracles wrought on one of His more immediate

followers. The Resurrection of Lazarus, so like this in many respects,

is the only other.

This scene of the healing Christ in His disciples' household suggests

the whole subject of the effect on domestic life of Christianity, or

more truly of Christ Himself. It is scarcely too much to say that the

home, as many of us blessedly know, is the creation of Christ. Cana of

Galilee--The household at Bethany.

II. The time.

After His long day's toil--the unwearied mercy. On the Sabbath--the

Lord of the Sabbath.

III. The person.

The woman. How Christianity embodies the true emancipation of women.

They are participants in an equal gift, honoured by admission to equal

service.

IV. The effect.

She ministered'; testimony of the completeness of the cure. Which

completeness is also real in the spiritual region.

How the basis of all our service must be His healing. Ours second, not

first.

How the end of His healing is our service. We are bound to render it:

He desires it. How each one's character and circumstances determine his

service. How common duties may be sanctified. He accepts our service

whatever it be.

The Sabbath. The services of love come before ritual observance, in

Jesus and in the cured woman.

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THE HEALING CHRIST

Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.'--MATT. viii.

17.

You will remember, probably, that in our Old Testament translation of

these words they are made to refer to man's mental and spiritual evils:

He bare our griefs and carried our sorrows.' Our evangelist takes them

to refer, certainly not exclusively, but in part, to men's corporeal

evils--our infirmities' (bodily weaknesses, that is) and our

sicknesses.' He was distinctly justified in so doing, both by the

meaning of the original words, which are perfectly general and capable

of either application, and by the true and deep view of the

comprehensiveness of our Lord's mission and purpose. Christ is the

antagonist of all the evils that affect man's life, whether his

corporeal or his spiritual; and no less true is it that, in His deep

sympathy, He bare our sicknesses' than that, in the mystery of His

atoning death, He was wounded for our transgressions.'

It is, therefore, this point of view of Christ, as the Healer, which I

desire to bring before you now.

I. First, I ask you to look at the plain facts as to our Lord's

ministry which are contained in these words:--Himself took our

infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.'

Now, there are two points that I desire to emphasise very briefly. One

is the prominence in Christ's life which is given to His healing

energy. We are accustomed to think of His cures as miracles. We are

accustomed to think of them in that aspect as evidences of His mission,

or as difficulties and stumbling-blocks, as the case may be. But I ask

you to put away all such thoughts for a minute, and think about the

miracles simply as being cures. Remember how enormous a proportion of

our Lord's time and pains and sympathy and thoughts was directed to

that one purpose of healing people of their bodily infirmities. We may

almost say that to an outsider He would look a great deal liker a man

who, as the Apostle Peter painted Him in one of his earliest addresses,

went about doing good and healing,' than as a teacher of divine wisdom,

to say nothing of an incarnation of the divine nature. His miracles of

healing were certainly the most conspicuous part of His life's work.

And then, remember, that whilst the great proportion of our Lord's

miracles are miracles of healing, we are sure that the whole of the

recorded miraculous works of our Lord are the smallest fraction of what

He really did. You remember how there crop up, here and there, in the

Gospels, general r�sum� of our Lord's work, of such a kind as

this:--And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues,

and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of

sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And they brought

unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and

torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which

were lunatic, and those that had the palsy and He healed them.' Or,

again:--And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of

Galilee, and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great

multitudes came unto Him, having those that were lame, blind, dumb,

maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet, and He

healed them.' Now these are but specimens of the occasional

generalisations which we find in the Gospels, which warrant us in

saying that, according to the New Testament record, Christ's works of

healing were to be numbered, not by tens, but by hundreds, and perhaps

by thousands.

That is the first fact calling for notice. The words of our text

suggest a second thought as to the cost at which these cures were

wrought. Himself took and bare' does not mean only took away.' It

includes that, as a consequence, but it points to something before the

removal of the sicknesses. It points to the fact that Christ in some

real sense endured the loads which He removed. Of course, His cross is

the highest exemplification of the great law which runs through His

whole life, that He identifies Himself with all the evil which He takes

away, and is able to take it away only because He identifies Himself

with it. But whilst the cross is the highest exemplification of this,

every miracle of mercy which He wrought is an illustration of the same

principle in its appropriate fashion, and upon a lower level. And

although we cannot say that the physical sufferings which He alleviated

were physically laid upon Him, yet we can say that He so identified

Himself with all sufferers by His swift sympathy as that He bore, and

therefore bore away, the diseases as well as the sins of the men for

whose healing He lived, and for whose redemption He died.

The proof of this crops up now and then. What did it mean that, when He

stood beside one poor sufferer, before He could utter from His

authoritative lips the divine word of power, Ephphatha, be opened,' the

same lips had to shape themselves for the utterance of an altogether

human and brotherly sigh? Did it not mean that the condition of His

healing power was sympathy, that He must bring Himself to feel the

burden that He will roll away? That sigh proves that His cures were the

works, not without cost to the doer, of a sympathising heart, and not

the mere passionless acts of a miracle-monger.

In like manner, what meant that strange tempest of agitation that swept

across the pacific ocean of His nature ere He stood by the grave of

Lazarus? Why that being troubled in Himself' before He raised him?

Wherefore the tears that heralded the restoration of the man to life?

They could not be shed for the loss that was so soon to be repaired.

They can only have been the emotion and tears of One who saw, as massed

in one black whole, the entire sorrows that affected physical humanity,

and rose in a holy passion of indignation and of sorrow at the sight of

that enemy, Death, with whose beginnings He had wrestled in many a

miracle of restoration, and whose sceptre He was now about to pluck

from his bony clutch. Therefore I say that Christ the healer bore, and

thereby bore away, the sicknesses and the infirmities of men.

Amidst mountains of rubbish and chaff, the Rabbis have a grain of wheat

in their legend which tells us that Messias is to come as a leper, and

to be found sitting amongst the lepers at the city's gate; which is a

picturesque and symbolical way of declaring the same truth that I am

now insisting upon, the participation by the Redeemer in all burdens

and sorrows of body and of spirit which He takes away.

II. And now with these facts--for I take them to be such--for the basis

of our thoughts, let me ask you to turn, in the second place, to some

plain practical conclusions that come from them.

The first of these that I would suggest is the lesson as to the proper

sweep and sphere of Christian beneficence. As I said in my introductory

remarks, we do not rightly measure the whole circumference of Christ's

work unless we regard it as covering and including all forms of human

evil. He is the antagonist of everything that is antagonistic to

man--pain, misery, sickness, death itself. All these are excrescences

on the divine design, transient accompaniments of disordered relations

between God and man. And this great physician of souls fights the

disease and does not neglect the symptoms; deals with the central evil

and is not so absorbed with that as to omit from His view or His

treatment the merely superficial manifestations of it.

So that if Christian people, individually and as Churches, are justly

exposed, in any measure, to the sarcasm which is freely cast upon them,

that they neglect the temporal well-being of men in order to attend

exclusively to their spiritual wants, they have not learned the example

of such partial treatment from their Master; nor have they taken in the

significance and the power of His life in its relation to human sorrow.

All that makes the heart bleed Christ comes to take away. All the ills

that flesh is heir to,' as well as those which each spirit, by

rebellion, brings upon itself--are the foes with whom Christ has left

His Church in the world in order to wage incessant warfare. If we

Christians, oppressed with the sense of the depth and central nature of

the evil of man's sin, have so devoted ourselves to preaching and

evangelising, that we are, in any measure, rightly chargeable with

neglecting hospitals and infirmaries and other forms of relief for

temporal necessities, just in that proportion have we departed from our

Master's spirit. But I do not, for my part, much believe, either in the

good faith of the accusers or in the applicability of the charge which

men, who never do anything for the religious improvement of their

fellows, are apt to bring against us. My little experience, I think,

teaches me that the folk who say to us Do not waste your money on

Bibles and missionaries, give it to hospitals and schools,' are not

usually the people that waste their money' on either; and that the

largest portion of all the work that is done in England to-day, for the

temporal well-being of men, comes from the Christians who also do work

for their spiritual well-being.

But let us learn the lesson, if we need it, from our enemies and our

critics; and see to it that the more we feel the lofty and transcendent

importance of carrying Christ's salvation to men's souls, the more we

endeavour, likewise, to live amongst them as He did, the embodiment of

pity, wide-eyed and comprehensive, for every evil that racks their

hearts and every pain that tortures their nerves. As a fact, hospitals

are found within the limits of Christianity, and not outside it; and so

far, Christendom, though it is largely professing Christendom only, has

learned that it follows a Christ who is the Saviour of the body and the

Physician of the soul.

In the next place, another practical lesson which I would draw from

this is, as to the sole conditions upon which any form of Christian

help can be rendered. The condition for the elevation of men is that

the lever which lifts them must have its point below them. That is to

say, you have to go down if you would heave up. You have to go amongst

if you would deliver; you have to make your own, by a sympathy which

you have learned of your Master, the sorrows and the sins of humanity,

if you would effectually remedy them. A guinea to an hospital is not

your contribution to the Christ-like relief of human suffering. It

wants, and He wants, your heart, your sympathy. Think for a moment of

the universe of anguish that may lie within the narrow limits of one

human body--that awful mystery of pain which holds in its red-hot

pincers hundreds and thousands of men and women in this city at this

moment. Try to imagine the mass of bodily agony, an enormous percentage

of which is utterly innocent, and a still larger percentage of it

perfectly remediable, which at this hour, whilst we sit here, is

torturing mankind. And oh! brethren, do not let any thought of the

transcendent importance of Christ's gospel, and what it does to men's

hearts, make us careless about these real, though lesser, evils which

lie beside us, and which we can remedy and help.

Only, remember the condition of help for them all. The newspapers went

into raptures some years since, and wisely, over a Roman Catholic

priest who shut himself up in a little island with a colony of lepers.

Some Protestant martyrs have done the same before him, without any

chorus of newspaper praise. Whoever did it had penetrated to the secret

of Christian help--identification with the evil. If we would take away

any misery or sin, we must act like that doctor who shut himself up in

the wards of an hospital, and kept a diary of the symptoms of his

disease, till the pen dropped from his fingers and the film came over

his eyes. Are we ready to do anything like that for our brethren? Until

we are, we have yet to learn and to practise the pattern which He has

set, Who, though He was rich, for our sins became poor': and who,

forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, Himself

likewise'--in their own fashion of weakness, and weariness, and sorrow,

and pain, and ultimately death--took part of the same.' He bore our

sicknesses,' therefore He bore them away, and, in so doing, taught us

the law of Christian help.

And lastly, let me not pass from this subject without leaving on your

hearts, dear friends, the other thought, of the connection and the

relative importance of these two hemispheres of Christ's work. The

sicknesses are symbols of the sins; the removal of the bodily pain and

disease is a prophecy and a visible parable proclaiming the removal of

all the harassment and abnormal action that afflict intellect, will, or

spirit. Christ Himself has taught us to regard His miracles of healing

as the making visible, in the outward sphere, of the analogous miracles

of healing in the spiritual realm. And although I have been saying a

great deal about the preciousness and the sacredness of the curative

influences which flow from Christ, and deal with outward diseases and

evils, let us not forget that a sound body is of small worth as

compared with a sound mind; that the body is the servant of the spirit,

meant mainly to do its behests, bring it knowledge, and express its

will; and that high above, and pointed to by, the lower, though

precious work of healing men's sicknesses, towers that work which we

all of us need, and the robustest of us, perhaps, need most, the

healing of our sick souls and their deliverance from death.

Every one of these manifold miracles which the Saviour wrought may be

taken as parabolical. You and I grope in darkness as the blind. You and

I have ears deaf to hear, and lips dumb to speak, the praises and the

love and the word of God. We are lame in the powers of mind and spirit

to run in the way of His commandments, and to walk unfainting in the

paths of duty. The fever of hot, passionate, foolish desires burns in

the veins of us all with its poison. The paralysis of a will that is

slothful to good infests and hinders us all. But there comes to us that

great hope and promise that Christ has the Spirit of the Lord upon Him

to bring liberty to the captive, sight to the blind, hearing to the

deaf, healing to the fevered, vigour to the palsied, activity to the

lame. Only let us set our trust in Him, carry our weaknesses to Him,

acknowledge our sins to Him, seek the touch of His healing and

quickening hand, and the miracle shall be wrought.

The old-fashioned surgery used to believe in the transfusion of blood

from a sound to a diseased person, and the consequent expulsion of

disease. That is the fact about our relation to Christ. Put your arm

side by side with His by simple faith in Him. Come into contact with

Him, and the blood of Jesus Christ, the law of the spirit of life that

was in Him,' will pass into the veins of your spirits, and make you

whole of whatsoever disease you have. Then shall the eyes of the blind

be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the

lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.' And so

shall you begin that course of healing and purifying, which will know

no pause nor natural termination until, redeemed in body, soul, and

spirit, you reach the land where the inhabitant thereof shall no more

say, I am sick,'--and there shall be no more death, neither shall there

be any more pain.'

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CHRIST REPRESSING RASH DISCIPLESHIP

And a certain scribe came, and said unto Him, Master, I will follow

Thee whithersoever Thou goest. 20. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes

have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man

hath not where to lay His head.'--MATT. viii. 19-20.

Our Lord was just on the point of leaving Capernaum for the other side

of the lake. His intended departure from the city, in which He had

spent so long a time, and wrought so many miracles, produced precisely

opposite effects on two of the crowd around Him, both of whom seem to

have been, in the loose sense of the word, disciples. One was this

scribe, whom the prospect of losing the Master from his side, hurried

into a too lightly formed and too confidently expressed undertaking.

The other presented exactly the opposite fault. That other man in the

crowd, at the prospect of losing sight of the Christ, began to think

that there were imperative duties at home which would prevent his

following the Master, and said, Suffer me first to go and bury my

father.' A sacred obligation, and one which Christ would not have

desired him to suspend, unless there had been something more behind it!

These two men, then, represent the two opposite poles of weakness, the

one too swift, the other too slow, to take a decisive step. And

Christ's treatment of them is, in like manner, a representation of the

two opposite methods which He adopts for curing opposite diseases, and

bringing both back to the same state of health. He stimulates the too

sluggish, He represses the too willing (if such a paradox may be

allowed). His treatment is at once spur and bridle. To the one man He

administers a sobering representation of what he is undertaking with so

light a heart; to the other He gives the commandment that sounds so

stern: Leave the highest duty, if you cannot do it without conflicting

with your higher to Me.'

And so I think that Matthew's arrangement of this pair of companion

pictures is to be preferred to that which we find in Luke, who

localises the incident in a different part of our Lord's ministry, and

on a different occasion. I deal now only with the first of these two

contrasted pictures, and consider the lightly-made vow, and Christ's

sobering treatment of it.

I. The too lightly uttered vow.

There is a certain almost jaunty air of self-complacence about the man

and his facile promise. What he promised was no more than what Christ

requires from each of us, no more than what Christ was infinitely glad

to have laid at His feet. And he promised it with absolute sincerity,

meaning every word that he said, and believing that he could fulfil it

all. What was the fault? There were three: taking counsel of a

transitory feeling; making a vow with a very slight knowledge of what

it meant; and relying with foolish confidence on his own strength.

Vows which rest on no firmer foundation than these are sure to sink and

topple over into ruin. Discipleship which is the result of mere emotion

must be evanescent, for all emotion is so. Effervescence cannot last,

and when the cause ceases the effect ceases too. Discipleship which

enlists in Christ's army, in ignorance of the hard marching and

fighting which have to be gone through, will very soon be skulking in

the rear or deserting the flag altogether. Discipleship which offers

faithful following because it relies on its own fervour and force will,

sooner or later, feel its unthinkingly undertaken obligations too

heavy, and be glad to shake off the yoke which it was so eager to put

on.

These three things, singly or combined, are the explanations, as they

are the causes, of half the stagnant Christianity that chokes our

churches. Men have vowed, and did not know what they were vowing,

pledging themselves, in a moment of excitement, to what after years

discover to them to be a hard and uncongenial course of life. They have

been carried into the position of professed disciples on the top of a

wave of emotion which has long since broken and retreated, leaving them

stranded and motionless in a place where they have no business to be.

Every community of professing Christians is weakened, and its vitality

is lowered, by the presence and influence of members who have said, I

will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest,' but whose vow was but a

flash in the pan, and never meant anything. They did not know what they

were saying. They had not stopped to think why they were saying it,

still less did they take the advice of the Master to count their forces

before they went into the battle, and see whether their ten thousand

could meet him that would come against them with twenty thousand.

I do not suppose that much of our modern religionism is in great danger

from too fervid emotion. That, certainly, is not the side on which our

average Christianity is defective. No feeling can be too fervid which

has been kindled by profound contemplation and hearty acceptance of

Christ's redeeming love. The facts to which sound religious emotion

looks, warrant, and the work in the Christian life which it has to do,

needs that it shall be at white-heat, if it is to be worthy of its

object and equal to its tasks. But there very often is emotion which is

too fervid for the convictions which are presumed to kindle it, and

which burns itself out quickly because it neither comes from principle

nor leads to action. No resolution to follow Christ can be too

enthusiastic, nor any renunciation for His sake too absolute, to

correspond to His supreme authority. But there may very easily be brave

words much too great for the real determination which is in them. A

half-empty bottle makes more noise, if you shake it, than a full one.

We cannot estimate the hindrances of the Christian life too lightly; if

we do so knowing them, and thinking little of them because we think so

joyfully of Christ our helper. But there may very easily be a

presumptuous contempt of these, which is only the result of ignorance

and self-confidence, and will soon be abased into dread of them, and

probably end in desertion of Him.

A sadly large number of professing Christians may see their own faces

in this mirror. How many of us are exactly like this man? Long, long

ago we vowed to follow Christ. Have we advanced a yard on the Christian

course since then, or do we stand very much at the same point as on

that far-off day? Some of us, who spent no breath in saying what we

were going to do, but used it in the prayer, Draw me, and I will run

after Thee,' have followed the Captain. Some of us have been like

clumsy recruits, who have only been marking time all the while, one

foot up and the other down, but always in the same place. That is the

kind of advance that the lightly formed resolution--formed in ignorance

of what it involved, and in foolish confidence in the resolver's

strength--is too apt to lead to. Is it not so in all life? No caravan

ever starts from a port on the coast to go up-country, but there is a

percentage of deserters in the first week. There are always, in every

good work, adherents, easily moved, pushing themselves into the front,

full of resolves in the beginning, and then, when the tug comes, they

drop out of the ranks and leave the quiet ones, that did not say, I am

going to do it,' but thought to themselves, I should uncommonly like to

try whether I can.' to bear the burden and heat of the march. A sad,

wise, self-distrustful valour is the temper that wins.

Let us see to it, dear brethren, not that our fervour be less--I do not

know how the fervour of some of you could be less and keep alive at

all--but that our principle be more; not that our resolutions be less

noble, but that they be more deeply engrained. You can light a fire of

the chips and paper in an instant, and the flimsier the material the

more quickly it will crackle; it takes a longer time to get coals in a

blaze, and they will last longer. Be your resolves slow to begin and

never-ending,' especially when you say, as we are all bound to say,

Lord! I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.'

II. Note our Lord's treatment of this too lightly uttered vow.

It is wonderfully gentle and lenient. He speaks no rebuke. He does not

reject the proffered devotion. He does not even say that there was

anything defective in it, but simply answers by a quiet statement of

what the vow was pledging the rash utterer to do. Christ's words are a

douche of cold water to condense the steam which was so noisily

escaping, to turn the vaporous enthusiasm into something more solid,

with the particles nearer each other. His object was not to repel, but

to turn an ignorant, somewhat bragging vow into a calm, humble

determination, with a silent God helping me' for its foundation. To

repel is sometimes the way to attract. Jesus Christ would not have any

one coming after Him on a misunderstanding of where he is going, or

what he will have to do. It shall be all fair and above board, and the

difficulties and sacrifices and necessary restrictions and

inconveniences shall all be stated. He does not need to hide from His

recruits the black side of the war for which He seeks to enlist them,

but He tells it all to them to begin with, and then waits--and He only

knows how longingly He waits--for their repeating, with full knowledge

and humble determination, the vow that sprang so lightly to their lips

when they did not understand what they were saying. Of course our

Lord's words had literal truth, and their original intention was to

bring clearly before this man the hard fact that following Jesus meant

homelessness. It is as if He had said, You are ready to follow Me

wherever I go--are you? You will have to go far, and to be always

going. Creatures have their burrows and their roosting-places, but I,

the Lord of creatures, the Son of Man, whose kingdom prophets

proclaimed, am houseless in My own realm, and My followers must share

My wandering life. Are you ready for that?' Jesus was homeless. He was

born in a hired stable, cradled in a manger, owed shelter to faithful

friends, was buried in a borrowed grave; He had not where to lay His

head,' living or dying. And His servants, in literal truth, had to

tramp after Him, through the length and breadth of the land. And if

this man was meaning to follow Him whithersoever He went, he had not

before him a little pleasure-journey across the lake, to come back

again in a day or two, but he was enlisting for a term of service, that

extended over a life.

But then, beyond that, there is a deeper lesson here. The Son of Man'

on our Lord's lips not only expressed His dignity as Messiah, but His

relation to the whole race of men; and declared that He was what we

nowadays call ideal manhood. And that is the point, as I take it, of

the contrast between the restful lives of the lower creatures, who all

have a place fitted to them, where they curl themselves up, and go to

sleep, and are comfortable, and the higher life of men, which is

homeless in the deepest sense. The Son of Man,' He in whom the whole

essence of humanity is, as it were, concentrated; and who, in His own

person, presents the very type and perfection of manhood, cannot but be

homeless.

Ah, yes I man's prerogative is unrest, and he should recognise it as a

blessing. It is the condition of all noble life; it is the condition of

all growth. The foxes have holes,' and the fox's hole fits it, and

therefore the hole of the fox to-day is what it was in the beginning,

and ever shall be. Man has no such abode, therefore he grows. Man is

blessed with that great discourse that looks before and after,' and his

thoughts wander through eternity, and therefore he is capable of

endless advance, and if he is in the path where his Maker has meant him

to be, sure of endless growth. The more a man gets like a beast, the

more has he of the beast's lot of happy contentment in this world. And

the more he gets like a man, like the Son of Man,' the more has he to

realise that he is a pilgrim and a sojourner, as all his fathers were.

And so, dear friends, because disciples must follow the Son of Man who

is the King, and whose life is the perfect mirror of manhood, restless

homelessness is our lot, if we are His disciples. Ay! and it is our

blessing. It is better to sleep beneath the stars than beneath golden

canopies, and to lay the head upon a stone than upon a lace pillow, if

the ladder is at our side and the face of God above it. Better be out

in the fields, a homeless stranger with the Lord, than huddling

together and perfectly comfortable in houses of clay that perish before

the moth.

Do not let us repine; let us be thankful that we cannot, if we are

Christ's, but be strangers here; for all the bitterness and pain of

unrest and homelessness pass away, and all sweetness and gladness is

breathed into them, when we can say, I am a sojourner and a stranger

with Thee,' and when in our unrest we are following the Lamb

whithersoever He goeth.'

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CHRIST STIMULATING SLUGGISH DISCIPLESHIP

And another of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, suffer me first to go

and bury my father. 22. But Jesus said unto him, Follow Me; and let the

dead bury their dead.'--MATT. viii. 21-22.

The very first words of these verses, And another of His disciples,'

show us that the incident recorded in them is only half of a whole. We

have already considered the other half, and supplement our former

remarks by a glance at the remaining portion now. The two men, whose

treatment by Christ is narrated, are the antipodes of each other. The

former is a type of well-meaning, lightly formed, and so, probably,

swiftly abandoned purposes. This man is one of the people who always

see something else to be done first, when any plain duty comes before

them. Sluggish, hesitating, keenly conscious of other possibilities and

demands, he needs precisely the opposite treatment from his

light-hearted and light-purposed brother. Some plants want putting into

a cold house to be checked, some into a greenhouse to be forwarded.

Diversity of treatment, even when it amounts to opposition of

treatment, comes from the same single purpose. And so here the spur is

applied, whilst in the former incident it was the rein that was needed.

I. Note, then, first of all, this apparently most laudable and

reasonable request.

Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.' Nature says Go,' and

religion enjoins it, and everything seems to say that it is the right

thing for a man to do. The man was perfectly sincere in his petition,

and perfectly sincere in the implied promise that, as soon as the

funeral was over, he would come back. He meant it, out and out. If he

had not, he would have received different treatment; and if he had not,

he would have ceased to be the valuable example and lesson that he is

to us. So we have here a disciple quite sincere, who believes himself

to have already obeyed in spirit and only to be hindered from obeying

in outward act by an imperative duty that even a barbarian would know

to be imperative.

And yet Jesus Christ read him better than he read himself; and by His

answer lets us see that the tone of mind into which we are all tempted

to drop, and which is the characteristic natural tendency of some of

us, that of being hindered from doing the plain thing that lies before

us, because something else crops up, which we also think is imperative

upon us, is full of danger, and may be the cover of a great deal of

self-deception; and, at any rate, is not in consonance with Christ's

supreme and pressing and immediate claims.

The temper which says, Suffer me first to go and bury my father,' is

full of danger. One never knows but that, after he has got his father

buried, there will be something else turning up equally important.

There was the will to be read afterwards, and if he was, as probably he

was, the eldest son, he would most likely be the executor. There would

be all sorts of affairs to settle up before he might feel that it was

his duty to leave everything and follow the Master.

And so it always is. Suffer me first, and when we get to the top of

that hill, there is another one beyond. And so we go on from step to

step, getting ready to do the duties that we know are most imperative

upon us, by sweeping preliminaries out of the way, and so we go on

until our dying day, when somebody else buries us. Like some

backwoodsman in the American forests who should say to himself, Now, I

will not sow a grain of wheat until I have cleared all the land that

belongs to me. I will do that first and then begin to reap,' he would

be a great deal wiser if he cleared and sowed a little bit first, and

lived upon it, and then cleared a little bit more. Mark the plain

lesson that comes out of this incident, that the habit, for it is a

habit with some of us, of putting other pressing duties forward, before

we attend to the highest claims of Christ, is full of danger, because

there will be no end to them if we once admit the principle. And this

is true not only in regard to Christianity, but in regard to everything

that is worth doing in this world. Whenever some great and noble task

presents itself with its solemn call for consecration, some dwarf of an

apparent duty thrusts itself in between and perks up in our faces with

its demand, Attend to me first, and then I will let you go on to that

other.'

But morally, this plea, however sincerely urged, is more or less

unconscious self-deception. The person who says Suffer me first' is

usually hoodwinking conscience, and covering over, if not a

determination not to do, at least a reluctance to determine to do, the

postponed duty. And although we may think ourselves quite resolved in

spirit, and only needing the fitting vacant space to show that we are

ready to act, in the majority of cases the man who says Suffer me

first' means, though he often does not know it, I do not think I will

do it, after all, even then.' Now there are a great many good people

who, when urged to some of the plain duties of discipleship--such as

Christian work, Christian beneficence, the consecration of themselves

to the service of their Master--have always something else very

important, and of immediate, pressing urgency, that has to be done

first. And then and then, ay? and then,--something else, and

then--something else. And so some of you go on, and will go on, unless

by God's grace you shake off the evil habit, to the end of your days,

fancying yourselves disciples, and yet all the while delaying really to

follow the Master until the close. And all your yesterdays will be but

lighting you, with unfulfilled purposes, to dusty death.'

II. Now look at the apparently harsh and unreasonable refusal of this

reasonable request.

It is extremely unlike Jesus Christ in substance and in tone. It is

unlike Him to put any barrier in the way of a son's yielding to the

impulses of his heart and attending to the last duties to his father.

It is extremely unlike Him to couch His refusal in words that sound, at

first hearing, so harsh and contemptuous, and that seem to say, Let the

dead world go as it will; never you mind it, do you not go after it at

all or care about it.'

But if we remember that it is Jesus Christ, who came to bring life into

the dead world, who says this, then, I think, we shall understand

better what He means. I do not need to explain, I suppose, that by the

one dead' here is meant the physical and natural dead,' and by the

other the morally and religiously dead'; and that what Christ says, in

the picturesque way that He so often affected in order to bring great

truths home in concrete form to sluggish understandings, is in effect,

Nay! For the men in the world that are separated from God, and so are

dead in their selfhood and their sin, burying other dead people is

appropriate work. But your business, as living by Me, is to carry life,

and let the burying alone, to be done by the dead people that can do

nothing else.'

Now the spirit of our Lord's answer may be put thus:--It must always be

Christ first, and every one else second; and it must therefore

sometimes be Christ only, and no one else. Let me bury my father and

then I will come.' No,' says Christ; first your duty to Me': first in

order and time, because first in order of importance. And this is His

habitual tone, He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not

worthy of Me.'

Did you ever think of what a strange claim that is for a man to make

upon others? This Jesus Christ comes to you and me, and to every man,

and says, I demand, and I have a right to demand, thy supreme affection

and thy first obedience. All other relations are subordinate to thy

relation to Me. All other persons ought to be less dear to thee than I

am. No other duty can be so imperative as the duty of following Me.'

What right has He to speak thus to us? On what does such a tremendous

claim rest? Who is it that fronts humanity and says, He that loveth

father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me'? He had a right to

say it, because He is more than they, and has done more than they,

because He is the Son of God manifest in the flesh, and because on the

Cross He has died for all men. Therefore all other claims dwindle and

sink into nothingness before His. Therefore His will is supreme, and

our relation to Him is the dominant fact in our whole moral and

religious character. He must be first, whoever comes second, and

between the first and the second there is a great gulf fixed.

Remember that this postponing of all other duties, relationships, and

claims to Christ's claims and relationships, and to our duties to Him,

lifts them up, and does not lower them; exalts, and does not degrade,

the earthly affections. They are nobler and loftier, being second, than

when perversely, and, in the literal sense, preposterously, they assume

to be first. The little hills in the foreground are never so green and

fair as when they are looked at in connection with the great white Alps

that tower behind them; and all earthly loves and relationships catch a

tinge of more ethereal beauty, and are lifted into a loftier region,

when they are rigidly subordinated to our love to Him. Being second,

they are more than when they bragged that they were first.

Again, if it must be Christ first, and everybody and everything besides

second, then to carry that out, it will often have to be Christ only,

and no one else. There will come in every man's life the need for a

sharp decision between conflicting allegiances. Life is full of harsh

alternatives, and it is of no use to kick against the pricks. The

divine order is Jesus first and all things second. But we sometimes

break that order, and then it comes to be, Very well, then, if you

cannot keep the lower in their right places, you must learn to do

without them altogether; and if you will not have Him first and them

second, you must not have them at all.' If thine eye offend thee, pluck

it out,' it would be far better for thee to keep it without offence. If

thine hand offend thee,' put it down on the block, and take the cleaver

in the other hand, and off with it, it would be better for thee to go

into life whole than maimed, but it is better to go into life maimed,

than to go into destruction whole. The abandonment of the father's bier

is second best; but it is sometimes imperative. When you find a taste,

a pursuit, a study, an occupation, a recreation coming between you and

Jesus Christ--when you do not know how it is, but, somehow or other,

the sky that was blue a minute or two ago has a doleful veil of grey

creeping all over it, be sure that something or other which ought to be

under has got topmost, and you will have to get rid of it in order to

come right again. If this man would certainly have come back had Jesus

let him go, he would have been let go; but because Jesus knew that he

would not come back, therefore He said, You must deny your natural

affection, because it is coming between you and Me.'

So, dear brethren, when we find that earthly duties, pursuits,

occupations of any kind, affections, pure and beautiful as in

themselves they may be, are hindering our following the Master, then,

if they are things of which we can denude ourselves, though it be at a

distinct sacrifice, we are bound to do so; or else we are not loving

the Master more than all besides.

Let me remind you in closing of the variation in this story which the

evangelist Luke gives us. He interprets Christ's commandment, Follow

Me,' and expands it into preach the Gospel,' which was involved in it.

There are many of you who are busily engaged in legitimate occupations,

and devoting yourselves in various degrees to various forms of

beneficence touching the secular condition of the people around us. May

I hint to such, Let the dead bury their dead; preach thou the gospel?'

A Christian man's first business is to witness for Jesus Christ, and no

amount of diligence in legitimate occupations or in work for the good

of others will absolve him from the charge of having turned duties

upside down, if he says, I cannot witness for Jesus Christ, for I am so

busy about these other things.' This command has a special application

to us ministers. There are hosts of admirable things that we are

tempted to engage in nowadays, with the enlarged opportunities that we

have of influencing men, socially, politically, intellectually, and it

wants rigid concentration for us to keep out of the paths which might

hinder our usefulness, or, at all events, dissipate our strength. Let

us hear that ringing voice ringing always in our ears, Preach thou the

gospel of the kingdom.'

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THE PEACE-BRINGER IN THE NATURAL WORLD

And when He was entered into a ship, His disciples followed Him. 24.

And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the

ship was covered with the waves; but He was asleep. 25. And His

disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

26. And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?

Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great

calm. 27. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man la this,

that even the winds and the sea obey him!'--MATT. viii. 23-27.

The second group of miracles in these chapters shows us Christ as the

Prince of Peace, and that in three regions--the material, the

superhuman, and the moral. He stills the tempest, casts out demons, and

forgives sins, thus quieting nature, spirit, and conscience.

Mountain-girdled lakes are exposed to sudden storms from the wind

sweeping down the glens. Such a one comes roaring down as the little

boat, probably belonging to James and John, is labouring across the six

or seven miles to the eastern side. Matthew describes the boat as it

would appear from shore, as being covered' and lost to sight by the

breaking waves. Mark, who is Peter's mouthpiece, describes the

desperate plight as one on board knew it, and says the boat was

filling.' It must have been a serious gale which frightened a crew who

had spent all their lives on the lake.

Note Christ's sleep in the storm. His calm slumber is contrasted with

the hurly-burly of the tempest and the alarm of the crew. It was the

sleep of physical exhaustion after a hard day's work. He was too tired

to keep awake, or to be disturbed by the tumult. His fatigue is a sign

of His true manhood, of His toil up to the very edge of His strength; a

characteristic of His life of service, which we do not make as

prominent in our thoughts as we should. It is also a sign of His calm

conscience and pure heart. Jonah slept through the storm because his

conscience was stupefied; but Christ, as a tired child laying its head

on its mother's lap.

That sleep may have a symbolical meaning for us. Though Christ is

present, the storm comes, and He sleeps through it. Lazarus dies, and

He makes no sign of sympathy. Peter lies in prison, and not till the

hammers of the carpenters putting up the gibbet for to-morrow are

heard, does deliverance come. He delays His help, that He may try our

faith and quicken our prayers. The boat may be covered with the waves,

and He sleeps on, but He will wake before it sinks. He sleeps, but He

never over-sleeps, and there are no too-lates with Him.

Note next the awaking cry of fear. The broken abruptness of their

appeal reveals the urgency of the case in the experienced eyes of these

fishermen. Their summons is a curious mixture of fear and faith. Save

us' is the language of faith; we perish' is that of fear. That strange

blending of opposites is often repeated by us. The office of faith is

to suppress fear. But the origin of faith is often in fear, and we are

driven to trust just because we are so much afraid. A faith which does

not wholly suppress fear may still be most real; and the highest faith

has ever the consciousness that unless Christ help, and that speedily,

we perish.

So note next the gentle remonstrance. There is something very majestic

in the tranquillity of our Lord's awaking, and, if we follow Matthew's

order, in His addressing Himself first to the disciples' weakness, and

letting the storm rage on. It can do no harm, and for the present may

blow as it listeth, while He gives the trembling disciples a lesson.

Observe how lovingly our Lord meets an imperfect faith. He has no

rebuke for their rude awaking of Him. He does not find fault with them

for being fearful,' but for being so fearful' as to let fear cover

faith, just as the waves were doing the boat. He pityingly recognises

the struggle in their souls, and their possession of some spark of

faith which He would fain blow into a flame. He shows them and us the

reason for overwhelming fear as being a deficiency in faith. And He

casts all into the form of a question, thus softening rebuke, and

calming their terrors by the appeal to their common sense. Fear is

irrational if we can exercise faith. It is mere bravado to say I will

not be afraid,' for this awful universe is full of occasions for just

terror; but it is the voice of sober reason which says I will trust,

and not be afraid.' Christ answers His own question in the act of

putting it,--ye are of little faith, that is why ye are so fearful.

Note, next, the word that calms the storm. Christ yields to the cry of

an imperfect faith, and so strengthens it. If He did not, what would

become of any of us? He does not quench the dimly burning wick, but

tends it and feeds it with oil--by His inward gifts and by His answers

to prayer--till it burns up clear and smokeless, a faith without fear.

Even smoke needs but a higher temperature to flame; and fear which is

mingled with faith needs but a little more heat to be converted into

radiance of trust. That is precisely what Christ does by this miracle.

His royal word is all-powerful. We see Him rising in the stern of the

fishing-boat, and sending His voice into the howling darkness, and wind

and waves cower at His feet like dogs that know their master. As in the

healing of the centurion's servant, we have the token of divinity in

that His bare word is able to produce effects in the natural realm. As

He lay asleep He showed the weakness of manhood; but He woke to

manifest the power of indwelling divinity. So it is always in His life,

where, side by side with the signs of humiliation and participation in

man's weakness, we ever have tokens of His divinity breaking through

the veil. All this power is put forth at the cry of timid men. The

storm was meant to move to terror; terror was meant to evoke the

miracle--the result was complete and immediate. No after-swell

disturbed the placid waters when the wind dropped. There had been a

great tempest,' and now there was a great calm,' as the fishermen

floated peacefully to their landing-place beneath the shadow of the

hills. The wilder the tempest, the profounder the subsequent repose.

All this is a true symbol of our individual lives, as well as of the

history of the Church. Storms will come, and He may seem to be

heedless. He is ever awakened by our cry, which needs not to be pure

faith in order to bring the answer, but may be strangely intertwined of

faith and fear. The Lord will help . . . and that right early,' and the

peace that He brings is peace indeed. So it may be with us amid the

struggles of life. So may it be with us when the voyage on this

storm-tossed sea of time is done! They cry unto the Lord in their

trouble. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are

still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them

unto their desired haven.'

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THE PEACE-BRINGER IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

And when He was come to the other side into the country of the

Gergesenes, there met Him two possessed with devils, coming out of the

tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. 29.

And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with Thee,

Jesus, thou Son of God? art Thou come hither to torment us before the

time? 30. And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine

feeding. 31. So the devils besought Him, saying, If Thou cast us out,

suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. 32. And He said unto them,

Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and,

behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into

the sea, and perished in the waters. 33. And they that kept them fled,

and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was

befallen to the possessed of the devils. 34. And, behold, the whole

city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw Him, they besought Him

that He would depart out of their coasts.'--MATT. viii. 28-34.

Matthew keeps to chronological order in the first and second miracles

of the second triplet, but probably His reason for bringing them

together was rather similarity in their contents than proximity in

their time. For one cannot but feel that the stilling of the storm,

which manifested Jesus as the Peace-bringer in the realm of the

Natural, is fitly followed by the casting out of demons, which showed

Him as the Lord of still wider and darker realms, and the Peace-bringer

to spirits tortured and torn by a mysterious tyranny. His meek power

sways all creatures; His word runneth very swiftly.' Winds and seas and

demons hearken and obey. Cheap ridicule has been plentifully flung at

this miracle, and some defenders of the Gospels have tried to explain

it away, and have almost apologised for it, but, while it raises

difficult problems in its details, the total effect of it is to present

a sublime conception of Jesus and of His absolute, universal authority.

The conception is heightened in sublimity when the two adjacent

miracles are contemplated in connection.

There is singular variation in the readings of the name of the scene of

the miracle in the three evangelists. According to the reading of the

Authorised Version, Matthew locates it in the country of the

Gergesenes'; Mark and Luke, in the country of the Gadarenes'; whereas

the Revised Version, following the general consensus of textual

critics, reads Gadarenes' in Matthew and Gerasenes' in Mark and Luke.

Now, Gadara is over six miles from the lake, and the deep gorge of a

river lies between, so that it is out of the question as the scene of

the miracle. But the only Gerasa known, till lately, is even more

impossible, for it is far to the east of the lake. But some years

since, Thomson found ruins bearing the name of Khersa or Gersa, at the

only portion of that coast on which the steep hills come down to the

shore' (Smith, Historical Geography of the Holy Land, p. 459). This is

probably the site of the miracle, and may have been included in the

territory dependent on Gadara, and so have been rightly described as in

the country of the Gadarenes.'

Matthew again abbreviates, omitting many of the most striking and

solemn features of the narrative as given by the other two evangelists,

and he also diverges from them in mentioning two demoniacs instead of

one. That is not contradiction, for if there were two, there was one,

but it is divergence, due to more accurate information. Whether they

were meant so or no, the abbreviations have the striking result that

Jesus speaks but one word, the permissive Go,' and that thus His simple

presence is the potent spell before which the demons cower and flee.

They know Him as the Son of God'; a name which, on their lips, must be

taken in its full significance. If demoniacal possession is a fact,

there is no difficulty in accounting for the name here given to Jesus,

nor for the sudden change from the fierce purpose of barring an

intruder's path to abject submission. If it is not a fact, to make a

plausible explanation of either circumstance will be a task needing

many contortions, as is seen by the attempts to achieve it. For

example, we are told that the demoniacs were afraid of Jesus, because

He was not afraid of them,' and they knew Him, because men with

shattered reason also felt the spell, while the wise and the

strong-minded often used their intellect, under the force of passion or

prejudice, to resist the force of truth.' Possibly the last clause goes

as far to explain some critics' non-recognition of demoniacal

possession as the first does to explain the demoniacs' recognition of

Jesus!

To the demonic nature Christ's coming brought torture, as the sunbeam,

which gives life to many, also gives death to ugly creatures that crawl

and swarm in the dark. Turn up a stone, and the creeping things hurry

out of the penetrating glare so unwelcome. What maketh heaven, that

maketh hell,' and the same presence is life or death, joy or agony. The

dear perception of divine purity and the shuddering recoil of impotent

hatred from it are surely of the very essence of the demonic nature,

and every man, who looks into the depths of his own spirit, knows that

the possibilities of such a state are in him.

Our Lord discriminated between healing the sick and casting out demons.

He distinguished between forms of disease due to possession and the

same diseases when dissociated from it, as, for example, cases of

dumbness. His whole attitude, both in His actual dealing with the

possessed and in His referring to the subject, gave His complete

adhesion to the reality of the awful thing. It is vain to say that He

humoured the delusions of insanity in order to cure them. That theory

does not adequately explain any of the facts and does not touch some of

them. It is perilous to try to weaken the force of the narrative by

saying that the evangelists were under the influence of popular notions

(which are quietly assumed to have been wrong), and hence that their

prepossessions coloured their representations. If the mirror was so

distorted, what reliance can be placed on any part of its reflection of

Jesus? There can be no doubt that the Gospel narrative asserts and

assumes the reality of demoniacal possession, and if the representation

that Jesus also assumed it is due to the evangelists, what trust can be

reposed in authorities which misrepresent Him in such a matter? On the

other hand, if they do not misrepresent Him, and He blundered,

confounding mere insanity with possession by a demon, what reliance can

be reposed in Him as our Teacher of the Unseen World? The issues

involved are very grave and far-reaching, and raillery or sarcasm is

out of place.

But the question is pertinent: By what right do we allege that

demoniacal possession is an exploded figment and an impossibility? Do

we know ourselves or our fellows so thoroughly as to be warranted in

denying that deep down in the mysterious subliminal consciousness'

there is a gate through which spiritual beings may come into contact

with human personalities? He would be bold, to the verge of presumption

or somewhat further, who should take up such a position. And have we

any better right to assume that we know so much of the universe as to

be sure that there are no evil spirits there, who can come into contact

with human spirits and wield an alien tyranny over them? The Christian

attitude is not that of such far-reaching denial which outruns our

knowledge, but that of calm belief that Jesus is the head of all

principality and power, and that to Him all are subject. It is taken

for granted that the supposed possession is insanity. But may it not

rather be that to-day some of the supposed insanity is possession? Be

that as it may--and perhaps those who have the widest experience of

lunatics' would be the least ready to dismiss the possibility,--Jesus

recognised the reality that there were souls oppressed by a real

personality, which had settled itself in the house of life, and none of

us has wide and deep enough knowledge to contradict Him. Might it not

be better to accept His witness in this, as in other matters beyond our

ken, as true, and to ponder it?

The demons' petition, according to the Received Text, takes the form,

Suffer us to go,' while the reading adopted by most modern editors is

Send us.' The former reading seems to be taken from Luke (viii. 32),

while Mark has Send' (not the same word as now read in Matthew). But

Mark goes on to say, not that Jesus sent them, but that He suffered

them' or gave them leave' (the same word as in Matthew, according to

the Received Text). Thus, Jesus' part in the transaction is simply

permissive, and the one word which He speaks is authoritative indeed in

its curtness, and means simply away,' or begone.' It casts them out but

does not send them in. He did not send them into the herd, but out of

the men, and did not prevent their entrance into the swine. It should

further be noted that nothing in the narrative suggests that the

destruction of the herd was designed even by the demons, much less by

Jesus. The maddened brutes rushed straight before them, not knowing why

or where; the steep slope was in front, and the sea was at its foot,

and their terrified, short gallop ended there. The last thing the

demons would have done would have been to banish themselves, as the

death of the swine did banish them, from their new shelter. There is no

need, then, to invent justifications for Christ's destroying the herd,

for He did not destroy it. No doubt, keeping swine was a breach of

Jewish law; no doubt the two demoniacs and the bystanders would be more

convinced of the reality of the exorcism by the fate of the swine, but

these apologies are needless.

The narrative suggests some affinity between the demoniac and the

animal nature, and though it is easy to ridicule, it is impossible to

disprove, the suggestion. We know too little about either to do that,

and what we cannot disprove it is somewhat venturesome hardily to deny.

There are depths in the one nature, which we cannot fathom though its

possessors are close to us; the other is removed from our investigation

altogether. Where we are so utterly ignorant we had better neither

affirm nor deny. But we may take a homiletical use out of that apparent

affinity, and recognise that a spirit in rebellion against God

necessarily gravitates downwards, and becomes more or less bestialised.

No wonder that the swineherds fled, but, surely, it is a wonder that

eagerness to be rid of Jesus was the sole result of the miracle.

Perhaps the reason was the loss of the swine, which would bulk largest

in their keepers' excited story; perhaps the reason was a fear that He

would find out and rebuke other instances of breach of strict Jewish

propriety, perhaps it was simply the shrinking from any close contact

with the heavenly, or apparently supernatural, which is so instinctive

in us, and witnesses to a dormant consciousness of discord with Heaven.

Depart from me, for I am a sinful man,' is the cry of the roused

conscience. And, alas! it has power to send away Him whom we need, and

who comes to us, just because we are sinful, and just that He may

deliver us from our sin.

END OF VOL. I

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Index of Latin Words and Phrases

\* [577]Christianos ad leones

\* [578]Dei grati�

\* [579]Orare est laborare.

\* [580]pro tanto

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82. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.vi-p1.2

83. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.vi-p15.1

84. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.vi-p15.2

85. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.ii-p9.1

86. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.i-p2.3

87. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.ii.iv-p12.1

88. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.vii-p1.1

89. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p12.1

90. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.ii.iv-p12.1

91. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.vi-p1.1

92. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p6.2

93. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p3.3

94. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p13.1

95. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.i-p1.1

96. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p14.1

97. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.ii-p1.1

98. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p12.3

99. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p10.2

100. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p15.1

101. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iii-p1.1

102. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p3.1

103. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p16.1

104. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p1.1

105. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p7.1

106. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p9.1

107. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p7.2

108. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p9.1

109. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p10.1

110. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p12.1

111. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p15.1

112. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p17.1

113. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p17.2

114. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p17.1

115. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p17.1

116. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.v-p1.1

117. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.v-p2.1

118. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p2.1

119. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p18.1

120. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p1.1

121. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p12.2

122. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p2.2

123. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p19.1

124. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vii-p1.1

125. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p19.1

126. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vii-p1.1

127. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p11.1

128. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p12.1

129. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p2.3

130. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p10.1

131. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p6.2

132. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p20.1

133. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iv-p2.1

134. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.i-p1.1

135. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iv-p2.1

136. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p2.1

137. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p21.1

138. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p1.1

139. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p2.1

140. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p3.1

141. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p2.2

142. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p13.2

143. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p2.3

144. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p9.1

145. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p2.3

146. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p9.1

147. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.5

148. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p22.1

149. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p1.1

150. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p13.3

151. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.2

152. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p7.2

153. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.1

154. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.6

155. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.2

156. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p7.1

157. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.4

158. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.3

159. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.6

160. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p8.1

161. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.7

162. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iii-p3.7

163. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p23.1

164. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iv-p1.1

165. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iv-p4.1

166. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p2.1

167. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p24.1

168. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p1.1

169. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p5.1

170. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p6.1

171. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p13.1

172. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p25.1

173. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.i-p1.2

174. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p26.1

175. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.ii-p1.1

176. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p2.1

177. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p27.1

178. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p1.1

179. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p8.1

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181. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p7.1

182. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p12.2

183. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p9.1

184. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p12.2

185. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p2.3

186. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p12.1

187. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.iii-p12.2

188. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vi.i-p1.1

189. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p28.1

190. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vii.i-p1.1

191. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p29.1

192. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vii.ii-p1.1

193. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p30.1

194. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p31.1

195. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vii.iv-p1.1

196. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vii.iii-p1.1

197. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p32.1

198. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vii.v-p1.1

199. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p33.1

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202. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.ix.i-p1.1

203. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p34.1

204. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.ix.i-p1.1

205. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p35.1

206. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.i-p1.1

207. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p36.1

208. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p1.1

209. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p8.1

210. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p9.1

211. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p11.1

212. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p9.2

213. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p37.1

214. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.i-p1.1

215. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p37.1

216. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.i-p1.1

217. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p7.1

218. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p7.1

219. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p38.1

220. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.ii-p1.1

221. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p38.1

222. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.ii-p1.1

223. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p9.1

224. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p4.1

225. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p39.1

226. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p1.1

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229. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p11.1

230. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p40.1

231. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p12.1

232. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iv-p1.1

233. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p13.1

234. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p15.1

235. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p18.1

236. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p41.1

237. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p1.1

238. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p5.1

239. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p42.1

240. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.vi-p1.1

241. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p14.1

242. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p16.1

243. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p8.1

244. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p43.1

245. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.vii-p1.1

246. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p44.1

247. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.i-p1.1

248. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p44.1

249. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.i-p1.1

250. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p45.1

251. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.ii-p1.1

252. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p46.1

253. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.iii-p1.1

254. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p46.1

255. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.i-p2.1

256. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.iii-p1.1

257. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.iv-p2.1

258. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p47.1

259. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.iv-p1.1

260. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p48.1

261. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.iv-p11.1

262. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.v-p1.1

263. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p49.1

264. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.i-p2.2

265. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.iv-p12.1

266. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vi-p1.1

267. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.iv-p12.2

268. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vii-p2.1

269. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p50.1

270. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vii-p1.1

271. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vii-p9.2

272. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vii-p2.2

273. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vii-p9.1

274. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p50.1

275. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vii-p1.2

276. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vii-p2.3

277. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p51.1

278. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.viii-p1.1

279. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.ii-p6.1

280. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p1.1

281. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.ii-p1.1

282. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.vi-p2.1

283. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.ii-p6.2

284. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.ii-p6.3

285. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.iii-p3.1

286. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p2.1

287. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.iii-p1.1

288. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p3.1

289. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.iv-p1.1

290. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.iii-p7.1

291. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p4.1

292. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.v-p1.1

293. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p5.1

294. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.vi-p1.1

295. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.vi-p2.2

296. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.vii-p2.1

297. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p6.1

298. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.vii-p1.1

299. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.vii-p2.2

300. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p7.1

301. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.viii-p1.1

302. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p8.1

303. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.ix-p1.1

304. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.x-p1.1

305. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xii-p2.3

306. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p10.1

307. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xi-p1.1

308. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p11.1

309. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xii-p1.1

310. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xii-p2.2

311. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xii-p4.1

312. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xii-p4.3

313. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xii-p4.2

314. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xii-p4.4

315. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xiii-p3.1

316. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p12.1

317. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xiii-p1.1

318. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xiv-p3.3

319. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p13.1

320. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xiv-p1.1

321. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xv-p1.1

322. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p14.1

323. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p15.1

324. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xvi-p1.1

325. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p16.1

326. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xvii-p1.1

327. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p17.1

328. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xviii-p1.1

329. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p18.1

330. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xix-p1.1

331. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p19.1

332. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xx-p1.1

333. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p20.1

334. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxi-p1.1

335. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p21.1

336. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxii-p1.1

337. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p22.1

338. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxiii-p1.1

339. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p23.1

340. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxiv-p1.1

341. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p4.1

342. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p4.7

343. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlv-p10.1

344. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p2.1

345. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p24.1

346. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p1.1

347. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p4.2

348. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p4.5

349. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p7.1

350. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p4.3

351. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p4.4

352. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p8.1

353. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p8.2

354. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p4.3

355. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p4.6

356. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p9.1

357. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxviii-p6.1

358. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p2.2

359. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p11.1

360. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p11.2

361. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p11.1

362. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p12.1

363. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxv-p12.1

364. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxvi-p3.1

365. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p25.1

366. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxvi-p1.1

367. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p26.1

368. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxvii-p1.1

369. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p27.1

370. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxviii-p1.1

371. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxix-p2.1

372. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p28.1

373. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxix-p1.1

374. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p29.1

375. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxx-p1.1

376. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p30.1

377. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p31.1

378. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p32.1

379. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxi-p1.1

380. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxii-p1.1

381. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxiii-p1.1

382. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p33.1

383. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p34.1

384. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxiv-p1.1

385. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxv-p1.1

386. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p41.1

387. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p35.1

388. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxvi-p1.1

389. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p36.1

390. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxvii-p1.1

391. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxviii-p1.1

392. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p37.1

393. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p38.1

394. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p39.1

395. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxix-p1.1

396. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xl-p1.1

397. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p40.1

398. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xli-p1.1

399. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlii-p1.1

400. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p42.1

401. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xliii-p1.1

402. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p43.1

403. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xliv-p1.1

404. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p44.1

405. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlv-p1.1

406. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlv-p5.1

407. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlv-p6.1

408. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p45.1

409. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlvi-p1.1

410. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlv-p9.1

411. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p46.1

412. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlvii-p1.1

413. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlviii-p1.1

414. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p47.1

415. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlviii-p1.1

416. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p48.1

417. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlix-p1.1

418. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xiv-p3.1

419. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p50.1

420. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.li-p1.1

421. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p49.1

422. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.l-p1.1

423. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p51.1

424. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.lii-p1.1

425. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.lii-p9.1

426. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p52.1

427. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.liii-p1.1

428. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.l-p2.1

429. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p53.1

430. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.liv-p1.1

431. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p54.1

432. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.lv-p1.1

433. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p55.1

434. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.lvi-p1.1

435. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.i-p56.1

436. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.lvii-p1.1

437. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xiv-p3.2

438. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.l-p2.2

439. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.l-p2.2

440. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxi-p10.2

441. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vii-p10.1

442. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.vii-p10.1

443. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxi-p10.1

444. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.lvii-p8.1

445. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xiii-p4.1

446. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.ix-p3.1

447. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xii-p2.1

448. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.vi-p15.3

449. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p10.1

450. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p10.1

451. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p6.1

452. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p6.1

453. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p6.1

454. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p6.1

455. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.iii-p16.2

456. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xi.v-p18.1

457. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p3.1

458. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p10.2

459. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p12.2

460. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.ii-p12.2

461. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.i-p51.2

462. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.viii-p2.1

463. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.ii.i-p0.1

464. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.ii.ii-p0.1

465. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.ii.iii-p0.1

466. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.ii.iv-p0.1

467. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.ii.v-p0.1

468. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.i-p0.1

469. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.ii-p0.1

470. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.iii-p0.1

471. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.iv-p0.1

472. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.v-p0.1

473. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.vi-p0.1

474. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iii.vii-p0.1

475. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.i-p0.1

476. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.ii-p0.1

477. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iii-p0.1

478. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.iv-p0.1

479. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.v-p0.1

480. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.iv.vi-p0.1

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483. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.i-p0.1

484. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.ii-p0.1

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486. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.iv-p0.1

487. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.v.v-p0.1

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492. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vii.ii-p0.1

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494. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.vii.iv-p0.1

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499. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.x.i-p0.1

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514. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.iii-p0.1

515. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.iv-p0.1

516. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.v-p0.1

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527. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.viii-p0.1

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531. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xiii-p0.1

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545. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxvii-p0.1

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551. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxii-p0.1

552. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxv-p0.1

553. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxiv-p0.1

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556. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxvii-p0.1

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558. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xl-p0.1

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563. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlv-p0.1

564. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlvi-p0.1

565. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlvii-p0.1

566. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlviii-p0.1

567. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlix-p0.1

568. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.li-p0.1

569. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.l-p0.1

570. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.lii-p0.1

571. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.liii-p0.1

572. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.liv-p0.1

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575. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.lvii-p0.1

576. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#ii.xii.viii-p0.1

577. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxii-p26.1

578. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xl-p10.1

579. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xxxvi-p26.1

580. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/ezek\_matt1/cache/ezek\_matt1.html3#iii.xlvii-p24.1