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Sermons of Rev. Theophilus T.
Stork, D.D.

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Sermons

By Rev. Theophilus T. Stork, D.D.

Edited By His Sons

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

Preface

THIS VOLUME, selected from the sermons of the late Dr. Stork, has been prepared for those who desire to possess some memorial of that which in the hearing was so full of spiritual quickening and comfort. I say some *memorial*, for it has been sadly borne in on the editors, as they have been busy over these discourses, that the written words present but a meager outline of the words that were originally spoken.

Various obstacles have stood in the way of any successful reporting, at this time, of the preaching of Dr. Stork.

In the first place, he wrote, as appears from his manuscripts, with unequal fullness in the same discourse. Beginning with care, and writing at first deliberately, he hurried his pen as thoughts rushed upon him and emotion quickened, jotting down brief notes of argument, illustration, allusion, appeal, exhortation, till at the close only here and there an entire sentence or expression can be disentangled from the crowded lines. This, of necessity, gives a fragmentary and incomplete character to the printed discourse, which to those who remember the full and overflowing matter of the preacher will seem, at times, but a cold and beggarly transcript of the original. The editors, by filling out from memory, and where the sense was obvious, the brief hints given in the manuscript, have done what they could to make good these gaps. But still a great deal is lost.

Then, again, though Dr. Stork preached invariably from a carefully prepared manuscript, he was very largely an extemporaneous preacher. It was his own testimony that his best thoughts, his richest matter, came to him unpremeditated. Those who best remember him in the pulpit will recall passages when he turned away from the written discourse that lay before him and poured forth sentence after sentence of appeal and expostulation, of description and pathetic entreaty, when his own soul seemed to be on fire, and the sympathetic thrill passed from the speaker to his hearers, and they were borne away on the flood of his impetuous speech. Such passages were mostly the offspring of some spontaneous flash of thought or rising

emotion in the preacher. Of these no trace can be found in the original manuscript, save it may be a penciled word or two interlined, or in the margin, evidently jotted down after the discourse had been delivered.

But, after all, any printed record of his preaching must fail to reproduce the original effect. It would, of necessity, lack that which constituted the supreme quality of his excellence, the impressiveness of the living man and his manner. The charm and power of some of the best preaching is evanescent. It can be known only in the presence of the speaker himself, and for the brief hour his discourse continues. When the voice ceases and the congregation disperses, the sermon at its best, in its flower, is lost forever. For that which, in preaching of this sort, is highest, is also most impalpable, incommunicable. That combined effect of voice and manner, of pathos and fire, lighting up every thought, throwing a color and glow on every sentiment, informing the man and possessing his audience — this that we call eloquence — how can it be imparted or made known to any but the hearer? As well hope to transfer the effect of melody to him who does not hear, or the impression of color to one without sight.

Nothing of Dr. Stork's could give in the reading any adequate idea of the effect produced by his utterances when in the full tide of discourse. But, it will be said, is not this true of every good preacher? Do not all sermons lose in the reading? Surely not. There are preachers whose words are as weighty heard as read; they themselves add nothing to their thoughts. Others there are whose words are even more impressive on the printed page than when heard from the pulpit; their presence takes away from the effect of their thoughts. But where the speaker embodies in *himself*, as it were, his thoughts; where the sentiment is the outcome of the whole man — mind, heart, and will, and bounteous nature has given the power to suit the action to the word, to marry sense to sound and manner — there is an eloquence that can never be gathered up after the speaker has gone. And such a preacher was Dr. Stork.

In preparing these discourses for the press, passages here and there have recalled the occasion of their original utterance. But how poor and empty seemed the written words as they stood by the side of themselves as memory gave them back, with the cadence of voice, the flashing eye, the changing countenance, the presence of the speaker — the body was there beautiful still, but the soul was gone.

Nor was this effect a mere trick of speech, the jugglery of the accomplished elocutionist. No man was ever less able to play a part, or catch up the artificial graces of the practiced and skillful speaker. It was not in his ardent and simple nature to be a speaker by art. He said of himself, "Other men may learn oratory by rule and practice; where they can, it is right they should; but as for myself, I must speak right on. All the rules only hamper me." Perhaps the chief secret of his impressiveness in the pulpit was his sincerity and earnestness. As one said who listened often to him, "I am impressed by what he says even when I do not believe it, for he seems to believe it so thoroughly and deeply himself. Every word seems to come from the bottom of his soul." It was the verification of the maxim of the Latin poet: "If you would have me weep, you must weep yourself;" if you would impress men with a sense of the weight of what you utter, you must be impressed yourself.

It is not necessary to suppose that Dr. Stork believed the truths of the Gospel, which he loved to preach, more deeply than others of his brethren; but his was that happy constitution of soul which, when it embraces a truth, embraces it with ardor and believes it with energy. Truth, as he meditated it, not only convinced him, but also kindled in him enthusiasm. There are many of us who believe; we are convinced; but our souls do not take fire at contact with the truth. Happy he who not only believes, but believes with fire. This energy of belief, this ardor of conviction, made the commonplaces of the Gospel, the old, old story, seem in his utterance something fresh and irresistibly attractive. Men listened to old truths from his lips as though they were a new revelation. They were new, for they came out of a heart that new coined them and stamped its own impress of vitality upon them as they passed through its experience.

Nature, too, had given him that fluidity of soul, so to speak, which receives readily the impression of that which is beautiful, noble, graceful, touching, and by sympathy passes the impression "over to others who might in them selves be incapable of the experience at first hand. The great sayings of Jesus, the solemn voices of the prophets, the pathetic and beautiful scenes of Bible history, these that by familiarity have become to so many of us worn-out strings from which no thrilling melody sounds, or sounds but seldom, were to him ever powerful. His nature responded to the lightest touch, and by passing them to his audience through his sensitive

and vibrating soul, he made old things new. They heard the lost melodies sound from the old strings as he touched them.

Last of all, he was endowed with that most wonderful of all organs, a rich, thrilling, sympathetic voice. When it rose in passion, or melted with pathos, or wound its way into the corners of the heart in pleading, knowing, as we who listened did, that not a cadence or vibration but was instinct with truth, and expressed the deepest conviction and yearning of him who spoke, how could we resist?

These were some of the qualities of the preacher which, it will at once be seen, could not pass over into his printed discourse. If the sermons here offered to his friends shall seem in any way to fall short of the recollections we may have had of his utterances, or less than the reputation the author enjoyed while living, let it be remembered how much of the living preacher must needs be absent from his printed pages, and also how small a part of what was really spoken was ever reported in the writer's manuscript.

With all these drawbacks, we are yet persuaded, however, that those who listened to Dr. Stork will find much in these discourses to recall, if only in outline, utterances that brought inspiration and comfort to many hearts. They are full of spiritual suggestion and tender delineations of the beauty of godliness. They are not weighty discourses for the scholar or theologian, but sermons for toiling, sorrowing, struggling men and women, to whom the gospel of Christ is not so much a system of truth or solution of the riddle of the universe as a help to a better and happier life, and the only light that penetrates to the world beyond the grave.

It may not be amiss in this connection to characterize briefly the general drift of the author's preaching. As suggested above, it was of the practical order. While it made no pretension to adding anything to theological learning or literature, it was thorough, and, in a literary point of view, finished. Varied and fresh in its choice of topics, and the treatment of them, it was marked by two prevailing qualities that indicated the habitual purpose and wish of the preacher: it was *awakening* and *comforting*.

Few ministers have aimed more persistently at piercing that indifference and stupidity of the natural heart which, in a nominally Christian community, is probably the great est of all barriers to conversion. And few in the ministry of a regular pastorate have been more successful in arousing in men a sense of sinfulness, and of the need of a Saviour. Almost every sermon led at last, whatever route it may have seemed to pursue, to a view

of eternity, of the guilt of the sinner, and the uplifted cross. This tenor of preaching had its effect not only on the unconverted, but also an influence no less quickening and salutary on the people of God. Said one who had sat for a time under his preaching:

“When I hear some men I come home feeling what a good thing religion is, and how happy I should be who have it. I am pleased with myself. But when I hear Dr. Stork, I come away thinking what a sinner I am, and how much I need a Saviour.”

The memory of those solemn and searching appeals that seemed to open the gates of eternity and reveal the secrets of the world to come, while they laid bare the guilty and unclean heart, will be remembered by many who turn these pages till the day of death.

The other quality was one even more congenial to the preacher's natural temper. He loved to speak the comforts of the Gospel; and he did so with a winning gentleness. Christ and His beauty, the tenderness of the Divine compassion, the human side of our Lord's character, the contemplation of heaven and its rest — these were favorite themes, and urged by that plaintive and penetrating voice, in those graphic descriptions and in that glowing imagery in which he was wont to indulge, they made the Gospel story a solace and comfort to many troubled hearts.

Of the fruit of his labors in the pulpit it is not necessary here to speak. These few remarks have to do merely with the subject matter and manner of his preaching.

As a memorial, then, of the faithful preacher, as a means of rescuing from oblivion a few of those striking and moving utterances that are so precious in memory to his many hearers, and as an attempt to give to those who know of him only by reputation some notion of what Dr. Stork was in the pulpit, these imperfect records are sent forth.

1. “I Go A Fishing.” John 21:3-4.

“Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.” John 21:3-4.

THIS is one of those beautiful and suggestive pictures of the Gospel that we love to look at and remember. It was in the gray twilight of the morning that the fishing boat was nearing the beach. Jesus was standing on the shore, and the fishermen, Peter, and James, and John, and Thomas, and Nathaniel, saw some figure on the beach; but in the misty twilight they did not know that it was Jesus. The whole scene is picturesque, and rich in moral suggestions and practical lessons.

First, *We have Peter's purpose and word*: “I go a fishing.” Peter was a man who had a will and a way of his own. When he made up his mind to do a thing, he did it at once, without regard to others, what they might think or do. He did not ask Thomas and Nathaniel, James and John, what they were going to do; but clearly rings out his own purpose, “I go a fishing.” And what was the effect of this? Why, the others said at once, “We also go with thee.”

We need the man who will give the starting word, and then the man who will go with him. First, the man of invention, of conception, energy, a man who has ideas, convictions, plans, and purposes, and who boldly says, “I am going to do this;” and there will always be those who will go with him.

First, then, the individual man, the personal consecration, the distinct announcement of a purpose; and there will always be some drawn to follow in sympathy and association. Have you ever tried this in your own way of life? If a Christian, have you ever turned round and said, “I am going to serve the Lord?” You have no idea what a preacher you would be if you would say that tenderly, out of a loving heart, and with a fixed purpose.

Have you ever said in your family to your children, “Children, I am going to serve the Saviour?” How all the little things would look up to you so brightly, so trustingly, and you would be twice over a father to them.

In general life, get a clear idea of something you are going to do, and boldly say, trusting in God, “I am going to do this.” No one ever speaks this kind of word in a right spirit and with a right intent without influencing the circle of which he is the center. So Joshua said, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” So when you say, “I am going to give myself to Christ and His service; I am going to unite with the Church and confess Christ;” some about will be touched and moved to “say, We also go with thee.”

We want, then, two kinds of men: those who lead, saying, “I go a fishing”; and those who follow, saying, “We also go with thee.”

Let us see what followed this resolve and utterance. “They went forth and entered into a ship immediately, and that night they caught nothing.” What a report to give of a man’s work. Two words express it all — *Night* and *Nothing*. And they were not to blame for it, either. So men are often discouraged, though they do their best as ministers, Christians, Sunday-school teachers, and all seems naught. Perhaps this is your case. You went forth — it may be in a small sphere; but you did your best; and when you came to reckon the result, it was only — *Night* — *Nothing*. It was a hard time with these poor disciples. They must give up catching men for catching fish, and cannot even do that. They had forsaken one work for another, and now that had forsaken them. You look at others successful, and are despondent. But if you have been doing your work faithfully, you have nothing to do with results. We must not allow any seeming failure to divert our purpose or relax our efforts. We must work as if everything depended on us, and then go to God and pray as if we had no power at all. In the great day, not results, but fidelity will be the test; “Well done,... thou hast been *faithful*,... enter into the joy of thy Lord.”

Look at the next verse: “But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore.” How beautiful: Morning and Jesus. Put the two together, and you have the rapid variations of life, *Night* and *Nothing*; *Morning* and *Jesus*. Such are the alternations in true experience. You see a Christian: he looks sad; his countenance is shaded, depressed; he has been disappointed. You read in his face *Night* and *Nothing*. You see him a week or month after, and his face shines as the morning; his voice is tuneful, and

there is an atmosphere about him vital, bracing. Such is the Christian's life. I sometimes question the genuineness of that experience which is always happy.

But look a little more at this. When morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore. Why, he was there all night, but they did not see him. When going to Emmaus on a spring evening, Jesus came and walked and talked with them. They thought He had forgotten them, but it was they who had forgotten Him. Once He came to them in the storm, walking on the billows, and they were frightened and thought it a ghost. So God is some times hidden from us in our toil. Sometimes in affliction we seem to be forsaken of Him. But it is only momentary, and afterwards He reveals Himself in such richness and sweetness and glory as the disciples knew at Emmaus. So here, after the toil of the night, they saw Jesus on the shore. So, often after the toil comes the Comforter; after trial and darkness comes such a sweet revelation of Jesus.

“The opening heavens around me shine
With beams of sacred bliss,
While Jesus shows His heart is mine,
And whispers I am His.”

“Children, have ye any meat?” came Christ's question over the waters; and the answer returns, “No.” What a report! What struggles the Church had then! What struggles she often has now in her members! Like her suffering Lord, she is the Church of the poor.

Beautiful scene for us! The disciples alone on the sea, fishing all night, taking nothing; the morning dawning over the lake, a figure is seen standing on the shore — only to their dim vision in the twilight, a figure; and yet it was the Saviour. What a lovely, pathetic picture!

Let us turn from the picture to the interview.

The Saviour begins: “Children, have ye any meat?” And they answer, “No.” Then, as always, He gives the directing word: “Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.” They might have said, What does he, standing on the beach, know about it? We are fishermen, and know all about the lake. We are fishermen by profession; how can he know better than we? But they cast the net as directed, “and now they are not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.”

What a lesson for Christian workers! How should this prayer ever be upon their lips: "Lord Jesus, Thou knowest the right side of the ship. In this business of mine; in these family concerns; in this ministry; in this church work; in the Sunday-school; show me how and where to cast the net." Go to your work in the church, in the Sunday-school, without Christ, and, as with the disciples, it will be *night* and *nothing*. Go with prayer, Christ with you, and the very sea shall give up its abundance. All things are yours.

The most vivid suggestion of this phase of the scene before us, then, is that we must take Christ with us; His word, His law, His presence must be in our business of life. If you open a shop in one of these streets, let Christ stand behind the counter, telling you which is the right weight, what the just measure, the true standard; teaching you how to keep your books, and how to conduct your business honestly, and you will have "the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich and addeth no sorrow thereto." If you would only by faith take hold of that idea, that Christ knows about fishing, about all the common concerns of life, that he holds the whole earth in his hands, you would, by faith and prayer, and humble trust, work your way, like these disciples, through *night* and *nothing* to *morning* and *multitudes*. And especially in spiritual work, in the ministry, in the church, in the Sunday-school, is this true. If you have been laboring, and have only *night* and *nothing*, then try this plan. Take the word and spirit of Christ with you. Then you will have success. "They that go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

"Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter: It is the Lord." O wonderful revelation! Love has the quickest ear, and the keenest eye. How quick a mother's ear to catch the faintest cry of her child in the cradle! How keen the vision of the father to see his son tattered and yet in the distance.

Who is it that sees through the mist and the twilight that figure on the shore? Who detects first in that undefined figure on the beach the Lord? John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, the disciple who leaned upon the Saviour's bosom. And just in proportion as we love Jesus will we understand the Bible, not so much by intellect as by the heart; and so have a quick recognition of Jesus in life and providence. When you receive great blessings, say: It is the Lord; when some great deliverance comes: It is the Lord; when some loved one is taken away: It is the Lord; and when the

deeper shadows fall, and we pass through the valley of the shadow of death, still know: It is the Lord.

“While He affords His aid,
I cannot yield to fear;
Though I should walk through death’s dark shade,
My Shepherd’s with me there.”

Another beautiful thought is suggested by this scene. In the first instance Peter said: “I go a fishing; and next the disciple whom Jesus loved,” “It is the Lord.” So we have different methods of doing things, and each man is called to his own work. There must be some man of ideas, of impulse, enthusiasm, to give the starting word like Peter: “I go a fishing;” and who causes others to say: “We go with thee.” And then there must be another and higher type of man, who will say to us again and again: “It is the Lord; It is the Lord.” It does not all come from Peter; not all from any one man.

There are many members, but one body. And if any man or woman can speak a true word for Christ, say something that will help in the great service, let him be recognized as God’s servant, though he does not say what the minister says, and though he makes a suggestion we never thought of. We have various gifts, and all should be consecrated to God’s service and glory.

Now Peter comes out again.

“Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he cast himself into the sea;” a moving man; not a meditative man, nor a dreamy mystic; not a speculative man but one of impulse and action. “I go,” and he casts himself into the sea. What a beautiful consistency. “But what an imprudent man,” some might say: “How improper a thing.” No, not for him. If any other man, Thomas, Nathaniel, or John, had done this, it would have been very foolish. But not for Peter the enthusiast, the man of sudden flashes of feeling and impulse. The only wonder is that he waited to put on his coat. But why this haste? Ah, Peter had denied his Lord. It may be that all through the lonely watches of the night he had been thinking of that base denial, troubled, conscience-stricken. And the moment he hears that Jesus is on the shore, he cannot wait; he plunges into the sea and goes to his injured Lord. No one knows what passed between them as he knelt at the feet of Jesus, crying: “Lord, be merciful to me! Forgive me!” He wanted to say something to his master alone. He did not care to have others present; and

he hastens to unburden his soul and hear from the lips of Jesus the word of love and forgiveness. People sometimes talk against revivals of religion, because there is too much excitement in them, too much impulse and feeling. I never feel disposed to find fault with any way in which a poor sinner may get to Jesus, so he is sincere and in earnest, and gives himself to Christ to lead a Christian life.

One thing I know: no one ever went to meet Jesus, as did Peter, who did not find Him full of tenderness and love, who did not hear from Him the blessed words, "Thy sins are forgiven; go in peace." Are there any waiting till they know where He is? who say, As soon as I know I will go? He is here now; in this house today, waiting to be gracious. If you have betrayed Him, sinned against Him, said you did not know him, still you may go to Him and seek his love; and before you can tell Him, He will give you all His mercy and pity and pardon.

"Just as I am, without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!"

We come now to the last incident in this scene.

"The other disciples came in a little ship... dragging the net with fishes."

We like to see a man like Peter, who cares nothing about the fishes, who leaps instantly into the sea and presses on to his Lord. But then we would not overlook the calm and more practical men who will come in a little boat bringing the fishes with them; men like Thomas and James and Nathaniel. We want all the slow-headed, careful people, discreet people, who count the fishes one by one, and bring them to the shore. God uses all sorts: Peter and John, Martha and Mary, Luther and Melancthon. We could do without none of them.

In a church we want the young people, full of fire and passion and enthusiasm, who do not wait to count fishes, but go to their Lord and His work with all their ardor and youthful raptures. And we want, too, the slow; those that seem at times heavy even. In the sanctuary there is room for all, for every faculty in all.

Finally, let us study this as a picture of life; life on the sea, life doing its work, often with only this result — Night and Nothing. Let us remember that even so we have Christ on the shore waiting, watching, directing. Oh,

what an impetus should that thought give us! Often we think we have nothing for our toil. But when the morning comes we see that Jesus is with us. He says, Come. We have been unfaithful; our hearts are heavy, even as it was with Peter. But when the dawn arises, a blessed voice is heard across the sea, Come to me."

What is this life of ours but just a troubled lake, heaving and swelling and tossing, breaking in billows and dashing into foam, rising into storm, and then at last lulling into a beautiful calm. And when fishing work is done, and we give it up, and want to go home, yonder is Jesus on the shore.

My friend, have you any Christ on your shore? Have you any hope when your work is done, and you have passed through the night, and all you have wrought for seems nothing? Will you see Jesus on the shore, who makes the morning? O Life, when ended what art thou but one short yesterday!

2. Mary And Martha. Luke 10:38-39.

Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village; and a certain woman, named Martha, received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word." Luke 10:38-39.

EVERY READER of the Bible is acquainted with the sisters of Bethany, and has often lingered in thought in that quiet home made light by sisterly affection, and consecrated by the affection of Jesus; a home where the Saviour loved to linger after the toils of the day, where even He found a sanctuary of repose from the noise and sins of the world.

We call your attention to Martha and Mary as presenting two phases of religion in actual life, or two distinct aspects of religious character.

One of the most difficult achievements of genius in works of fiction is the creation of individuality, and the maintenance of strict consistency in character. This is usually accomplished by minute descriptions and variety of incident. But in this Gospel history there is only a casual lifting of the veil, and Mary and Martha stand before us never to be mistaken or forgotten. They appear upon the scene but two or three times in the Gospel narrative, and yet we have a clear and distinct conception of their peculiar personalities; they are as familiar to us in their individual characters as any two persons in the circle of our friends in the daily walks of life.

I assume, what no one will question, that both the sisters were pious. But religion had different manifestations in them, according to their personal and constitutional temperaments; a fact we should never forget in our estimate of the Christians around us. I believe God designed Christians to be not mere copies of one another, but possessed of individual characters. Just as nature around us shows itself in no uniform dullness, but unfolds in a thousand various forms of beauty, so should be the varied manifestations of piety. Just as with the same general conformation of features, throughout

the race there are no two faces alike, so with essentially the same endowments, there are no two souls alike, there is no stereotyped form of religion. If all Christians presented one dull, constrained uniformity, I should suspect hypocrisy somewhere; I should suspect all were trying to be like one another, instead of each trying to be like Christ, the great exemplar of Christian perfection.

A consideration of these two sisters will illustrate this idea, that religion in its practical manifestations will be tinged and modified by our peculiar temperaments and natural dispositions; and that as Christians we do not lose our distinct and peculiar personalities. It seems to me an evidence of sincerity when religion, if I may use the expression, acts naturally.

The two phases of religious character as seen in the Gospel history of Mary and Martha are brought to view in three distinct scenes.

The first place in which the two sisters are brought into striking contrast is in our text. They appear here most distinctly marked in their religious characters.

The quiet home of Bethany is thrown into unusual agitation by the unexpected arrival of Christ and some, if not all, of the disciples. The entertainment of the guests naturally devolves upon Martha, who seems to have been the head of the family and the manager of the household affairs. She is full of bustle and anxiety in the entertainment of the visitors. We may infer that Martha was a woman who took great pains with everything she did, and made much of every duty and every trouble, being of an anxious disposition, and yet of great energy and stirring habits, ambitious to have everything done in the best manner. In her bustling activity she seems to lose the serenity of her mind, and is betrayed into a peevish and fretful temper, which overlooks both the kindness due to a sister and the veneration becoming her distinguished guest. Baffled and fretted, she enters the room where Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, and in a most disrespectful manner says: "Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." To which the Saviour answers in the calm but touching rebuke: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things."

In this scene Martha, cumbered with her plans and cares, absorbed in domestic duties, and venting her petulant censure upon her sister, contrasts unfavorably with Mary serenely and happily sitting at the feet of Jesus. And

yet they were both pious. Their religion, we see, is tinged by their natural temperaments.

Martha has been aptly styled the female Peter, ardent, impetuous, practical. Her love to Christ shows itself in a restless, bustling activity. The very ardor, warm-heartedness, and over-anxiety of her nature, exhibited in preparing for the comfort of her guests, led her unconsciously into this fretfulness of temper. Her very faults seem to spring from her virtues. But she was in a wrong state of mind; and the Saviour uttered the mild and gentle rebuke: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things." As though He would say: 'Every thing excites in you an anxious and a troubled mind. You magnify everything you have to do by disproportionate solicitude. By being wholly absorbed in family cares and labors, you are really losing sight of the one thing needful.'

Mary was altogether different. In her natural disposition she was quiet, thoughtful, full of deep emotion and intense affection. She resembles John in the tenderness and intensity of her love to the Saviour. Hence, while Martha is fretted and cumbered with much serving, she sits quietly at the feet of Jesus without an anxious thought or care. She is absorbed by the presence of Jesus, and in the spiritual yearnings of her heart forgets the business of entertainment. She had found one who could solve all her difficulties in religion, who could satisfy the aspirations of her soul after truth and heaven. And she sat enchained at the feet of her Lord, catching the words that fell from His lips, and forgetting everything else in the rapturous joy of the glowing moments.

Here we have the two sisters in vivid contrast, revealing their peculiar dispositions in their religion. Martha, though pious, exhibits a religious character inferior to Mary's. Martha had a degree of faith, and unquestionably loved the Saviour, but there is a tinge of worldliness about her religion. Her activity and zeal were inspired by the loftiest motives. Mary is more devout and aspiring, living in the world, yet deriving her true life from celestial sources. There was more of the ideal in her religion. To her spiritual vision this world absolutely had not so many nor such pressing claims as pressed upon her sister. The scale of her up-reaching thought reduced the size of these earthly cares. Eternity loomed up to her view and overshadowed earth. To say the least, Mary was one of those characters who cause us to overlook what they do in the consideration of what they are. We are more impressed by her spirit than by her actions. She sat at the

feet of Jesus, for her appropriate sphere was in the region of thought and aspiration. Her heart was a censer of devout meditations, and her whole being, like a heavenly harp, seemed to vibrate to every touch and influence of the Holy Spirit. It seems to be the mission of such natures not so much to act as to shine in their own calm brightness, like planets reflecting upon us a light which has been poured into them from invisible suns. But wherever they move their presence is felt; man's heart grows better for the time, and his sins lie still, while through the dim and murky atmosphere of earth they impart gleams and suggestions of heaven.

The practical reflection suggested by this contrast of characters is simply this: Let each one seek the highest development of his individual nature. Martha would be improved by possessing more of Mary's spirit and devotion; and Mary would, perhaps, be more useful with something of Martha's practical nature. But they could never become alike. Martha could never become Mary, nor could Mary become Martha. Just so is it with John and Peter, with Luther and Melancthon. Each moves in his own orbit, fulfills his own law, and to interfere with these, to attempt to soften Luther to the natural suavity and gentleness of Melancthon, or to put Luther's thunder-words into the honey-flowing mouth of Melancthon, is to destroy the power and gift of each. Nor is it necessary. We need Marthas, perhaps, more than Marys, where so much is to be done. To be always sitting at the feet of Jesus will not do in a world where so much is to be accomplished. We must work as well as pray.

Let each one aspire to the highest excellence and perfection of his own peculiar nature under the regenerating and sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God. And let not the Marthas, gifted with a more active and energetic nature, capable of greater activity and usefulness, censure the more quiet souls — the Marys who may be sitting at the Saviour's feet — by saying: "Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" On the other hand, let not the Marys, absorbed in quiet meditation, despise those of a busier, more active temper, the Marthas who are ever scheming and planning, and engaged in every good work. We need this very diversity. "Now," says Paul, "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

The contemplation of Martha and Mary in their home at Bethany would naturally lead us to some reflections upon the influence of Christianity upon

the character and sphere and destiny of woman. We have time but to glance at this bearing of our subject.

The influence of the Gospel upon the outward condition of woman is too well known to demand our attention now. That sex which almost alone was friendly to the Saviour, anointing His feet with ointment, and following Him with tears to the cross, preparing sweet spices for His burial, and first to hail His resurrection, that sex in turn has been specially befriended and blessed by the Gospel. It has raised her from the condition of a menial under paganism to be a refined and purifying influence in society, and to lend to home the dignity and grace of mother, wife, sister, daughter; names which touch the tenderest feelings of our nature, and awaken the sweetest sympathies of the human heart; names that live longest and brightest among the memories of the past.

The Gospel has done everything for woman, and from that sex Christianity has had the most of its disciples, and those the most devoted. Dr. Dwight reckons that there are three pious women to one pious man. Indeed, we have an instinctive feeling that every woman should especially be the friend of Christ. An infidel woman, one that would sneer at the Bible, or the cross, or speak lightly of the Saviour, is a monster from whom all the finer feelings of humanity recoil. There are few so degenerate that they would not blush to be known as the child of an infidel mother. Oh, what is woman, what all the charms of beauty, the graces of mind and manner, without the meeker grace of piety! Ah, a lighter thing than vanity.

Her very position is one which specially needs the sustaining power and consolation of the Gospel. It is one of peculiar trials, of vexing cares and shaded sorrows. Often is she called in her quiet home to under take toils and domestic cares, to meet painful bereavements. The heroes of history wear wreaths of fame about their bleeding brows; but who shall unfold the records of woman's martyrdom traced in tears, hidden in silence, in country homes? And where can she find strength and peace and consolation, unless with Mary, at the feet of Jesus?

Piety alone can qualify woman for her important social position. It is at once her greatest strength and most graceful ornament. "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." Other things there are which constitute her adornment; this is the brightest jewel in her crown. It elevates and beautifies her character when the charms of youth and beauty are gone. It hallows all her domestic virtues and gives

peace amid oppressive cares. It sanctifies the infirmities of age and sheds the light and serenity of hope over the sunset of life.

Martha and Mary, in the quiet duties of home, show the proper sphere of woman. And if the modern cry for “woman’s rights” intends to assign her a different sphere, I believe it assails a great and beautiful law of nature, and makes a demand which the general sentiment of her own sex will repudiate. I refer to that principle of duality which runs through the universe, dividing every perfect whole into two parts, assigning to each its own appropriate work. It is the duality of day and night, of the leaf and the flower, of the hand and the heart. If woman abandon her sphere, there is no one else to fill it, and a wide circle of human wants is left empty and desolate. Then the symmetrical unity of life collapses; one side becomes paralyzed, and the other monstrous.

With the exception of a few women of frosty sympathies and intrepid nerves, whose ‘strong-mindedness’ has absorbed the gentler feelings — with the exception of such — I believe that most women are content in that separate path in which, since man and woman came out together from the gates of Eden, she has walked side by side with man through the flowers and thorns that grow along the ways of life. Home — is not that a beautiful and glorious sphere? What nobler work than to make this a place of joy and strength and peace; to weave the thousand silken cords of affection, stronger than bands of iron; to bring into harmony the jarring and effervescing elements of society. Though she may never mingle in the rougher walks of life, her influence secretly winds itself into all the great movements of the world.

What may she not do if she rightly fills that hallowed sphere assigned her by God? What is she not, if a true woman and wife, to her husband — the motive that inspires his life and labors?

“Wreathing him flowers to make his joys more bright;
Or when the storm has spread its darkest shroud
To gild with hope the rainbow on the cloud.”

Look, too, at the influence of the mother. Do we admire the power that wields scepters, sways senates, dashes in the front of victorious battle? — the germ of all springs up under the guardianship and is unfolded by the breath of her love. The mainspring of all greatness is in the nursery, and

touched by a mother's hand. Thousands in heaven will unite in that beautiful tribute of Dr. Bethune to his mother:

“Methinks when singing at His feet,
Amidst the ransomed throng above,
Thy name upon my glowing lips shall be,
And I will bless that grace for Heaven and thee.”

Let me commend these sisters of Bethany as worthy of imitation. We naturally expect woman to be for Christ and His cause. Chateaubriand says: “A ray of Christ still lingers over the beautiful brow of the Jewess because her voice was not mingled with the dreadful cry, ‘Crucify Him, crucify Him!’”

Look at the noble Christian women in the Gospel history; no flattery, no mockery, no peril, not death itself, could keep them from the awful scenes of Calvary. Man sleeps when his Saviour lies prostrate in the garden; man's love hesitates and falters when his Saviour is crowned with thorns; man denies Him; and man betrays Him; but woman, never!

“Not she, with treacherous kiss, her Saviour stung;
Not she denied Him with unholy tongue.
She, when apostles shrunk, could danger brave;
Last at His cross, and earliest at His grave.”

Let our homes be blessed with Christian mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and all society will feel the blessings of the Gospel; the kingdom of Christ will move on in divine beauty and power. Let our Marthas and Marys be found with Christ and for Christ, and fulfill their mission in their appointed sphere, not comet-like, flashing in irregular orbits, but like the gentle shining of the star, which is the first to light the day and the last to leave it. In that sphere she shall best serve Christ and her generation.

“From every lowly path well trod,
Looks meekly upward to her God.”

There are two other scenes in the Gospel history in which the two sisters appear in contrast, exhibiting the same personal peculiarities of character.

Let us view them in the dark hour of affliction. The happy home at Bethany is now hushed in the stillness of grief, and shaded with sorrow. Lazarus is dead. They have sent a message to Jesus: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." But He comes not. After they have returned from the grave to their desolate home they hear that Jesus is coming. Here again we see the personal peculiarities of the two sisters. Martha, as soon as she hears that Christ is coming, goes forth to meet Him; but Mary remains in the house.

Martha here appears in the more favorable light. Mary, true to her natural disposition, remains in the house, broods over her affliction, and indulges in the luxury of grief. But Martha, with her active and impetuous temper, rushes forth to meet the Saviour. She goes with as heavy a heart as Mary, but how much wiser here than her sister to go and lay that heart, heavy and throbbing with grief, at the feet of Jesus. Once she would have called Mary away from Christ; now she hastens to her sister and sends her to the feet of Jesus: "She went her way, and called Mary, her sister, secretly, saying: The Master is come, and calleth for thee."

We see the peculiarities of the two sisters distinctly marked in this scene. With Martha the mourning was more of a sudden outburst of feeling; with Mary it was deeper, intenser, more lasting sorrow. With a beautiful touch of nature both, at meeting Christ, exclaim: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." How natural, when a calamity befalls us, a friend or a child dies, this utterance. But after the first ejaculation Martha is sufficiently comforted to hold conversation with the Saviour, and to hear from His lips those grand, soul-thrilling words: "I am the resurrection and the life." But Mary, after uttering the words: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," after her more sensitive and passionate nature, sank down with this outgush of her heart at His feet in speechless sorrow.

Were it properly within the scope of this discourse, we should love to linger near that tomb where the weeping sisters receive their brother back to life. That entire scene at Bethany is a beautiful pictorial representation of a Christian family in sickness, in death, and in the resurrection of the last day.

When a member of our family is sick, what a comfort, if we can by prayer send a message to Jesus, saying: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." What a privilege, when death comes, to be able to feel that it is, as it was in this instance, "for the glory of God."

We may learn, too, from this scene what it becomes us as disciples of Christ to do when our loved ones are taken away. We are not to sit still and nourish our grief, but go with our wounded and heavy hearts to the blessed Saviour, and hear Him say: "I am the resurrection and the life." And if we can say of our families as Eliot said of his: "We are all in Christ, or with Christ," then the open grave at Bethany, with Lazarus raised and clasped in the arms of his loving sisters, is but a prefiguration of that blessed, joyous, and everlasting reunion of the loved on the morn of the resurrection — "no wanderer lost, a family in heaven."

There is another and last scene, in which Martha and Mary appear before us in their peculiar characters.

About a week before the crucifixion we find Jesus and Lazarus and the two sisters at supper in the house of Simon the Leper. How true to their several dispositions do they appear at this meal: "And Martha served... Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment."

Both the sisters gave an appropriate expression of their love and gratitude. But what a contrast does the business-like activity of the one afford to the delicate and costly attention of the other! These offerings show a radical difference of natural character. The one is a matter-of-fact nature, full of energy and activity; the other, an ideal, contemplative soul, seeking, with devout aspiration, some rich symbol to express its deep and yearning affection; rendering to the Saviour in that costly ointment a tribute which has been consecrated by her act to be an everlasting memorial of her piety, an offering that not only filled the house of Simon with its odor, but has possessed the whole world with its heavenly fragrance.

Thus, in this last scene, as in the first, we find the same peculiarities in the two sisters, the same attitudes even — the one serving, the other at the feet of Jesus. Martha has improved in temper, and is far more religious than in the first scene, but we still see the same constitutional temperament. Her piety still exhibits itself in a restless activity and generous hospitality. And the very fact that she showed faults in the beginning, invests her character with a peculiar interest to us, now that she seems to have corrected them.

Mary, who seems never to have strayed, does not so deeply touch our sympathy. We have a kind of fellow-feeling for Martha, because we are so much like her, "careful and troubled about many things," and often tempted

to fretfulness and impatience. If Mary was more like an angel, Martha is more like a redeemed sinner.

Mary in the three scenes is always at the Saviour's feet as a learner, as a mourner, as a servant, and devout worshiper. She still occupies that lovely attitude. Centuries have rolled over her lonely grave, but her redeemed spirit has long since cast her crown at the Saviour's feet in heaven. For eighteen hundred years she has worshipped and sung before the Lamb in the midst of the throne, for she chose that good part which could not be taken away from her.

And Martha has exchanged her cares and toils on earth for the rest of heaven; but her active mind and heart and hands

“— find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy.”

Practical Lessons

A few practical lessons from the scenes we have attempted to present, and we have done.

1. Christ loves special acts and testimonials of devotion.

That box of ointment which Mary brought as a special expression of her grateful love was acceptable, and strengthened the cords of affection between her heart and her Saviour. If you have any gift which, at any time, your loving heart prompts you to give to Christ, it will be like Mary's spikenard, a grateful incense. Whenever, then, you make a contribution to the church, to the cause of missions, for the relief of the sick or the poor, make it as an offering to Christ. When your heart is swelling and throbbing with love to Him who loved you and gave Himself for you, then bring some special gift, and, like Mary, you will pour sweet ointment on the Saviour's head, the joy of which you will carry in your heart, even as Mary carried the perfume with her which she took from the anointing of her Lord.

2. The True Object and End of Life.

The Saviour's rebuke of Martha and commendation of Mary set before us the true object and end of life. Martha was busy and full of energy, but her activity was displeasing to Christ. It is not enough, then, that we are busy; the question is, what are we doing? Every thoroughfare, every department of life, every profession, is full of Marthas, "cumbered about much serving;" and to all the busy throng the Saviour would say: "Ye are careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful." In these words our Lord puts the "great object of life in its true place: but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." 'What,' He seems to say, 'will be the end of all these careful and troubled thoughts, this incessant whirl of toil by day and night? What will remain to show of all this anxiety and labor in a dying hour, or at the bar of God?' Is it not a strange infatuation that leads men to labor for the body and neglect the soul, to toil for earth and lose sight of heaven? It is as if you should care for the casket and throw away the jewels; as if a mother, when the house was on fire, should save the cradle and leave the sleeping babe to perish in the flames.

How beautiful, how impressive, in this light, is the picture of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus; and what force in the words He spake: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." Let this picture live in your memory. Amid all your busy cares let these words of Christ control your life. Ask yourself, What can compensate me of all the world has to offer for the loss of the good portion of Mary, the blessedness of being a child of God and an heir of glory? Look at those busy hands; soon folded over the still, cold breast in your long, long sleep, they will turn to dust in the grave:

"Soon must this body die,
This mortal frame decay;
Soon must these active limbs of mine
Lie mold'ring in the clay."

God grant that these words of Jesus may ring in our ears and rouse us to choose the "one thing," "the good part," of Mary. With Mary, may we sit at the Saviour's feet on earth, and with Mary and all the redeemed cast our crowns at His feet in heaven, and join in the ever lasting song, "Worthy is

the lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.” Amen.

3. Wanderings And Tears.

Psalm 56:8

“Thou tellest my wanderings; put thou my tears into thy bottle; are they not in thy book?”
Psalm 56:8.

THE BIBLE is full of beautiful images. Its words and its thoughts are alike poetical. It has gathered around its central truths all natural beauty and interest. It is a temple with one altar and one God, our Saviour, but illumined with varied lights, and adorned with manifold and beautiful ornaments. And these figures are all the grander and more beautiful because incidental and unsought. In the bow which paints the melting cloud there is a beauty which no artist can imitate; for it is the glory which gilds beneficence; the flush which can not but come forth from sun and shower. They have all the gracefulness of a high utility, and all the modest charm of sanctity. Here we have the utterance of a heart in trouble, under a cloud, but with a faith that spans that cloud with the bow of promise.

We have first, the conviction of the Psalmist: “Thou tellest my wanderings.”

Ever since man’s expulsion from Eden he has been a wanderer; not only from the home of innocence, but from the God of love. He is a prodigal, that has wandered from his Father’s house. Every step has been away from home. His whole history is one of departure; wandering from God his end and aim and everlasting portion. If any of us have returned to our Father’s house and love, we must sing:

“Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God.”

The language of David in the text is evidently the utterance of one who has been brought back to his Father’s house. He was at the time a child of God;

and it is as such he confesses his wanderings. This may refer to human life in its varied scenes and changes. The patriarchs viewed themselves as strangers and pilgrims. David was himself a great wanderer. He says, "He was hunted like a partridge upon the mountain." And the idea is, that in all the changes of life, in the marked alternations, the eye of the Lord was upon him, and His omnipotent hand upheld all his goings. And so of all God's people; they are all wanderers, pilgrims, and no one can forecast the changes before him, or the windings of his way as it leads onward to the unseen world. But we have this assurance: "The Lord knoweth all thy walkings through this great world." "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths." "Thou tellest my wanderings."

Yes, we are wanderers here, but we are going to a city out of sight:

"Zion its name, the Lord is there,
It shines with everlasting light."

Happy he who can say with David: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

But David refers, also, to his wanderings in heart and life from the ways of God. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." Thus says the Church in solemn confession. And who among us is not conscious of this tendency to depart from God? Who of us can look into his heart and not detect these wanderings of thought in prayer, wanderings in his affections after the world? in the loss of our first love, and fervor and zeal? And we sigh over our departed joys, "Oh, that I were as in months past!"

Now David was not only conscious of these wanderings, but he is assured that God knew them. "Thou tellest my wanderings." But how? "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." And when any of His children wander, he calls them back; sometimes by His word, but this they do not always hear; sometimes by the gentle whisper of the spirit, or by the thundering of conscience. If these fail, then He stretches forth His hand of mercy: sickness, loss of property, bereavement, rudely shake us. And that earthly thing that was stealing away our hearts from God is broken or removed, or, like Jonah's gourd, it springs up only to wither, and a cloud is over us; God speaks to us, and our hearts turn to Him again.

Then, when the cloud passes away, "Like the disciples on the mount, we see none save Jesus only."

Happy indeed are we, if, like David, we can say: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes." For, "before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word."

Yes, affliction falls upon a Christian as the evening darkness falls, which at once hides the earth and unveils the sky. Earthly hopes are smitten, and we are taught to look upward to that blessed hope. Blessed is the affliction, and blessed the sorrow.

"Father! I bless Thy gentle hand;
How kind was Thy chastising rod,
That forced my conscience to a stand,
And brought my wandering soul to God."

Notice, next, his prayer, "Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle." There are some who look upon tears as a sign of weakness. But such an affected stoicism is neither human nor "religious. Lavater says:"True greatness is always simple," and we may add, that true greatness is always combined with tenderness. Homer, that matchless painter of men, represents "Ajax, the bravest, and Ulysses, the wisest of his heroes, as often weeping."

But we have a nobler model than any pagan hero. Look at Jesus, the man of sorrows; see Him weep with the sorrowing sisters at Bethany; hear Him pouring His tearful soul into that pathetic lamentation over the doomed city: "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not!"

David was a man of tears. One source of his tears was sin: "My sin is ever before me." Not only that great flagrant sin which haunted the peace of his after life, but his daily heart sins and failures were his cry. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults." And as for his own, so for the sins of others: "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes because they keep not Thy law." So Paul: "I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." And so every child of God has times when, in secret, he weeps over his own sins and those of others. Yes,

"E'en the rapture of pardon is mingled with fears,
And the cup of thanksgiving with penitent tears."

And then David had his troubles that made him weep. He often alludes to this: "My tears have been my meat day and night. I water my couch with my tears."

Even in his exaltation, when surrounded with royal grandeur, when he wore the crown and grasped the scepter of a great kingdom, he was not without sorrows. He had his troubles as an individual, such as are common to humanity. He had his political trials, and his domestic sorrows. When the young man Absalom had fallen on the field of battle, what were crowns and kingdoms to that father's broken heart over a fallen child, dying in sin? As he went up to his chamber and wept: "Oh, my son Absalom, my son, my son! Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son!" Oh yes, David had his tears, as we all have. Who of us has not sins, bereavements, sorrows? Yes; no countenance gazes on the sky that has not been dimmed with tears. Often, like David, we would cry: "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest."

Next, we consider David's prayer, concerning his tears. "Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle." This requires some explanation.

The Romans had little vessels called lachrymals, which were filled with tears, and commonly buried with the friend whose death drew them forth. It was supposed it would add to the comfort of the departed to know that he was not forgotten by those who were left behind. Some of these urns may be seen in the British Museum. When the grave of Cicero was opened in 1554, there were found two glass urns, the larger filled with a kind of earth, the other with a fluid. The one, it is supposed, contained ashes, the other, the tears of friends.

At Roman funerals, one went to each at the height of his grief, with a piece of cloth, on which he carefully collected the falling tears, which he expressed into a glass urn (lachrymal). They were preserved with the greatest care, and placed on the sepulchre of the deceased as a memorial of affection and sorrow.

It seems to us in these modern days an eccentric custom. But the image is a very touching one. If one could have seen the bereaved mother bending over the cold remains of a departed child, endeavoring to secure, in her little urn, the gushing tears, treasuring up those precious drops of affection as a memorial of the departed, or to deposit the urn in the grave of the child. Such a scene would be to the beholder most tender and affecting. It is not likely such a custom obtained among the Jews, especially at this early

period. But the allusion to this custom by the Psalmist is beautiful and affecting. The words of the text, in the light of this ancient custom, means this: Let my sorrows, the very expression of my sorrow in tears, be dear to Thee; and as the Roman mother preserved the tears shed at the death of her child, may my tears be precious in Thy sight. "Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle." Or, as his prayer elsewhere breaks forth: "Look upon mine affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins. Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

How beautiful and wonderful is this revelation of God, as not only seeing, but touched with pity, at the sorrows of his people; as treasuring up for their preciousness the tears of His saints.

And this revelation of the great God, as full of pity and sympathy and comfort for his people, is made to us in his son Jesus Christ, who is touched with a feeling for our infirmity.

Now, Christian brethren, let this revelation cheer and comfort you in your trials and sorrows. To you it is given not only to believe in Jesus, but to suffer for him and with him. His example has sanctified grief, and almost made it sweet to mourn.

"We tread the path our Master trod;
We bear the cross He bore."

And many a hand holds a cup filled with that which overflowed in Gethsemane. Many a lip trembles with the prayer, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." There are brows still about which are crowns of thorns, and Christianity still takes up its cross and follows Jesus. And oh, remember, that whilst you are to rejoice in the Lord, always, our holy religion does not crush those finer feelings of humanity which find their natural expression in tears. There will be times to weep for all of us. Like the woman in Simon's house, who stooped to bathe the Saviour's feet with her tears, our eyes will overflow. Like Martha and Mary, we shall weep over some loved one gone. Like the widow following her only son to the grave, we shall walk desolate in the funeral procession. Oh yes, weep! Jesus forbids thee not. He knows the meaning of those tears. Only weep in penitence, in faith, in sweet submission to His will. Then with David you may pray, "Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle." Precious in the sight of the Lord are the tears of His saints.

With such a view of God in Christ, we may well exclaim with the apostle, in holy transport: “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.”

Let us not lose the meaning of the phrase, “God of all comfort.” In all his greatness he stoops to comfort. I see a dew-drop cheering a thirsty flower; I know whence it sprang. I see a rill of comfort flowing into a sad soul; I know its spring; it came from heaven, from the God of all comfort. Blessed revelation! and all through Christ. Let us take God in Christ home to our hearts.

And then we are to remember that “they that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” In his vision of heaven, John says: “I beheld, and lo, a great multitude which no man could number, clothed with white robes and palms.” These, he learned, were those which came out of great tribulation. “Therefore, are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.” We, too, are on our way to the same world and to the same great company.

“Then let our songs abound,
And every tear be dry;
We’re marching through Immanuel’s ground
To fairer worlds on high.”

There are no tears in Heaven, for there is no sorrow there. No tears of penitence, for there shall be no sin. No tears of conflict; no temptation and no tempter there. No tears of bereavement, for there is no death there. No tears of separation, for they shall go no more out for ever. “The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

“Every tear is wiped away;
Sighs no more shall heave the breast;
Night is lost in endless day;
Sorrow, in eternal rest.”

4. Flight In Winter. Mark 13:18.

“And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.” Mark 13:18.

THESE ARE WORDS of counsel and premonition. They were uttered by Christ to His disciples in view of the destruction of Jerusalem. He saw, in prophetic vision, the clouds gathering over the doomed city, and, with kindly forecast, warned them when they saw the signs of its impending desolation to flee to the mountains.

But as the evils of flight would be greatly augmented if it should occur in the inclement season, and as God ever tempers judgment with mercy, He instructed them to pray that their flight might not be in the winter, and that, since the approaching calamity was inevitable, it might come to them mingled with mercy.

That the disciples acted upon the admonition of their Lord is evident from the history of that fearful catastrophe. The hand of God so interposed in their behalf that every Christian escaped from the city before it fell under the mighty shock of the Roman army. Cestius Gallus, the Roman general, at the first siege, might at once have taken the city. But the Christians were yet in Jerusalem, and they must have time to flee. Hence, the Roman conqueror, at the very moment of capturing the city, without any assignable reason, suspended hostilities, and recalled his soldiers from the gates of the city. Even Josephus ascribes this singular act of the Roman general to a special interposition of Divine Providence. During this suspension of the siege many fled from Jerusalem, as from a sinking ship. Among the fugitives were the disciples of Christ. Acting upon the premonition of their Lord, when they saw signs of the impending doom, they fled to Pella, a city among the mountains beyond Jordan. God remembered them in mercy. No storms of winter impeded the flight of these Christian refugees from the descending judgments. The events of the siege, as well as the seasons, were so ordered and adjusted by Providence that no Christian was imperilled in his flight. Whilst blood flowed through the streets of Jerusalem, and

1,300,000 citizens perished in the fearful desolation, every Christian escaped with his life. They were as safe then in their mountain refuge as they are now within the crystal walls of the New Jerusalem. For then and ever “they that dwell in the secret of the Lord, abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

“God is the tower
To which they fly;
His grace is nigh
In every hour.”

It is not difficult to see the meaning of the text in its application to the Christians in Jerusalem during the crisis of her impending doom. If they had been called upon to flee in the storms of winter, their flight, if not wholly impracticable, would have been surrounded with difficulty, and overhung with perils. If to the terrors of flight had been added the rigors of winter, many of the aged and feeble would have fainted by the way, and never reached the mountains. Hence, the Saviour admonished them to pray, that not in the winter, but in some more genial season, they might be summoned to flee from the coming storm.

There is an obvious analogy between the stages in human life and the successive seasons of the year. In both there is a spring, a summer, and a winter, and in both the successive periods are determined by what goes before. “If the spring put forth no blossoms, in summer there will be no beauty, and in autumn no fruit. So if youth be neglected, manhood will be contemptible, and old age miserable. If the beginnings of life have been vanity, its latter end can be no other than vexation of spirit.”

There is a winter in human life, as in the seasons of the year. Youth is our spring, the seed-time, the budding-time of our life. Then comes summer, with its flowering and harvests. And then the sober age of experience, with the fruits of wisdom; and this we call the autumn of our days. But if spared, there will come another season, when there will be ice in the blood and snow on the brow, and all the emblems of a moral winter pass over the man.

“Pass some few years Thy flowering spring, thy summer’s ardent strength,
Thy sober autumn fading into age,
And pale concluding winter comes at last —
And shuts the scene.”

Yes, winter will come! And if there has been no piety in youth or manhood, no fleeing to the mercy of the Lord in the springtime, or summer, or autumn, it will be difficult for the man to flee in the Winter of his days; difficult when his eye is dim, and his foot is halting in the deepening shadows to brave the rugged path of winter with its cold and storms. In this figurative sense the text is a solemn warning against that protracted indifference to religion which so often terminates in the ruin of the soul. The literal sense, with its historical incidents, seems both to illustrate and enforce the admonition: “Pray that your flight be not in the winter.” This does not imply that flight is an impossible thing in the winter of human life, or that the aged sinner must inevitably perish. The fact that we are to pray that our flight be not in the winter implies that flight is at least possible, however difficult. But it does imply that, though possible, it will be attended with fearful peril.

Whilst, therefore, we warn men against the perils of flight in the winter, or the perils of waiting for conversion in old age, we would not withhold the message of salvation, even from the oldest sinner. It may not be too late — not while the pulse, though feeble, yet beats; not while the eye, though dim, yet discerns; not, though the winter be at its depth, and the sun be touching the horizon, not too late to say to the aged sinner: “Escape for thy life; flee from the coming storm; awake, awake, O sluggish soul, awake, and view thy setting sun!”

What is the moral history of a man who has grown old in sin? Assuming that he has passed his years in a Christian land, what have been the processes going on in his understanding, heart, and conscience? How many religious truths have been addressed to his understanding! How many appeals have been made by the word and spirit to his heart and conscience! But all these truths and appeals have been resisted, and the man stands in the winter of his life without Christ and without hope. During the passing years there were times of anxiety about his soul and eternity, for such times come to every man. There are moments in the history of every man when the truth flashes in upon the soul, and he is moved by its power; moments of retirement and meditation, when he is unconsciously turned to

thoughtfulness; times when God speaks in solemn dispensations of providence, when death enters the circle of his friends, or comes into his own household, and, under the shadows of the coming world, he is made to feel the vanity of earth; and to exclaim, with solemn apprehensions of the future,

'Tis not the whole of life to live.
Nor all of death to die."

We may safely predicate such times of awakening and solemn thoughtfulness of every man who has lived for many years in a Christian land. In many instances the religious convictions and purposes are deeper and stronger than we have represented. Sometimes, under the preaching of the word and the power of the Holy Ghost, the man is so moved in his whole spiritual being, that, like Felix, he trembles in view of a coming judgment; but, like that unhappy governor, his convictions and fears are quieted by the evasive and fatal answer, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Sometimes under the word and the Spirit his convictions are so strong, and his heart and conscience so moved toward the Christian life, that like Agrippa, he exclaims, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Yes, the old man can recall times in his past life when, like Felix, he trembled, or when, like Agrippa, he was almost persuaded to be a Christian — times of conviction and religious impulses, when it might have been said of him as Christ said to the questioning scribe, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

Now, the aged sinner is one who has passed through some such religious convictions and impulses. He has been beating back at almost every step of his life the overtures of heaven, hushing anxieties, silencing conscience, and resisting the spirit; and thus closing up, as it were, the common avenues through which the Gospel finds entrance to the soul. At every stage of life he has been losing something of the freshness and susceptibility of youth. Once he felt a strange horror as he heard of that world of the wicked, where all is darkness, death, and long despair, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Once his heart glowed with a yearning impulse as he heard of heaven, of its abodes of peace and songs of joy. But now he hears of hell without fear, and of heaven without one kindling desire or aspiration. Alas, what a change has come over the man in the passing years! How cold,

stupid, and insensible to all that once moved him to joy or tears! As we look upon such a man, we may well exclaim with sorrow, "How hardly shall he enter into the kingdom of God!"

But you say, is it not as easy for God to convert an old as a young man? Yes, on the Divine side of the work it is. For with God all things are possible. But on the human side the difficulty assumes a fearful magnitude. The divine command to every man is, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." There must be a cooperation of man with God in the work of salvation. And here is the point of difficulty with the old sinner. He has unfitted himself for the great work. Just as an old man with dim vision, numbness of limbs, and faltering steps, would find it hard to gird himself for battle, so the aged sinner, with his darkened understanding, torpid affections, and stupid conscience, will find it hard to work out his salvation, and lay hold upon the hope set before him. Verily, such a man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. Oh, pray that your flight be not in the winter.

Another difficulty in the salvation of the aged sinner is found in the false schemes of religion he is naturally tempted to embrace, and the false hopes he is led to indulge in order to quiet any remaining anxieties, and dispel any lingering fears of the future.

An old man out of Christ, if not utterly insensible to religious truth, will be found sheltering himself in some refuge of lies, and with a delusive hope dreaming that all is well. One is comforted because he has led a very moral life. And such a life, outwardly moral and blameless in the eyes of the world, is not to be despised; but as a ground of hope for the future, it is utterly worthless, it is but the hope of the hypocrite, which shall perish. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight." A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. For a man, then, to hope for heaven because he has been moral, is to repeat the folly of him who built his house upon the drifting sand. He who does so is destined to a similar disaster when the floods come.

Another old man consoles himself that God is infinite in mercy, and will not suffer any of his creatures to perish finally and forever. It is true, God is merciful; but his mercy is revealed to man only in Christ Jesus. To trust in His mercy out of Christ is to trust in a phantom of our own imagination. Out of Christ God is a consuming fire, and his anger burns to the lowest

hell. How awful the delusion of the aged sinner who trusts in the mercy of God, out of Christ. It is to fabricate a refuge of lies, which shall be swept away.

And yet another says it is too late for him to change his sentiments or habits of life. He consoles himself with the hope that things in the future, even for him, may not be so bad as represented. At all events, he is too old to be troubled with new doctrines about religion, upon which his mind has long been settled. With some such delusion he goes on untroubled to his doom. Such are some of the delusions of the old sinner, which hide from view the perils that surround his path. The literal difficulties of a flight from Jerusalem in the winter will illustrate the difficulties of the salvation of the aged under such blindness and delusion. If in the former case the snow hides the pitfalls, and the ice covers the treacherous water, and the Aurora Borealis paints the midnight sky till it seems blushing with the morning, then the man shall not see the dangers that surround his path. So, in the latter case, the aged sinner under manifold delusions and deceptive appearances, is unconscious of the perils that environ his path. As one in some deep reverie, who sits quietly at the foot of the mountain from whose heights the avalanche is loosening to descend with crushing and overwhelming power, so the aged sinner, in his delusions and reveries of hope, makes no effort to escape the impending doom; crying "peace, peace," when sudden destruction is coming upon him.

The final difficulty in the way of the aged sinner is the solemn fact that the day of grace may not be always coextensive with human life. Before the end of his days the man may reach the fatal moral crisis in which his destiny is fixed for ever. He may still hear the gospel message; he may still enjoy the means of grace; but to him they have become powerless. The man who has for so many years hardened himself against God, and all the touching appeals of a Saviour's love, who has all his life resisted the truth and spirit of God, may superinduce a spiritual blindness and insensibility, upon which all religious truth and influences will fall as powerless as the cold moonbeams upon mountains of ice. Though the man may at intervals be startled with phantoms of coming wrath, he has no heart to seek for mercy. He may live on the remnant of his days, with faith enough to people the future with terrors, but not faith enough to lay hold of the only Saviour from perdition.

Such a spiritual condition is indicated as possible in those solemn warnings of the Bible against grieving the Spirit and hardening the heart. By a long neglect of religion and a persistent indulgence of evil passions, the man may lose his very capacity for religion; when God shall say, "he is joined to idols, let him alone;" and the Spirit, long grieved and resisted, shall depart and leave him to his depraved impulses to work out his own destruction. This is an awfully solemn fact, and should make every aged sinner who may be nearing the fatal crisis, to tremble for his soul.

"God's Spirit will not always strive
With harden'd, self-destroying man."

Yes, it is possible to be doomed before the end of this mortal life.

"There is a time, we know not when,
A point, we know not where,
That marks the destiny of men
To glory or despair.

"There is a line by us unseen,
That crosses every path;
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath."

Some of you may be nearing that unseen point, that fatal crisis; and if so, consider the perils that crowd your path, and threaten your flight in the winter. Remember some time or other, there must be flight from Jerusalem to Pella, from the law you have broken, and whose curses are thundering over your guilty soul, to Christ, the only Saviour; flight from a life of sin to a life of penitence and faith and holiness. The premonitions of conscience and the repeated and explicit teachings of the Bible affirm the necessity of flight. "Except ye repent ye shall all like wise perish."

What can we say to the old out of Christ? Your condition is one unutterably sad and perilous. To you, the spring and summer of life are gone, and the winter has come; a winter that has no returning spring. You can not recall the past. You cannot say, as one of old, "O sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou moon in the valley of Ajulon!" There is no Gibeon or Ajulon in human life! You cannot rekindle the morning beams of

youth; you cannot recall the strength and glory of man hood; you cannot fix the evening rays of age in the shadowy horizon. No, on and onward you are borne to a dark, starless, doomed eternity.

As the old man stands upon that shore of all visible being, from whence he can never turn back, oh! how must he long for some word of promise, some voice that can break the silence of the vast solitude that lies before him, and tell him of immortal youth, of a future, where everlasting spring abides, and never-withering flowers; of regions far away in the boundless universe of God, where he may renew his youth, and live for ever. But alas! to him there comes no voice of promise, no gleam of hope. The future is all dark and dreary and desolate. The old man without God and hope is a mere wreck on the shores of life — a ruin upon the beetling cliffs of time tottering to its fall. Oh! it is a sight to make one weep as Jesus wept over doomed Jerusalem.

“Behold the aged sinner goes,
Laden with guilt and heavy woes,
Down to the regions of the dead,
With awful curses on his head.”

But the doom, though impending, has not yet fallen. It may not be too late. Oh! if there be left a lingering desire after God, a pulse of life, though feeble, “Awake, arise, or be forever fallen!” Summon the remnant of your wasted talent; gather up your enfeebled strength; call upon God for mercy, and flee to Jesus now.

“Awake, for on this transient hour
Thy long eternity depends!”

A word, here, to the young. What emphasis and urgency does this subject give to the Divine exhortation, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” Now is your accepted time. “The talents which older men lose by their worldly practice and neglect of God, are fresh in you and free. Hence your facility to apprehend God and the things of religion. Hence your quick sensibility, your prompt perception, your ability to feel in experiment, what reason cannot master — God, Christ, the inspiring grace, the heavenly peace, eternal life. The holy talent now is yours. In a few

selfish years it will be shortening, and, before you know it, will be quite taken away. This best, highest, most glorious talent of your nature God is now calling you to save. Make, then, no delay in this first matter of life, the choice of God. Give him up thy talent, whole and fresh, to be increased by early devotion and a lifelong fidelity in His service. Call it the dew of thy youth, understanding well, when thy sun is fairly up, it will, like dew, be gone."Oh, seek the Lord while he may be found!"

If, in the spring-time, you begin the heavenly course; if through the summer and autumn of your life you have walked with God, then let the winter of age come. It is well. Winter is the right time for the great transition, from the mortal to the immortal. It was in nature's winter our Lord came from heaven to earth, to redeem, and the winter is the right time for His redeemed to pass from earth to heaven.

A Christian old age is beautiful and blessed! Indeed, the Christian never grows old. Gently as the night opens into day, so gently does time, with the aged Christian, pass into eternity. Beautiful and true is the parting represented by the poet:

"Life! We've been long together,
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather:
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear;
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear.
Then, steal away, give little warning,
(Choose thine own time),
Say not, Good Night; but in some happier clime
Bid me, Good Morning."

5. The Publican's Prayer. Luke 18:13.

“God be merciful to me a sinner.” Luke 18:13.

WE TURN FROM THE PROUD, self-righteous Pharisee, to the poor self-despairing publican, whose prayer is our text. He is not recounting his fasts and tithes, and emblazoning his virtues, throwing a veil of artificial gilding over the rotten sepulchre of his heart. We hear nothing from this self-despondent sinner but this one outburst, this cry from the very depths of guilt and misery, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Earnestness does not express itself in long and pompous sentences. It is short and simple. As a man who in falling over a crag catches the branch of a tree, so did this man. He is like Peter sinking in the waves, stretching out his hand to Jesus, crying, “Save me, I perish.” So this prayer goes up. It came struggling from a heart crushed and throbbing with conscious guilt and penitence. It was a prayer that from that bruised heart and those trembling lips went up to the throne of God, and came rebounding from that throne in blessing upon the publican. “He went down to his house justified.”

Notice:

I. The Character In Which This Man Prays

With one word he paints to the eye his posture before God: “a sinner.” This is a revelation of the whole man. This stands in marked contrast with the complacency of the Pharisee. He trusted in himself that he was righteous. There he stood in the temple; before him was the altar of burnt-offering; there stood the priests supplicating the pardon of the nation's transgressions. All around him were the evidences of sin, that the temple was built for

sinners. Yet he feels no guilt. He speaks of himself as righteous. His prayer was not in harmony with the place nor with the facts. For even if he was not as bad as others, he was, notwithstanding, a sinner before God. Now look at the publican. Something in the original is to be noted. It is not "a sinner," but "the sinner;" as if contrasting himself with others, he was worse than anybody else. As if, admitting others had some excellencies, he had none: he was of all men most sinful, "the sinner." He "stood afar off." His attitude corresponds with this feeling. Men often speak more eloquently by acts than by words. Standing afar off, as one who felt himself unworthy to enter the house of God, he said, by his attitude, "I am less than the least of all thy mercies." He "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven." The Pharisee looked boldly up. Why not? There was nothing in the azure heavens purer than himself. The angels veil their faces before the Lord; but there is no brightness in God's glory, sun-like, to dazzle him, nor awfulness in God's holiness to daunt him.

But the publican, like a child conscious of having done wrong, covers his cheek with burning blushes, and bends his eyes to the ground. Self-abased and self-condemned, he shrinks within himself, and wonders, perhaps, that the very earth does not open to swallow him up. He does not dare to look up. He "smote upon his breast." The hands of the Pharisee are stretched to heaven to receive his reward, and, like the conqueror with the laurels of victory, bends his head to receive the crown, not as a gift of grace, but as his of right. But the publican smote upon his breast, for so the impassioned people of the East expressed the deepest sorrow. But his sounding blows expressed more than sorrow. They said, as they fell thick and heavy on his bosom, Here lies the root of all my sins: Oh, this hard, wicked heart! These blows were inarticulate prayers saying, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit with me." And then, you observe, it is not as a reformed sinner or penitent, nor yet as a praying sinner, but "simply as the sinner" that he describes himself. If he had pled for mercy on the ground of his penitence or his prayer, the very plea would have spoiled his suit, and turned him away empty. But nothing he offers, save that he is a sinner, the chief of sinners. Convulsed with conflicting emotions, shame, guilt, fear, hope, for all these are struggling in his soul, he smites upon his breast and cries for mercy. He is moved with earnestness; there is but one thought, one feeling present to him, and one passionate cry for mercy:

“Look down, O Lord, with pitying eye,
And save the soul condemned to die.”

II. Consider the blessing for which he prays: Mercy.

Where did the publican learn this? The phrase, “God is merciful,” is not known except in the Bible. No such phrase can be found in the poetry or philosophy of Paganism. No heathen poet ever said with David, “Great is the mercy of the Lord.” When they struck their harps in homage to the gods, judgment was their theme. They saw no rainbow about the throne of their Jupiter, and his scepter was a thunderbolt, not a golden scepter that penitents “might touch and live.”

Nor is there anything in nature, apart from revelation, to suggest the idea of God’s mercy. Take nature out of the light of the Bible, and there is nothing from the dew to the ocean, from the flowers to the stars, to even whisper of the divine mercy. It is only when nature is lit up under the Sun of Righteousness that land and sea, earth and sky, glow with the mercy of the Lord that endureth forever.

How did this publican, then, know anything about the mercy of the Lord? Perhaps in his childhood he had listened to that old chant in the temple service: “The mercy of the Lord endureth for ever.” How wonderful the return in memory of the truths learned in childhood; the song sung by the mother in the nursery, the prayer repeated by the side of the kneeling child, the story of the cross told in simple words to the wondering little one, the lessons of piety impressed upon the plastic mind, — how these linger under long years of forgetfulness and come back to arouse and wile the soul to goodness, and so save it.

This man, in his conviction of guilt, and under a sense of condemnation, recalls the early lessons of his childhood; the songs of the temple come to him on the wings of memory; they light up the dark chambers of his penitent heart with gleams of hope, and he pleads for mercy. “God be merciful to me a sinner.” And he seeks it from God. It is against Him all our sins are committed. “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.” And no sinful heart can ever find rest and peace until God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven it, and speaks by the Spirit to the

conscience, saying: “Thy sins are forgiven, go in peace.” Hence, in this prayer there was enfolded a plea for forgiveness. “Mercy is the stem, forgiveness is the flower that blooms upon it. We seek mercy that we may have forgiveness, because it springs from mercy.”

But it may strike some that in this prayer there is no mention of Christ or a mediator. But in looking at the original we find the word “*ilastheten*,” which means, ‘have mercy by sacrifice,’ or, ‘make atonement for me a sinner.’ Why did the publican use such a word? He had seen the lamb slain, morning and evening, for sacrifice; he had seen the Passover lamb slain once a year. This taught him that God is just, as well as merciful. Every type, every sacrifice, foreshadowed the great truth that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. To the true Israelite they prefigured the great sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the world. This poor sinner looked away through types and shadows to Jesus, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world —

“A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.”

It was this inspired and gave utterance to the prayer: “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

III. Hence The Result:

“I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.” The Pharisee’s prayer, like a stone cast at heaven, falls back and returns upon his own head, while the publican’s prayer ascends like the cloud of incense that floated heavenward from the morning and evening sacrifice. Sins confessed are sins forgiven. So this man was justified, but not by his prayer or penitence. He did not expect this. His prayer and temper of mind are excellent, but he never dreamed they would justify him. If he had, his prayer would have been as bad as that of the Pharisee. Nothing of self is in him or his prayer but self-despair; and casting himself as a lost sinner upon the mercy of God, in Christ Jesus, he is taken up into Christ and made righteous. That humiliation was the first step of the ladder, the topmost round of which touched heaven and glory. “He went down justified.” The

blessing came as the rebound of his prayer. He hardly expected this. He came laden with sin; he goes away with the burden of guilt lifted from his soul. One earnest cry for mercy, one believing look upon Jesus, has transformed that sinner into a child of God and an heir of heaven.

Do you say this is wonderful? So are all the ways of God's grace. So the Bible says: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon;" then the prophet adds: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts... saith the Lord: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." It is beyond all our powers of conception. We can no more grasp it than we can span eternity. It is as the hymn says: every forgiven sinner is a miracle of grace:

"Oh, what mercy flows from heaven!
Oh, what joy and happiness!
Love I much? I've much forgiven; I'm a miracle of grace."

IV. We Have The Whole Gospel Plan Of Salvation Expressed In This Prayer:

"God be merciful to me a sinner." We see in what attitude we must come to God, simply as sinners. All the mercy there is in God is for sinners. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. To come within the sphere of God's mercy we must come as sinners. Unless we come so, He can have nothing to do with us, no more than with the angels that fell and have no mercy, or with the angels that never fell and need no mercy. Only as sinners saved by grace can we approach a holy God.

What encouragement for any who feel their sin and long for salvation. A missionary relates of a Hottentot who was under conviction of sin, and anxious to know the way of life, that living in a pious family he heard read one day at family worship the parable of the Pharisee and publican. When the prayer of the Pharisee was read, this poor Hottentot said to himself: "This is a good man; there is nothing there for me." But when the prayer of the publican came: "God be merciful to me a sinner," the poor savage took

heart and said: This suits me; now I know how to pray." With this prayer he retired and prayed till he found peace. Full of joy, having no one to speak to as he went out, he exclaimed "Ye hills, ye rocks, ye trees, ye rivers, hear what God has done for my soul! He has been merciful to me a sinner!"

Do I speak to one who feels the burden of sin? who says as he hears of this man, I feel like that publican; then for you there is the same mercy and forgiveness. This poor sinner giving himself to Christ was justified, and went away with a sweet sense of divine forgiveness in his soul; the blessing of grace and the hope of glory. So it may be for any sinner here. One touch of the hem of Christ's garment, laid hold of by the poor woman in the gospel, brought healing and salvation. So one look of faith to Jesus, one earnest cry for mercy, can bring pardon, and salvation, and peace now. So that if you come here under condemnation, you can go away with forgiveness and hope. Like this man, you may go down to your house justified, with peace in your conscience, and the joy of God in your heart. Happy would such a going home be; it would turn the barest hovel into a palace, and make you sing a new song. Light is the step of one released from prison, and turning his face homeward. Never did sun, or flowers, or birds seem so beautiful as now, when he is hastening home to his wife and children. So he goes down to his house a free, pardoned, happy man.

Yet lighter his step, and happier his heart who, accepting Christ, goes down to his house justified, a child of God, and an heir of glory. And what shall hinder? You have only to throw away all confidence in yourself, and put your soul into the hands of Jesus, to be healed, forgiven, and saved, so that you may sing:

"Hail! my ever blessed Jesus,
Only Thee I wish to sing;
To my soul Thy name is precious,
Thou, my prophet, priest, and king!"

What an interest gathers about that publican in the temple. It is a spectacle that sends joy to heaven. But three things on earth are mentioned in the Bible as giving joy to the angels of God: creation, incarnation, and the repentance of a sinner. This fact, like a flash of golden light, leaps from one end of the universe to the other. It takes much to move a world; indeed, a great event to make a sensation in a great city. It was said some years ago by an English journal that there was but one person in Great Britain whose

death would make a sensation in London, and that the Duke of Wellington. If our globe were to be blotted out, it would be to the universe but like a dim light going out in a distant sky. But the beating of that poor publican's penitent heart sounds beyond the stars. That cry for mercy has richest melody for the ears of angels accustomed to the music of heaven. There is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Oh, there is some sweet mystery, some unutterable grandeur in a soul turning to God and saved. They see what it is:

"Oh, how divine, how sweet the joy
When but one sinner turns,
And with an humble, broken heart,
His sins and errors mourns.

"Pleased with the news the saints below
In songs their tongues employ;
Beyond the skies the tidings go,
And heaven is filled with joy."

6. Peter's False Humility. John 13:8.

“Peter saith unto Him, Thou shalt not wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” John 13:8.

THIS GOSPEL PICTURE as it rises to our view through the intervening mists of eighteen hundred years seems almost as strange and incredible to us as it did to Peter.

The scene depicted here occurred at the feast of the passover. The Saviour, rising from supper, proceeded with basin and towel to wash the disciples' feet. How amazing, how startling to our feelings of propriety was this act of condescension. It seems the process began with Peter; and he, seeing Jesus about to kneel before him to perform the ablution, with an instinctive feeling of unfitness, would prevent the Saviour. He manifests a sudden outburst of feeling: “Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” Jesus answered and said unto him, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.” This, one might suppose, would have satisfied Peter's delicacy of feeling. But so deep and inveterate was his repugnance to this humiliation of his Lord, that his first feelings of aversion grew into a positive resistance; and he gives utterance to his settled purpose, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.”

It is not difficult for us to understand the feeling of Peter in this positive denial. There is in us an instinctive sense of propriety, an inherent feeling of the fitness of things, that makes us naturally shrink from receiving acts of menial service from one far above us. Here was Jesus, who had spoken to the disciples with heavenly wisdom such as had never dropped from human lips, and to whom they had listened with rapt attention, whose miracles of power and mercy had filled them with devout wonder, and before whom they had bowed as before the majesty of God. Is it any wonder if, when Jesus bent to wash the feet of Peter, this impulsive disciple should shrink

back with the exclamation, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" What, thou! the great Messiah, the son of God, the Saviour of the world! Thou wash my feet! thy servant, a poor, sinful man? Those hands which cleansed the lepers with a touch, and opened the eyes of the blind, and raised the dead! Those hands wash my feet? Never! "Thou shalt never wash my feet."

Perhaps a casual glance at this picture has sometimes led us to censure Peter for his conduct. And yet it may be there is not one of us who has not had the very same feeling, though we may not have given it utterance. Let us linger on this point for a moment. There are times when we are overpowered with a sense of the grandeur and majesty of God and the utter littleness of man in the contrast. When, like the devout Psalmist, we consider the heavens, the work of His fingers, and the moon and stars, which He has ordained, we seem to shrink into utter nothingness, and exclaim, from the very dust, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him."

We think of the millions of worlds that roll through immensity, and we are bewildered by a sense of the vastness and magnificence of the universe. And yet, what is all this splendor to God? As night to noon, as a drop of water to the sea. What are ten thousand worlds compared with God! These myriad worlds are but as an atom, a cypher, brought against infinity. What am I, then? Naught! I am nothing.

And when told that this great God, this Lord of the universe, condescends to notice man, and cares for him as a father, watches over His children with the tenderness of a mother, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice, and that the very hairs of our heads are all numbered, we experience this very feeling of Peter's. It cannot be: He cannot descend so low! We have a feeling of unfitness in such amazing condescension, and we almost repel the doctrine, as Peter did when, in amazement, he exclaimed, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" And yet Peter was wrong in his repulsion of the Saviour from his feet, however strong and sincere his feeling of repugnance.

We should not shrink from those gracious tokens of God's condescension and love. In the very psalm in which David, after looking up to the heavens, exclaims: "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him!" he says that even "babes and sucklings are not beneath the notice or the love of that God who sets His"glory above the heavens." And in another place he

says: "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me;" and again, "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

Whatever awe we may feel when we consider the glories of the Godhead, revealed in nature and the Bible, in forms of majestic grandeur, or terrific effulgence, or overwhelming mystery, we will not shrink on this account from our Lord, for, like the gloom of the cloud which reveals the rainbow, or the dark azure of the midnight sky which brings out and brightens the stars, so solemn views of the greatness and glory of God only tend to develop and brighten the tenderness of his love. The heart that is bowed lowest under a sense of His greatness and majesty feels the sweetest thrill of His infinite love. Indeed, it is only to this posture of lowliness that the Lord has promised the special visitations of His love. "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also, that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Whilst we, therefore, like Peter, cherish such a sense of God's greatness and purity, as will make us bow in the very dust before Him, let us not, like him, with a false notion of propriety, or an affected humility, put from us the condescensions of His pity and compassion. Let us rather exclaim:

"Great God, how infinite art Thou!
How frail and weak are we!
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
And pay their praise to Thee."

But when we come to the work of redemption, God's love in the gift of His son, it is here we are especially conscious of feelings like those of Peter uttered in the text. Some go so far in the indulgence of this feeling as utterly to discard the doctrine of redemption. That God should give His only son to such humiliation; such sufferings, and such a death, to redeem this rebel world, seems to them incredible.

Such mysterious condescension sounds like a beautiful fable or glowing fancy: it seems as if it could not be true in a literal sense. It seems as if it were impossible in the nature of things that God should show such love and condescension to men. It is so entirely beyond all we know of love that it wears the air of romance.

This feeling prevails more extensively than we might at first suppose. A Danish missionary, who employed one of the native converts to translate a catechism for the use of the schools in India, relates that when the Indian

came to the passage in John: "Now are we the sons of God," he exclaimed: "No, no; it is too much; allow me to render it, 'Now are we permitted to kiss his feet.'" Here was the very feeling of Peter in the text. That poor heathen felt it was too much for a sinner to become a son of God.

Now, it is this very feeling of unbelief lurking in every impenitent bosom that disarms the gospel of its power to melt and subdue. No heart, however hard, can stand against the pressure of love. But men do not believe in the love of God and the love of Christ as revealed in the gospel. In no other way can we account for the insensibility with which many well-disposed hearers listen for years to the preaching of the gospel. They pay all outward respect to religion. Sometimes they feel a wish to be Christians. And we wonder how they can hear the simple and touching story of a Saviour's love from year to year without being moved to penitence, to faith, and love. There are two reasons that may account for this. The one is, they do not feel that they are sinners, and how can one know the love of Jesus until he sees that he is lost and perishing, and that Christ came to save him. Even when the sinner is awakened and feels his guilt, how slowly even then does the Saviour's love become real to him. Sometimes it is not until with trembling trust he submits to God, with the feeling, "I can but perish if I go; I am resolved to try," that the sweet sense of a Saviour's love dawns upon his soul. It was so in the experience of Cowper:

"Thus, afraid to trust His grace,
Long time did I rebel,
Till despairing of my case,
Down at His feet I fell.

"Then my stubborn heart He broke,
And subdued me to His sway,
With a single word He spoke:
'Thy sins are done away.'"

Then the sense of a Saviour's love possesses his heart; it is like the opening of the eyes of one born blind, and "he can say, Who loved me and gave himself for me."

Another reason why men hear the gospel without being moved is that it seems incredible that the great God and Saviour should have such pity and

love for them. They are unmoved because they do not believe that Christ loved them and gave himself for them.

If men believed Christ's love for them, it would touch their hearts. The most hardened of men can be moved by this. How has the human heart, in the darkest phases of depravity, responded to a mother's love. How is it that these very persons whose hearts are touched by human kindness can hear of all the Saviour has done and suffered for them and yet remain cold? Why is it? Manifestly men do not feel that Christ has suffered for them personally. He may have died to effect some great change in the moral government of God, or to shed some new glory upon the universe. But that he loved me and died for me individually is incredible. "Thou shalt never wash my feet." And thus the gospel is shorn of its power.

Now look at this picture again. Peter was willing that Christ should teach him; he was willing, when walking on the sea, that Christ should stretch out his hand and snatch him from death. But for the Son of God to kneel before him, to stoop before the disciple, and then with His sacred hands, those hands that laid the foundations of the earth, and stretched abroad the heavens as a curtain, wash the feet of his disciple, this could not be.

In His amazing pity and condescension is that which transcends all our ideas of fitness, and which we can not apprehend unless in the very depths of humility. His thoughts are not as our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways.

Hence the preaching of the cross was to the Greeks foolishness, and to the Jews a stumbling block: only to those that believe is it the power of God unto salvation. We need, as they did, to hear Him say, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." We need to accept the gracious invitation, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Come with me and let us see how wondrous is the condescension of Jesus. Let us go to Bethlehem and look into that cradle. There is a helpless babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. What a mystery! This is God manifest in the flesh. The angels have been there; their song seems still to linger in the air, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men."

As you stand and look at that little child, and think, 'That is the incarnate God,' "God manifest in the flesh." The Lord of glory came down to lie in that infant cradle, what are your thoughts? Was it for you that this was

done? ‘No,’ you are tempted to say, ‘it was for the world.’ Here, again, is the very spirit of Peter in the text. That life was manifested, that babe was born, that God took upon Him our flesh for you, and for no other being more than for you. The message of the angel to the shepherds is addressed to you individually: “Unto you a Saviour is born.” You may feel as did Peter, but you must do as did Simeon when the infant Jesus was brought to the temple. You must, by faith, take that child Jesus into your arms and fold Him to your heart, and say, like Simeon, “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

Come with me to the garden. There, under a moon lit sky and beneath the old olive trees, you see a human form, prostrate in agony and prayer. You hear the broken sighs, the touching prayer, “O, my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me!” And again, “O my father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.” But why must he drink that cup?

“’Twas for our sake, eternal God,
Thy Son sustained that heavy load.”

He must drink that cup, sinner, for you. This is your guilt pressing upon his soul until from his anguished frame there start drops of blood. This is part of the ransom for your soul.

“’Twas for our sake, eternal God,
Thy Son sustained that heavy load.”

Can you believe this? Are you willing to accept this?

Come with me, and let us stand before the death scene on Calvary. There you see Jesus with that cup from which he recoiled in the garden now at his lips. You see the Lamb, the spotless Lamb of God, led to the slaughter. He goes mocked, and buffeted, and scourged, and crowned with thorns; you see him nailed to the cross, and you hear that mournful cry, under the darkened sky, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” Again you hear, “It is finished,” and his head is bowed in death! You are thrilled with strange emotions, and you exclaim,

“For whom, for whom, my heart,
Were all these sorrows borne?”

Was it for that hardened centurion, that haughty scribe, that Mary Magdalene, that man lifting the sponge to his dying lips? Oh, no, not for them any more than for you, you who listen this day once more to this gospel. That meek and suffering Saviour seems to speak to you, O sinner, and say,

“For you, the objects of my love,
It was for you I died.”

And as if he were showing to us, as to Thomas, his pierced side, and wounded hands, and bleeding feet, He exclaims:

“These are the wounds for you I bore,
The tokens of my pains.”

The hardest heart has some chord responsive to love. Let any one feel that God as truly loves him as his father or his most devoted friend. Let him feel that Christ loved him, even unto death, and still loves him with more than the tenderness of a mother’s love, and this, if anything can, will touch him with conviction, and move him to repentance. Let it be that all other motives have failed; but who of us, if he rightly felt it, could lift his hand against that which is all love?

Consider, lastly, the Saviour’s reply to Peter: “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” It was not the mere washing of Peter’s feet that Christ had in mind. Humbly to submit to receive this cleansing at the hands of Christ would signify in Peter something deeper even than obedience. It would point to the reception of Christ as a condescending Saviour; it would be to acknowledge the stain of sin, and that Christ alone could wash it away. Our Lord seems here to say: “I know this appears to you a great condescension, but the lesson of condescension is but a small part of that I would have you learn from my conduct. I am about to stoop to the lowest hell to lift you up. No tongue can tell what I am to do and suffer for you. Do not stumble, nor be offended at this washing of your feet. This is nothing to what I shall do for you. What I do thou knowest not now. But now

submission to me and to what my love shall appoint, is all I ask. You are to be saved through infinite love; and if you begin to resist that love now, in so simple an instance as this, how can you receive what will seem still greater humiliation on my part:”If I wash thee not thou hast no part with me.”

Peter in his subsequent experience came to understand the meaning of that ceremony. The outward act dropped away from the inner meaning, and he saw the parable his Lord had enacted. The soul of love folded in that menial act, the solemn beginning of the sacrificial act of cleansing in that simple service, came home to his heart. And in his epistles his whole nature glows like the sky into which the sun throws back his radiance. You hear him say: “Whom having not seen ye love.” Yes, the impetuous apostle remembered that act of condescending love. “The precious blood of Christ:” precious, indeed, that spoke of such humiliation of the Lord of glory, of such cleansing. He speaks of Him with tender and reverential affection as the “Shepherd and Bishop of our souls;” and as his soul rises in the contemplation of the glory to be revealed, he lays all the honor and praise at this Saviour’s feet. “To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”

How this whole scene is redolent with the fragrance of love. This symbolical act, for instance, was the opening scene in that solemn mystery of love, the unfoldings of which were to lead Him at last to the cross. The one object He seemed to be aiming at was to impress more deeply the lesson of brotherly love. The very introduction of the scene breathes the same sentiment. “Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end.”

As we meditate this passage how many modulations do we catch of the one great theme, love.

1. We Were Made To Be Loved

It suggests to us that we were made and redeemed to be loved: what says the apostle of the great design of the plan of grace?

“That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

To be in heaven forever; to be loved forever; loved as the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost alone can love; to experience the full, yet ever increasing tide of this high communion — what a sea of glory does this open.

2. Will The Love Of Christ End With Our Salvation From Hell?

“Having loved His own,” shall he not “love them unto the end?” What shall we say? Surely, there can be no end. He who began by washing His disciples’ feet, and ended by dying on the cross for them, has more yet to unfold when we enter within the veil. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” The love of Christ did not reach its culmination on the cross. There is more to come, of which his death was only the beginning. For we are to be kings and priests unto our God. The wonder and splendor of that which was coming fired the soul of Peter when he penned those words: “He hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

Let no one, then, refuse when Christ invites. If I say, “Thou shalt never wash my feet,” then Christ makes answer, “If I wash thee not thou hast no part with me.” Yes, there is no exception. Of all that glorious company whom John saw clothed in white in heaven, there was none that had not been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Let this, then, be the song of our aspiration on earth, that we may know its realization in eternity:

“While upon the earth I stay,
Love divine shall tune my lay;
When I soar to bliss above,
Still I’ll praise a Saviour’s love.”

7. The Voice From Heaven.

Rev. 11:12.

“And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither.” Rev. 11:12.

THIS IS SAID of the noble witnesses of the truth in the Apocalyptic vision. They heard a great voice from heaven. And we too hear voices from heaven saying unto us, “Come up hither.” Did we not, how low and weary would be the way of our pilgrimage! Did we not, how sad and solitary the path of life as kindred souls departed one by one! How low and groveling our natures, how feeble our aspirations, if the spirit were not spoken to from above!

But now we do hear voices from heaven saying unto us, “Come up hither.” And our wayfaring life is cheered, and our cares are lightened, and the mystery of life is revealed. Hearing those voices from above, the soul feels the inspiration of a new life, breaks from these earthly bonds, sees through these veils of sense, and catching glimpse of the unseen and eternal, exclaims:

“From this world’s joys and senseless mirth,
O come, my soul, in haste retire;
Assume the grandeur of thy birth,
And to thy native heav’n aspire!”

These voices, like that which the two witnesses of the Apocalypse heard, are great voices, full of majesty and power, full of tenderness and love. Happy is the man who hears these heavenly voices, and whose heart answers to the call.

There is a voice even from the lower and material heaven calling on our souls and urging them to ascend. Thus the Psalmist: “The heavens declare

the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork.” No real voice or sound is heard from the silent heavens, but they speak to the soul.

“Forever singing as they shine,
The hand that made us is divine.”

They not only declare the glory of God, but exhort the spirit of man. Manifold, no doubt, are the uses of these shining worlds above us; but one purpose is to speak to us mortals and tell us there is something above and beyond the little globe on which we live and die; yea, that there are myriads of greater and brighter worlds. And with this revelation of the great universe, they tell us not to bind ourselves down to the little earth, but to look up to the many mansions in our Father’s house. With a great voice, the stars say unto our souls: “Come up hither! Come up into the vast dominion of God, and see the myriads of bright worlds above you. Stay not always below. Breathe not always in mists and vapors. Cleave not to earth, as if that were all, but come up. See our number, our vastness, our glory.” Such a contemplation will uplift the soul above the petty cares and ambitions of the world, give scope to our spiritual vision, and inspire us with hopes and longings that will reach up to God and out through eternity.

No man can look up to the clear, night sky, with its shining worlds, without feeling the littleness of earth, and its low aims and ambitions, without feeling an uplifting of his whole spiritual being into communion with the great God, without glimpses of his own future glorious destiny. Astrology is not altogether false. It was an old superstition, which has passed away, that the stars govern our mortal destiny. It is an eternal truth, that passes not away, that they help to reveal our immortal destiny by calling our souls up into the boundless universe, filling us with great thoughts of God, and wakening in us aspirations after glory, honor, and immortality.

But above and beyond these material heavens there is another voice, the voice of the Father of spirits speaking to His children. From His high and holy heaven He says, “Come up hither.”

The hopes which kindle in our souls, the yearnings of the heart after a good which we find not here, the affections which reach up after the unseen and eternal, the promises which are spoken by His mercies and His grace, the undying aspirations of the soul after life and immortality, all these are

the sacred words of His lips, and the great voice from heaven with which he says to us, "Come up hither."

Come up to the spiritual dwelling-place of your Maker, the birth-place of your own souls. Consider not that world your home which I have only made your pilgrimage. If you are tired in your journey, look forward to your rest. If the earth seems a dreary wilderness, transport yourselves in spirit to the promised land. If the pleasures of earth are transitory, and the glories of earth as vanity, look up to my presence, where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. Do not, in your pleasant dwellings on earth, forget that house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. Come up by charity and good works: make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when you fail on earth you may be received into everlasting habitations. Come up hither on the wings of prayer. Come up hither by faith in Jesus now, that hereafter you may come in by sight. Come up by hope now, that hereafter you may enter within the veil and see my face, and live forever.

Oh, let us listen to the voice of our Heavenly Father speaking to us from above; speaking to us in tones of paternal solicitude. As a father pitieth his children, so does He pity us, and love us, and speak to us. To the young he says: "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me." "My son, give me thy heart." And to those who are entangled in the cares of life and turn to the world, He says: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?... Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Yes, the voice of our Father calls us in His admonitions, in His invitations, in His promise. He says, 'Come up hither;' come away from the vanities of earth, from the temptations of sin, from the delusions of the world. Come up, children, to your Father's heart and your Father's house and home in the heavens! Come out from among them, and be ye separate.

But there is also the voice of His son, who dwells with the Father. He calls us from the same heaven, saying unto us: "Come up hither!"

Paul says: "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by His son." Yes, by His son Jesus Christ. The voice of His living ministry still speaks to us. To the sinner — "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden!" "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." To His people — "I give

unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” “Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given me may be with me, that they may behold my glory.”

So He speaks to us from his life on earth, and from the cross. And now, exalted as a Prince and Saviour, He speaks to us from the right hand of the Father: "Here are the mansions which I have been preparing for my disciples. It was to secure this blessed place for them that on earth I endured humiliation, reproach, and suffering; that I agonized in the garden and died on the cross; that I laid down in the tomb, and burst the gates of death, and ascended to these heavens; all for you.

“For this great end did I come to you, that you might come up hither to me, that where I am there ye may be also. Cause not all I have done for you to be vain. I became poor for you: I died that you might live. I have entered into my inheritance that ye might be fellow-heirs with me, and sit down with me in my Father’s kingdom. I would not lose one soul that I once bled to redeem. Oh, come up hither; there is room for you and all.” Yes,

“There’s room in heaven among the choir,
And harps and crowns of gold,
And glorious palms of vict’ry there,
And joys that ne’er were told.”

Clear and beautiful and touching is the voice of the Saviour from heaven calling us. It cannot be mistaken by those who have ears to hear.

Why did he teach us of heaven if here is to be the end? He is the way, but whither, if not to heaven? He is the resurrection and the life, but why, if believers do not rise and live? How is He the captain of our salvation if we share not with Him the everlasting kingdom? Oh, yes, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” The great voice of our ascended and glorified Lord and Saviour is, “Come up hither! Come up hither!” Oh, let our ready, grateful, transporting answer be, ‘Lord, we come; Saviour, we come. Whither thou hast gone and where thou art we know, and the way we know. O that we may have wisdom, and grace, and strength to follow in Thy footsteps, bearing our cross, till we meet Thee in our Father’s house and behold Thy face in glory.’

“Oh the delights, the heav’nly joys,
The glories of the place
Where Jesus sheds the brightest beams
Of his o’erflowing grace!”

And now we hear other great voices from heaven saying unto us, “Come up hither.” They are the voices of “the glorious company of the Apostles,” “the goodly fellowship of the prophets,” the noble army of martyrs, the innumerable multitude of saints and sealed servants of God, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, “Come up hither, and see our joys, and blessedness, and be encouraged! Ages roll on, but our pleasures are ever new. Your years come to an end, but we have put on immortality. Your days and nights succeed each other, but there is no night here. Faint not at your tribulations, for through such tribulations we reached these palms and crowns. Fight the good fight, and then come up hither, and swell our song of praise and victory, and join with us in ascribing blessing, and honor, and glory, and power unto him who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.”

And shall not the soul of every rational, of every Christian man, long to be with the church of the first born in heaven? Shall not the society of the good, and pure, and faithful of all times be the society of his choice? Can we become weary or faint on our way to such an everlasting abode with the spirits of the just made perfect?

“Where the saints of all ages in harmony meet,
Their Saviour and brethren transported to greet;
Where the anthems of rapture unceasingly roll,
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul.”

There are to some of you other voices in that great cloud of witnesses, voices which, though not more animating than the last, are nearer to the listening ear and dearer to the soul.

There are few who do not number in their families those whose places are vacant at the table and the hearth, but who are not reckoned as lost, only as gone before. Those loved ones gone from us, that mother, child, sister, they speak to us in the sad reverie of contemplation, in the cold shadow of memory, in the bright light of hope. They speak to us in the serene twilight, in the hours of meditation and prayer, sometimes even in the unheeded

tumult of the world. From their blessed home they speak to us; their voices float down from the silent heavens and say to us: "Come up hither!" Our infirmities, our sins, our tears are all gone. We hunger and thirst no more. Sigh not in despair over the withered hopes of earth. Bear the cross and despise the shame for the joy that is set before you. Light, life, beauty, and unutterable glory are here! Come, children of earth, come to the bright and blessed land, our Father's house. Oh, be faithful until death, and when you have fought the good fight, and finished your course, and kept the faith, come up hither."

"Then shall we meet again,
Meet ne'er to sever;
Then will peace wreath her chain
Round us forever!"

Oh, brethren, shall we listen to the voices of earth and sin when these voices are calling us from the heavens.

Some of you do not hearken to these voices. God, the Father, says, "My son, give me thy heart." Jesus, from the cross cries, "Come unto me." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Loved ones in heaven say, "Come." But you turn away and listen to the wicked voices of the world.

Oh, remember, if God is not heard and responded to here, then in the great day all these voices will be changed. Jesus will say, "Depart." The Spirit and all the voices of our loved ones, the cloud of witnesses, all the voices of heaven will say, "Depart."

Oh, let it not be; today, while ye hear these voices, harden not your heart. Say:

"Welcome, welcome, dear Redeemer,
Welcome to this heart of mine."

Then will all heavenly voices say, "Come up hither." In that great day, when Christ says, "Come, ye blessed," all heaven will with him say, "Come." Yes, you can say:

“Up to that world of light
Take us, dear Saviour;
May we all then unite
Happy forever.”

8. The Stone On The Sepulchre.

Mark 16:3-4.

“And they said among themselves: Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away; for it was very great.” Mark 16:3-4.

IN THE EARLY DAWN of the first Christian sabbath, in the gray twilight of the morning, the Marys are on their way to the tomb of Jesus. They had followed Him in life; they had lingered about the scene of His death, and true to their devotion, they are the first to hail His resurrection. “Last at His cross and earliest at His grave.” Early in the morning, sad and tearful, they are on their way to the tomb with sweet spices. It was not to embalm His body. That had already been done by Joseph and Nicodemus. They came simply to shed precious odors over the body of their Lord, as we adorn the graves of our loved ones with flowers that blossom and shed their fragrance over their sleeping dust.

As they go with troubled thoughts and yearning hearts, intent only on this last tribute of affection, suddenly it occurs to them that the tomb is sealed with a massive stone. Alas! what avail this early visit and these sweet spices? We cannot reach that loved form in the sealed sepulchre. These feeble hands cannot unbar the gates of the tomb. In this momentary suspense they exclaim: “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door?” But still they do not turn back. They could not see what good it would do to go on, or how the stone was to be removed; but urged on by love, with some vague and undefined hope, they go. And when they come to the garden, lo! they saw that the stone was rolled away. With mixed feelings of wonder, joy, and exultation they enter and find the tomb empty, and the angel speaking to them, “Ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He is risen.”

This is a beautiful illustration of Christian life and experience. It suggests, first, what is often found in the experience of the young Christian, as he sets out for the heavenly kingdom. He has yielded his heart to the Saviour, entered into covenant to be the Lord's, united with the church, and started on his pilgrimage. Like these pious females he is full of the fervor and enthusiasm of his first love. The path before him seems all bright and beautiful, and he says:

“Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee.”

But as he goes on he is suddenly met by some hindrance, some check, some setback, and jostled out of the even tenor of his way; he begins to think of the great journey before him. He sees, or thinks he sees, in the dim perspective of life, difficulties rising up before him like huge mountains, to intercept his progress to the heavenly city. To his awakened fears they seem to frown him back and bar his onward way. He is beset with doubts, and wonders how he shall ever reach the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul. Like the Marys, “he begins to ask, Who shall roll away the stone!” How shall I overcome these difficulties and temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil? How can I, in the face of all these enemies and barriers, maintain the conflict, achieve the victory, and gain my crown at last? Ah! you have felt this; you have said with these startled and despairing women, “Who shall roll us away the stone?”

Now look at this picture and take courage. There lay the stone at the door of the sepulchre; their feeble hands could not roll it away. But urged on by an undying love and devotion they went to the tomb; and when there the stone was rolled away. How encouraging is this incident to the despondent Christian. Difficulties are in your path like that massive stone; your feeble hands are powerless to remove them. As you go on, like Israel, you come to the impassable sea. You cry to God for help, and the command is, “Go forward.” You obey; the sea opens before you; you pass on, and shout the praises of God on the other shore. So it was in the case before us; and so it will always be with those who go forward trusting in the strength which God supplies.

“Full many a danger, toil, and snare,
My soul has overcome.
Tis grace that kept me safe thus far,
And grace will bring me home.”

This incident also illustrates what is often experienced in the practical duties of the Christian life. Sometimes in prospect they seem formidable, and beyond our ability to cope with: the duties we owe to our families, to our friends: the obligations that come upon us in the church; our debt to a perishing world; — How shall I meet these responsibilities? Take up that cross and bear it on, following Jesus. And then these daily crosses, so heavy, so many, — you have faltered under them, some times ready to despond. But have you ever in faith faced the difficulty and tried to meet it, and not found the needed strength? It must be so, for God has said: “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.”

Sometimes you wished to do some special work for Christ’s kingdom and glory, but a difficulty in the way frowned you back. You said, if that was not there I could do this thing. “Who shall roll us away the stone?” You went on, and it was rolled away.

You felt it your duty to speak to some friend on the subject of religion. You set out to do it, but on the way remembered some peculiar circumstance in the case that you were sure would cause you to be repulsed. But the love of Christ constrained you to go on. Putting your trust in God, and praying with all prayer, you went on; every difficulty vanished as you came to it; “the stone was rolled away.”

You have anticipated trials, and felt that what you feared might come would be more than you could bear. You looked upon some loved child as it lay so sweetly in its first sickness; your fears forecast the possibility of its being taken from you, and you felt that such a blow would be more than you could sustain, and you prayed: “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” But the apprehended stroke fell, and you bent over that loved one, cold and still in death, wondering at your own calmness and strength, as you breathed that acquiescing prayer, “Father, Thy will be done.”

“Be still, my soul! my Jesus can repay
From His own fullness all He takes away.”

This incident has a special application to that event, death, which sooner or later must come to us all.

And, first, in its relation to the departure of our friends and loved ones. We have said, as we parted with them at the grave, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" Yes, who? There it lies, cold and inexorable, — the stone of silence, the stone of utter, hopeless separation. It has been lying there since the beginning of the world. There is something dreadful about the unbroken silence of the tomb. If the departed, as they pass the cold river, could give some backward sign, some last word from beyond, what a comfort it would be! But, alas, all is silent. We go forth with our yearning hearts and ask, "If a man die, shall he live again!" We lean against the cold, silent marble, but there is no voice from the deep slumbers of the grave.

So it has been to those without the gospel. So it is still in utterly pagan lands. The stone still lies at the door of the sepulchre. But cannot men learn the doctrine of the resurrection from nature, from the veriest earthworm which passes from the chrysalis into the butterfly, seeming a winged blossom of the air? Or cannot men infer the resurrection of man from the resurrection of nature in spring time, that wonderful transformation of the earth? No; for else why did not the ancients learn the lesson? There is no intimation of such a lesson in any classic writer of antiquity. Look at the disciples and these holy women concerned in the burial of Jesus. It was in the full and gorgeous glory of an Asiatic spring that they laid him in the rocky tomb. His sepulchre was in a garden, surrounded by these boasted emblems of immortality. Around that rocky tomb clambered the sprays of flowers. Why did not every green leaf and opening bud speak to those sorrowing disciples, "There is a resurrection for the dead?" Ah, no! There lies the cold stone at the door of the sepulchre. And without the gospel it lies there still. Bereaved affection asks, Where is my departed friend? and nature and philosophy only echo back the question, with a more desponding emphasis.

There are those, indeed, in our day who profess to have communion with the spirit-world, and to hold converse with the departed. Ah, were it so, then, when we go forth weeping in the gray twilight, bearing spices and odors for the beloved dead, we should, indeed, find the stone rolled away and an angel sitting on it. But for us the stone must be rolled away by an unquestionable angel, whose countenance is as the lightning, who executes

no doubtful juggle by pale moonlight, but rolls back the stone in the morning light and sits upon it. Then could we bless God for communion with the unseen world.

But no such angel have we seen. No such sublime, unquestionable, glorious manifestation. And when we look at what is offered us by modern spiritualism, who that had a friend in heaven could wish him to return in such wise. The very instinct of a sacred sorrow forbids that our loved ones should stoop so low as to juggle, and rap, and squeak, and perform mountebank tricks, with chairs and tables, to recite over commonplaces in bad English. If this be communion with the dead, we would prefer to be without it. We have read some of these pretended communications, and we must say that if the future life be so dull and flat, if we are to have an eternity of such prosing and dullness, we would prefer annihilation. Oh, no; we turn away from all such foolery and delusions of wicked men, and find in the gospel that which we seek, for it has brought life and immortality to light. We go with these troubled disciples to the sepulchre in the garden and find the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, and hear the angel say to us, "He is not here; He is risen." And we exclaim with Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven."

And now when our loved ones die and we lay them down to their last sleep, we hear the Saviour say to us, as to the weeping sisters of Bethany, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Yes, to our personal bereavement and sorrow Christ speaks the words of unutterable consolation, "Thy brother, thy child, thy friend shall live again." "Where I am, there shall my disciples be." Blessed be God, the stone is rolled away. Death, the Christian's death, is but the gate of life, the portal of heaven, the threshold of eternity. The good that part at the grave shall meet again:

"Meet ne'er to sever:
Soon will peace wreathe her chain
Round us forever."

The last application of this incident is to our own departure. Sometimes, even to the Christian, the prospect of death is startling. The Apostle speaks of some who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage. This is a natural fear. I have known some very humble and consistent Christians who have had this fear of death, who would often pause, like the Marys on the way to the tomb, and say, "Who shall roll away the dark cloud that seems to lower over the grave? Who shall take away this strange and lingering fear, this instinctive, chilly recoil from death? Oh, who shall roll us away the stone?" But like the Marys, these timid, nervous, yet believing disciples, when they came to the sepulchre, saw that the stone was rolled away, the clouds were gone, and around them shone the light of the resurrection morn, and they could exclaim in triumph and exultation, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have a remarkable instance of this in Robert Glover, the martyr. For several days before his death he was almost overwhelmed with the prospect of martyrdom. He prayed for light, but without any sensible comfort. This darkness and dread continued until he came in sight of the stake, when suddenly his soul was so filled with light and consolation that he clapped his hands with joy, "shouting, He is come! He is come!" That timid, shrinking disciple seemed to go up in a chariot of fire.

Beautiful and consolatory are the lessons of this gospel. Have any of you fears of the future difficulties, doubts? Fear not, only believe. Put on the whole armor and go forward. "Who in the strength of Jesus trusts is more than conqueror." Are any of you fearful of trials and afflictions which seem to be gathering as a dark cloud over the future? "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also," said Jesus, "in me."

"The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break
In blessings on your head."

Do any of you fear death? As you look forward to that moment when you shall go down the dark valley, does your heart falter, and shrink, and say, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" Remember these sisters and take courage. Go on in the faith and love of

Jesus, and when your hour comes you will find the stone rolled away. Then, with a faith that almost unveils the glory of heaven, you shall sing:

“I hear the Saviour calling,
The joyful hour has come;
The angel guards are ready
To guide me to my home.”

9. The Fading Leaf. Isaiah 64:6.

“And we all do fade as a leaf.” Isaiah 64:6

THIS IS THE SERMON preached to us by this season of the year. When the grass is withering, and the flowers fading, and all the greenness and beauty of earth are passing away, the prophet takes up the silent suggestions of nature, and repeats to the passing generations: “We all do fade as the leaf.”

Year after year, from the time of the prophet, the same untiring chant has been uttered by the withering grass and the fading flowers. The feelings excited by the autumnal season are unvaried, but they are so true, so deep, so near to the fountains of life, that they are always fresh and always impressive. Time after time we may go into the autumnal woods, and while the yellow leaves fall slowly down and touch the earth with a sound so soft that it is almost silence, they awaken the selfsame thoughts and feelings. Ever the same, yet ever new; as fresh and affecting the last time as the first. They shall even, like the words of fine poetry, or of ancient prayer, endear themselves by repetition. We are now passing through this season. The greenness of the woods and the lawn has faded. The season of flowers and song and beauty is gone:

“’Tis past! no more the summer blooms!
Ascending in the rear... Behold, congenial
Autumn comes, the Sabbath of the year!”

The first suggestion of autumn is that which is expressed in the text: “We all do fade,” the sentiment which all men have felt; the sentiment which poets and prophets and apostles have uttered to the passing generations. “All flesh is grass,” says the prophet, “and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field.” The listening Psalmist heard, and prolongs the same plaintive theme: “As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field so he flourisheth; for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone.” The Apostle takes

up and prolongs the strain: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass." That is the moral of this season. That is the feeling which is as old as the time when the first leaf fell dry and withered at the feet of the first man, and it is the same feeling now. The suggestion that all the goodliness of man's mortal frame, all the glory of man's earthly hopes and fortunes, is as the beauty of withering grass and perishing flowers, is borne to all hearts by the fading scenes and sighing woods of autumn. There is a brotherhood between ourselves and flowers and trees; between the green things that wither, and the bright and beautiful ones that die; between these fading leaves and faces that have faded, and forms that have passed away.

As we walk in the woodlands of summer everything is full of life and beauty and song. But how changed by the frosts of autumn. From the broadest and loftiest tree, to the little wild plant at its roots, all is fading. Everything you look upon is dying. Leaves and flowers are returning to the dust, and the suggestion is inevitable that in this they are like ourselves: "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

There is not a tree that grows, nor a bird that sings, not a flower that blooms, nor child that laughs, not a man that toils, nor anything that lives, but is doomed to die. And whilst we thus speak how do images of loved ones that have passed away as the flowers of summer repeat this autumnal dirge of nature: "We all do fade as a leaf."

Ten, twenty, fifty years after this where shall we be? A few fleeting years and this teeming city, these living thousands, will all be sleeping in the silent city of the dead. The sabbath bells will ring out from city steeples, but they shall be rung by other hands, and rung for other worshipers; pulpits shall be filled by other preachers, and the pews by other worshipers. Not a familiar face you meet on your way to church, or in the market, or in the social circle, will be here. Our very homes will be occupied by strangers. For "we all do fade as a leaf;" and we have no abiding city here.

Some will be ready to say, "This is a gloomy picture of life. Why shade the little sunshine that glimmers on us here with such sombre views?" The answer is, nothing worth is that sunshine that will not pierce radiantly through this cloud. No cheerfulness, no delight, is worth having that cannot be enjoyed in the face of this fact of our mortal condition. To a thoughtful observer of mankind it is not their being doomed to fade and pass away that strikes him as the deepest gloom of the scene; no! but that they should be

thoughtless of this their condition. The melancholy thing is, that beings under such a doom do not lay hold of Him who has brought life and immortality to light. It is that, being doomed to fade and pass away, we do not seek in Christ for an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

But there are other lessons of our American autumn: lessons not only of sadness, but of hope and cheerfulness. We say of our American autumn, for it is peculiar, there is nothing like it in other countries. The richest and most varied hues that nature can produce, by the separation and blending of all the prismatic colors, meet us in every grove, and hillside, and mountain. The landscape is robed in almost dazzling brilliancy, especially when lighted up by the mellow rays of a November sun. This is a peculiarity of our American autumn.

A distinguished European, seeing a sketch of our autumnal scenery, said, "This is caricature." But when he came to this country and saw our forests in autumn, he said, "The painting does not equal the reality." A simple-minded Nestorian, in Persia, looking at a similar picture, said "What a strange country must America be where the trees are painted."

The peculiarities of an American autumn, therefore, furnish suggestions not only of sadness, but also of hope and cheerfulness.

Our autumn sets forth the goodness of God. The transition from the bloom of summer to the bleak winter might have been sudden and painful. The pleasant green might have turned at once to a shriveled mass, as if scathed by fire. And the beholder, as he looked out upon the scarred and blighted landscape, would have been filled with sad and painful emotions. And this, indeed, is the impression of autumnal scenery in other lands. But it is not so in this country.

It is true that even here the fading leaf, as an emblem of decay, touches our hearts with sadness; but it is a sadness mingled with light and hope. For here, after the storms of the equinox pass over, they leave the earth as the first deluge left it,

"With the bright bow of many colors hung
Upon the forest boughs."

We see the divine goodness that has spread such softened beauty over unwelcome decay, and made nature's winding sheet so lovely and

attractive.

We see in the fading of nature the lingering curse of sin; but in making that decay so beautiful, we see the goodness of the Lord. This beauty of autumn seems like the smile of hope on the face of this groaning creation, the hope of redemption when the curse shall be lifted from the earth, and there shall be a new heaven and earth. In the fading of autumn lingers the light of hope, the hope of redemption. For where sin abounds grace doth much more abound.

Again, there is something in our autumn which suggests and illustrates the effects of trial and affliction upon the Christian. We might expect that, when the plant is first smitten by frost, its functions would at once cease, its foliage wither, droop, and fall. But, no; though the delicate organs of the plant become diseased, and unable to continue perfect vegetation, yet by a secret chemical process the foliage is invested with varied and brilliant colors, and nature seems to smile, as she falls into the sleep of winter, and even decay by this wonderful chemistry of nature becomes lovely and attractive.

So the frosts of affliction and the chilling winds of adversity develop the beautiful graces of the spirit in the submissive, believing Christian, and his meekness and patience, faith, hope, and charity unfold in a quiet and attractive beauty, under the touches of adversity, just as trees and plants manifest a peculiar beauty under the frosts of autumn.

We need in nature winter as well as summer to keep the earth fruitful. So in the Christian life, we need sorrows as well as joys. "Jonah's whale will teach a good lesson, as well as Pisgah's top. And a man may sometimes learn as much by being a night and a day in the deep as from forty days on the mount." We see Jonah come out of the deep cured of his rebellion. We see Moses go up the mount in meekness, and come down in a passion and break the tables of stone. Yes, we need the touches of affliction, the fading of earthly joys, to bring out the graces of the spirit, and show us heavenly things. While the green and glossy leaves stand thickly on the trees, we walk beneath them in shadows, and only see the earth, and the things which are earthly; but when the leaves begin to fall the light comes in, the view is opened upward, and we behold the ever blue and vaulted sky. The goodliness of man and his glory, the objects of prosperity and earthly enjoyments, often shut out from our view things unseen and eternal; but when these fade and are shaken down as the leaves of autumn, then we look

up and see things heavenly and divine. Who has not felt this? We were leaning on some earthly object; trusting in some earthly good, some favorite scheme, possessions, friend, child, when they withered and passed away. What an opening up to the soul of heaven and heavenly things. We say: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Yes,

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the world where sorrow is unknown."

There is something in our autumnal scenery emblematical of what ought to be the autumn of our life, and our departure to the unseen world. In the natural world in the autumn come out the full glory and richness of the year. What marvelous beauty! The earth appears set with gorgeous colors, encircled with a haze of sifted gold. The testimony of the season is that of fullness of life, the coronation of the work of spring and summer. "First, the blade, then the corn, then the full corn in the ear."

It seems, in the fall, as if affluent nature had summoned all her riches for one full, glorious manifestation, and all her hidden beauty swims to the surface. The buried seed, the dews that came by night, the sweat of human labor, burst out in purple grapes and yellow corn. All the preceding processes of the year come out in the glories of this season. The later spring has bequeathed the color of its sky, the early summer the softness of its breath, and every little flower its peculiar tint, to be woven in this mantle of autumn, and to suffuse the woods with this consuming flame and prismatic beauty.

Now, if in the latest hours of the year come out the full glory and richness of the year, why should it not be so with the autumn of life? Surely, a genuine old age, a Christian completion of earthly life, will wear a kind of October glory, even when the body is broken and the flesh is weak.

It will correspond with autumn, as not only the last, but the richest of the cycle. There in the glories of faith, in the beauty of love, every tint of the soul, every gentle and holy affection, all the processes of secret devotion, and the inner life and work, will come out to complete and adorn the life of the Christian, and the vestibule of death will be a gateway of coronation. So is the old age of the Christian represented in the Bible. It is as the ripe shock

of corn. “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.” So it must be with us, or life will be a failure; so, or else the sad lament: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.”

There is, finally, in the fading of autumn something suggestive of submission and hope in the Christian’s departure from earth. The very grass itself as it withers, and the flower as it fades, seem to feel confidence in Him that made and calls them. The leaf drops gently from the tree without a murmur; the flower bows its head and exhales its sweetest odors as it dies. From the heath bell on the common to the oak, all die softly. Nature dies gently. There is no struggle and no shriek in the forest when the leaves part from the stem and softly as the snowflake sink to the ground. Why should there not be this trust of the Christian in God when He calls: “Return, ye children of men!” Why should they not yield themselves as gently and willingly to God? “Does He care for flowers? Are ye not much better than they?”

But in the fading of autumn there is not only something suggestive of quiet submission, but something also of hope and joy.

There are no richer hues than those of autumn. Though the leaves wither and turn to darkness, they wear their brightest colors just before they die. The trees are not clothed in mourning, but in triumphal beauty. They seem to put on their coronation robes. The leaves assume their most gorgeous tints, and pass away in the brightness of hope.

Do they not prefigure the serene and joyous hope of the Christian, as he fades from earth — a hope that death shall be swallowed up of victory, a hope of that time when a new earth shall be under him, and new heavens over him, and a glory unutterable shall clothe the spirits of the redeemed?

Well may he depart, as nature fades, radiant with hope, looking upon the winding sheet as his coronation robe.

“The wind breathes low, the withering leaf
Scarce whispers from the tree;
So gently flows the parting breath,
When good men cease to be.”

Let the young be admonished to seek the Lord in the springtime of life. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” There is but one spring, one summer, and but one autumn. To this autumn there is no

returning spring. If lost, it is never regained. Saddest of all laments is that so familiar wail, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended."

In the Bible the withering grass and fading flowers are emblems of the frailty and shortness of life and its glory; and, as such, they are contrasted with the stability of the Word of God. The prophet says, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the Word of our God shall stand forever." So let us view the lessons of the season. Here, in the withered leaves of autumn, is written "Frailty;" but that should only lead us to trust more fully in the Lord, whose Word endureth forever. Let the gloom that settles down over our earthly life be but the back ground of a splendor from the Sun that never sets; and these autumnal seasons, as they pass, bearing us on to the winter of age or the silence of the grave, but find us nearer home. And when the curtain of death falls upon us, as the shadows of night over the landscape, like that curtain it will reveal above more glory than it conceals below.

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the Word of our God shall stand forever."

This is rock. The Word of our God must stand when Heaven and Earth pass away. What cheer is in that! What though I am reminded that here I have no "continuing city?" I remember that I "seek one to come." What though I "fade as a leaf!" Shall I therefore repine? No, rather let me fade; let me languish; let me feel that mortality is upon me, and that this earthly scene is darkening around me, but with this inspiration of faith and hope that the gathering shadow is the twilight of all my woe and the dawn of bliss and light and love for evermore!

10. The Man Of Sorrows. Isaiah 53:3.

“A man of sorrows.” – Isaiah 53:3.

IN THE VISIONS of the old prophets this was one of the peculiar, distinctive marks by which Israel should know the Christ. True, there were other visions of Jesus, visions of His triumph, of majesty, and a kingdom blessed and glorious. But amid all that was regal and triumphant, there stood out to the prophetic gaze the Messiah, “He that should come,” in the marvelous description of the text, combining humility with exaltation, suffering with majesty, shame with glory, and death with life. Yes, Jesus rose to the visions of the old prophets, He stands now in the memory of the Christian world, as “The man of sorrows.”

We will consider the fact and its meaning. Though the subject is one familiar to us, it may be we have not considered it in its spiritual meaning and significance, and especially in its consolatory aspects to our suffering humanity. “Jesus, a man of sorrows.”

His personal life was one of sorrow. He came from the Father; he was far from home in a strange land, among strangers. Some of us know what that is. From His childhood, thoughts which he could not utter, which were not understood even by His disciples, were His. He was a lonely man. Those who loved Him did not know Him. His was the loneliness of the homeless man. He had not where to lay His head.

But it was mainly for others that He was a “man of sorrows.” Jesus Christ sorrowed over bodily suffering. Look at His miracles; no doubt they attested His divine mission; but how? Would they do so if nothing more than displays of power? if they were cold and devoid of feeling? No. What made His miracles a sign of His Messiahship? No doubt the power displayed; but more the tenderness, sympathy, love, which prompted each act of beneficence. It was a great thing to feed thousands of men and

women and children in the wilderness with a few loaves and fishes. But it was almost a greater thing that Omnipotence should show such yearning pity. He was moved with compassion toward them.

How beautiful in this sense the healing of the deaf and stammering man by the sea of Galilee. Power was in His act when He looked up to heaven and sighed, as He uttered the omnipotent “Ephphatha;” but He was revealed also not only as the Almighty, but as the One in whom dwelt all the fulness of humanity: the “man of sorrows.”

He sorrowed over mental suffering. When he met that funeral at the gate of Nain, and He saw the widowed mother weeping as she followed the body of her only son, it was not merely to show forth His glory as Messiah that He spake the omnipotent word. No, there was compassion for the sorrowing mother. It was the man of sorrows entering into the grief of the heart broken mother. And that memorable scene at Bethany, when Lazarus was raised. This, too, was for the glory of God. But how His heart throbbed in sympathy with the sisters. “Jesus wept.” What a revelation of the heart of the man of sorrows.

He sorrowed over spiritual suffering. Wherever there was anxiety and distress for sin, here, even more than for physical suffering, He was touched with tenderness and sympathy. One day as He sat in the house of Simon the Pharisee, there came in a woman who was a sinner. She knelt at His feet; she bathed them with her tears. Her sins, her anguish. of repentance and humble love touched His heart. He saved her, but what sorrowful sympathy was His with her.

When Peter denied his Lord, and that tender, piercing look was turned on him; and afterward Christ searched and probed the wounded conscience of His disciple with that threefold question, “Lovest thou me?” was there no sorrow in the heart of Christ as He exercised Himself to save His fallen disciple?

Now, if we group these three, the physical, the mental, and the spiritual phases of suffering in His experience, how does Christ stand out in history as the “man of sorrows.”

But there was an element yet more bitter in the cup He drank.

He was a man of sorrows chiefly in relation to sin. All around Him were the ruins that sin had wrought. Many vices were practiced then in Palestine, even as now. Men, in the full pursuit of pleasure were destroying themselves. Children were wretched and sinful. Homes lay desolate. We

know the wretched spectacle of a world lying in wickedness. Let us conceive, if we can, that spectacle unfolded before the omniscient eye of Christ; all the sins and sufferings of the great city laid bare before Him. What a weight of sadness must it have thrown upon the heart of the "man of sorrows."

But added to this was the sin of the professed disciples and teachers of religion; the formalism, the utter hypocrisy of scribes and Pharisees. It met Him everywhere. In the temple the Pharisee was praying; in the synagogue was the scribe teaching. Wherever He went, whatever He might do, as He wrought His miracles, as He instructed the people, He was surrounded by hypocrisy and spiritual pride.

But even nearer than this pressed this plague of sin. Among the apostles were strifes and jealousies, hardness of heart and blindness of mind. One of the sacred band was a traitor. Think of Judas, for three years the constant companion of our Lord, admitted to His confidence, a witness of miracles, a hearer of His discourses. And Jesus knew from the beginning who should betray Him. Can we think of a trial greater than this? To have in your own household, at table, admitted to confidence, one who is hardening more and more, and whom you know will be your final betrayer? This was Christ's sorrow. What a perpetual crucifixion of His delicate sensibilities! What spiritual anguish!

But we have not yet touched the bitterest element in this cup. *He was the Man of Sorrows specially and preeminently, because it was His office to bear sin.*

To see sin was sorrow to the Holy Jesus; to see sin in its ruinous waste of men, and families, and souls, this was enough to make Him sad. But He was to come closer to it even than this.

He was appointed to bear "our sins in His own body on the tree." Reason can say but little here. A veil of mystery hangs over the Holy Jesus upon the cross. We only know that God "made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Here is something more than seeing sin, feeling for sinners. This is expiation, sacrifice. Fathom the depth of this awful transaction we cannot. We may only take up with reverence the words of Scripture that describe it, neither adding to them, nor taking from them. "He," says the Apostle, "is the propitiation for our sins." "He," "echoes the prophet, was wounded for our" transgressions." Behold," says the forerunner, by the banks of Jordan, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Here, especially, He is the “Man of Sorrows.” We must go to Gethsemane and Calvary, if we would know the depth of those sorrows. It was in that lonely garden He cried, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” It was on Calvary that the wail burst from His dying lips, “My God, why hast Thou forsaken me!” The burden of sin was lying upon Him. He was *bearing* it; bearing it for us. He had grieved over sin in wicked men. He had wept over sin as He looked upon the ruin it had wrought in the fair city of Jerusalem. Now He bore it upon His innocent soul. He not only felt numbered with transgressors, but He made His soul an offering for sin. Oh, Mystery of the Cross! Oh, Man of Sorrows!

“What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, dearest friend,
For this, thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end!”

The view of Jesus as a man of sorrows shows us that seriousness, sorrow, even sadness, is suitable to our condition as fallen and sinful beings. In the experience of life we find that in all genuine happiness there is an element of sorrow. Sorrow for the suffering of others, sorrow for the sins of others, most of all for our own. Is that a preventive of peace? Is there not in the happiest a vein of sadness, and are they not happier for it? Does it not make their happiness truer, safer, more Christ-like? He who is all smiles and jests is not a happy man, because his whole happiness rests upon a falsehood. He is trying to represent the world to himself, as what it is not, as what a sinful world can never be. And he is trying to represent his own state to himself as what it is not; for he who is fighting the battle of life, pressing his way through temptations, and conflicts, and sins, into the kingdom of God, cannot always be merry. Yes, the path that leads into Paradise is not one leading only through vales of beauty, and sunshine, and song.

“Must we be carried to the skies,
On flow’ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?”

For all men sorrow; for most men sadness, is the expression of the truth. As Christ, the Man of Sorrows, we must all, more or less, be the children of

sorrow.

Only as a man of sorrows could Jesus be a Saviour for all men, and for the whole of life. In a very great degree sorrow is mingled in the experience of human life. For one person entirely at ease in mind, body, and estate, how many, in one or all of these respects, are in a condition of conscious disquietude and sorrow? How many in this assembly are so? Health, business, income, the family, the affections, the conscience, the past or the future, some of these give us unrest. Few, in all these respects, could say they are entirely and absolutely happy. Now just in proportion as there is this drawback to happiness, there is a natural affinity and attraction to Christ. It is when there is darkness in the world, when there is disappointment and loss in business, when there is sorrow in the household and despondency in the soul, it is then we feel a secret drawing to Christ as the Man of Sorrows. We are touched by the thought that He was acquainted with grief. Consider him who endured such contradiction. It is this which makes Him a Saviour for all men, and for the whole of life; for the sad as well as the joyful; for hours of gloom as well as moments of gladness. And though He is now exalted to the right hand of the Father, though no longer the Man of Sorrows, He is still “touched with a feeling for our infirmities.”

“He lives to silence all my fears,
He lives to stop and wipe my tears,
He lives to calm my troubled heart,
He lives all blessings to impart.”

Now the important question is, how we stand in reference to this Saviour?

If He is a Man of Sorrows, it is that He may minister to our sorrows. It is that He may draw us to Him by the assurance of His sympathy, and keep us near by the experience of His tenderness.

There are some people who may not yet understand this thing of sorrow. Life has dealt gently with them, and their path has been bright and beautiful, and full of song; and they dream it will always be so.

Is, therefore, Christ nothing to you as the Man of Sorrows? Ah! to all there must come the day of sorrow, even to you. And then you will understand the meaning of the text, “Sweet are the uses of adversity.” No one knows himself without sorrow. It brings a man nearer to truth, nearer to reality, nearer to Christ, and, therefore, nearer to hope.

No man can measure life without passing under its shadows. There are those who are lonely, desolate, friendless, disconsolate. And yet often they do not see where and how they are to find Christ. They have a general trust in His mercy and sympathy. But they do not find the rest and peace they long for. The world is dark to them, and yet heaven is not bright. Ah! He is nearer to you than you think. You must not wait for visible or audible tokens of His presence. He sees you, knows all your trouble, and is touched with sympathy. He says to you, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." You believe in God. Then that loss was not accidental. You may gather jewels for your crown from the wreck and rubbish of your earthly fortune. Then that bodily infirmity and sickness were not chance. No, this is the touch of decay on the earthly tabernacle to fashion and beautify the spiritual man for unfailing health and vigor and immortal youth and beauty. These troubles of outward estate or condition, or even mental cares and anxieties, are, when sanctified, purifying and saving. Human nature is like some elements in vegetation. In tapioca, one of the most harmless of all articles of food, there is one of the most deadly of all poisons. But the poison is of such a volatile nature, that when it is subjected to heat it escapes, and leaves only the nutriment of the starch. So the heart is naturally full of elements of evil, but when subjected to afflictions, little by little the venomous poison exhales, and only that which is wholesome and healthful remains. This process is not, indeed, joyous, but grievous; but afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby.

But some one will say, 'I have sorrow sufficient, but I cannot see that I am any better.' Perhaps not. But did it lead you to look to Jesus, and lean on Him? If so, it will do you good. We cannot always tell. The worm does not know what it is going to be when a butterfly. No more can a child of God foretell the glory that shall follow his trials. "For I reckon," said Paul, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

With some the great trouble is not outward, but inward. Sin poisons the soul; passions rage; temptation allures. Then come conflicts, rebellion, and the cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Now, it is just here that we come nearest to the heart of Jesus. He came, and lived, and died, as a Man of Sorrows, to redeem us from sin. This

caused Him his chief anguish; this was the sting of all His sorrow. It cost Him his life twice over; a dying life by reason of sin, and then at last a cruel and desolate death. O yes, in our sins let us look away to the Lamb of God; His blood “cleanseth us from all sin.”

“Jesus, save my dying soul:
Make my broken spirit whole.
Humbled in the dust we lie;
Saviour! leave us not to die.”

In this world, sin-smitten and shrouded with troubles, none can escape. When the Venetians besieged Athens, they threw their miscreant shot into the Acropolis with all its treasures of art, and those noble marbles of Phidias, which had stood in peerless beauty for hundreds of years, were scattered and broken. So come afflictions and disasters into families, blind, purposeless, destructive, as remorseless as the shot that shattered the sculptures of the Parthenon. In such a world, oh, what a blessing to be able to look to Jesus, the Man of Sorrows! There is no condition which He does not understand. Are we plagued with sin? Oh, He knows “He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.” “Who, then, is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.” So is it with all our sorrows. Are you struggling alone? Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, was also alone. Are you tempted? He, too, was tempted. Are you despondent? Hear Him as He groans forth his burden, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” Oh, yes, we have a great and merciful High Priest, who is passed into the heavens. He is touched with a feeling for our infirmities. “Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Yes, go to Him. Trust Him. He is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

God grant that whilst we must have the baptism of sorrow, we may also have the cleansing. So that when we have passed through tribulations, we shall stand invested in robes of white, with palms of victory, and shout in the throng of ineffable glory:

“Adversity’s cold frosts will soon be o’er:
It heralds brighter days; the joyous spring
Is cradled on the winter’s icy breast,
And yet comes flushed in beauty.”

11. Christ's Loneliness. John 16:32.

“And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” John 16:32

THE TEXT expresses a great fact in the experience of Christ. Often was He alone; alone in the great ideal of his life, alone in his sufferings, without human sympathy. Even on the cross a shadow falls upon his consciousness of the Divine presence, and through the darkness of that ninth hour is heard the cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” The text was uttered in near prospect of the cross. His heart seemed to recoil from the abandonment of that coming hour, from the desertion of friends and disciples. But the shrinking was only for a moment, for as that calm sense of the Divine presence flowed into his soul, He rose up to meet the solemn issue: “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet,” He adds, “I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

There are times when the thought comes upon us with peculiar force that each of us is essentially alone; alone, I mean, as an individual being, as a spiritual unit in the universe of God. Yes, each has his own life to live, his own thoughts to think, his own work to do, his own destiny to fulfill. It is well for us to consider this fact in an age when so many influences divert man from the center of his own soul into the whirl of outside realities. The great interests of the time are involved with external facts and activities. The discoveries of science, the progress of art and invention, the noise of business, the glory of commercial enterprise, and the revelry and pomp of the world, these exciting externalities are apt to divert attention from the individual, and steal from us the blessings of solitude. Admitting the great advantages of society and the power of social effort in the works of charity, there are blessings peculiar to solitude.

It is a fact, that in the lives of all the great thinkers and reformers there has been a preparation of solitary study in youth, and in after years the habit of retirement. There is scarcely an exception. The men who have thought for the world and for all coming generations, the men who have touched and moved the heart of the world, who have been the reformers and builders of institutions, these have been men much alone, thrown in upon themselves and on the powers unseen and eternal. The stream may sparkle and widen in the hot glare of public engagements, but the perennial springs whence all its waters are supplied must be among the cool and shaded heights of solitude. Look at the biography of the great men and reformers who affected society far and wide; they did not gather their best power in social resorts, but alone with Heaven. Look at Paul, three years in Arabia; and at Luther at Wartburg. Columbus and Washington spent their youth apart from men; their career was baptized in solitude and initiated in the air of retirement. And the divine ministry of the great Lord of all to the world must begin with forty days in the wilderness.

There is an intimate connection between solitude and spirituality of character. The loftiest of all our possible emotions is religious reverence expressing itself in worship or prayer. This communion with Heaven is associated with secrecy. It has been specially so associated ever since worship took its Christian ordination from Him who said "Enter into thy closet;" to go further back, it has been so since the Lord God spoke with Adam, alone in the garden, in the cool of the day.

Nature has given a hint of this truth in making it impossible for us to express to any mortal the deepest feeling. There are times when we have thoughts too deep for words, too deep even for tears. So, when we stand before the grand and sublime in nature, we are hushed to silence. A lively company may talk and jest, as they float among the winding threads of the picturesque harbor, shut in by the limitations of that narrow scenery; but if that company have thoughtful souls, they will grow quiet and be silent as they sail out upon the infinite sea, amidst the boundless simplicity of the waves and the sky. Or they may chatter and laugh together in the blooming valley, but when they go up among the everlasting hills of God, in the solitude and sublimity of the mountain, there is awe and silence. They may prattle the gossip of the drawing-room in gardens of sunshine, but the roll of celestial thunder will hush their empty levity with awe. It is because the grandeurs of creation take us nearest to the Creator. So, whenever the

uplifted soul approaches God in its most solemn devotion, it must go alone. If other souls bend around in unity of spirit, yet the communion of each with the Father is solitary, and each must be accepted, not for another, but by itself. It must bear its own single burden to the mercy seat. "Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God." The prayer must rise from a heart leaning on no earthly arm, even as it goes up to a spirit of whom it is written, that "He is God alone," and that He "alone doeth great wonders."

Yes, in our highest moods of elevation, in our sublimest sweep of faith, in our holiest rapture of love, we are alone, alone with our own soul and God. The Christian Cowper felt this, and expressed it in his hymn beginning: Far from the world, O Lord, I flee."

"The calm retreat, the silent shade,
With pray'r and praise agree,
And seem by thy sweet bounty made
For those who follow thee.
Then if thy spirit touch the soul,
And grace her mean abode,
Oh, with what peace, and joy, and love,
Does she commune with God."

Like Christ, His disciples must often feel that they are alone, and need the special consolation, "the Father is with me."

This loneliness will sometimes be felt by the Christian in his loyalty to principle, or some great duty.

Even in our day a man devoted to principle may find himself forsaken by the popular tide, misinterpreted by friends as well as foes, without sympathy, left alone. There may be cases, even, in our day, when to be a disciple of Jesus a man must leave father and mother, and houses and lands. Let a man take a single grace of Christianity, and try to carry it straight through every temptation, and over every hindrance, and he will see how often it is as the carrying of a cross. Let a man take a profession of Christianity that bases itself upon the life of faith rather than of sight, and hold it consistently through all the shifting policy of the world, and through all surrounding allurements, and how often must such a Christian feel that it is a lonely effort, throwing him back upon the poise of his own soul, leaving him nothing but the consolation of Christ in the text, "I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

But what a great thing it is thus to stand alone having this consolation! How grand, how impressive, the posture of a man struggling for truth and righteousness, when he sinks back upon his convictions of duty, and leans upon God. So Luther, when he stood before the imperial diet of Worms, stood *alone* for the truth, when in the majesty of faith he cried, "Here I stand; I *cannot* otherwise; God help me." Surrounded, then, by the power and pomp of the world, he seemed to be alone. But emperors, princes, priests, all were not so powerful as the solitary monk; for, fresh from the struggle and assurance of earnest prayer, he knew that he was not alone, because the Father was with him. Without such a conviction as this in the day of trial, how sad and hopeless is the human heart. Without it there can be no stability, no true moral courage. In many a trial, in many a struggle, to maintain without wavering the great principles of the gospel, we shall need this conviction of the right and of God's help, which is always with the right.

"Though billows after billows roll
To overwhelm my sinking soul,
Firm as a rock my faith shall stand,
Upheld by God's Almighty hand."

Finally, like Christ, in the great experiences of life, we must be alone.

There are times in which, however intensely our friends may feel for us, they cannot enter into our experience and feel in our stead.

As we look out upon the crowded streets, it is affecting to think how each man in that mingled mass is working out, and must work out, the problem of life alone. What an interest gathers about the humblest man, viewed as a moral agent, working out a spiritual destiny; amidst sins and conflicts, joys and sorrows, working out the problem of his life; working it out in results that lay hold on eternity.

In the profoundest experiences of life we must be alone.

Human suffering in all its forms is solitary. Tenderest sympathies may flow out from friends to minister to it. But there is something in it that their kindest offices can not reach; something appointed by Providence to be left alone.

There is the time of sickness, when in weakness and pain one must lie through long, sleepless nights; when the dearest friend has sunk in weariness, and the eyes of the watcher are heavy; when the dreams of fever

have melted away, leaving the mind with an intense realization of solitude; when there is a strange stillness in the house, and the surges of sound have died away in the streets, and the tick of the clock echoes, as it were, in eternity.

Then, as the dark mystery of disease closes round the clouded senses, there rises up a silent wall of impenetrable loneliness between the sufferer and the watcher.

There are thoughts and feelings in that failing frame which cannot be uttered. I have seen a sick child, always frank and outspoken, and yet when the spell of dissolution was coming slowly down upon the features, no entreaties of affection of father or mother could draw from that solemn silence of the failing child one whisper of the struggle where life and death were wrestling for the mastery.

Yes, even that little child seemed conscious that, with out father, mother, or sister, it must go alone; must, like Jesus, tread the wine-press alone.

“She saw a hand we could not see,
She heard a voice we could not hear,
It beckoned her away.”

Oh, then, in the loneliness of sickness, when all the links that bind us to others are loosened, and the soul feels the frailty of the wasting tabernacle, then, in that intense spiritual consciousness, how blessed is the thought: “In my weakness and solitude I am borne up in the arms of infinite love. Through the silence and shadow of the night-watches they support me. Oh, no, I am not alone, because the Father is with me. My heart and flesh fainteth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

In bereavement we are essentially alone. Though many may share it with us, though the flow of sympathy may be rich and full, nevertheless under that stroke each heart must feel its own bitterness. The father cannot mourn as the mother mourns. She has felt even a nearer and more mysterious relationship to the departed child, whose gentle pressure lies still warm upon her heart. And the sympathy of friends cannot be as our own grief; it is grateful, it is precious, it is consoling, but it cannot reach down into the heart where the sorrow lies; it can not enter there, or take hold of the deep substance of our sorrow. Oh, no; in our bereavements we are alone! And as time passes on and the ranks of those who have lived with us and loved us

grow thinner and thinner, a mournful consciousness of solitude will take possession of us. And then it is that we need the assurance of Christian trust and faith that we are not alone, because the Father is with us and with them, and that we and they live in the same presence, and are gathered up in the same mercy.

There is still another, and the last, experience of earth, in which we shall be alone. We must die alone. All men come into this world alone; all leave it alone. There is a moment in which no kindly wish, no tender sympathy, no outstretched hand, can enter into the world of our inner life and consciousness, from which all earthly perceptions are fading away. To the very verge of the stream our friends may accompany us; they may bend over us; they may cling to us there; but that one long wave from the sea of eternity sweeps us from the shore, and we go forth alone! Oh, in that untried and utter solitude, what, then, can there be for us but this blessed assurance: "I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

To each one of us this will soon be a solemn reality. Let us ask, nay, rather let each one put, the searching question to himself: "Am I ready to be alone?" We must suffer alone; we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds alone; we must go through the valley alone, alone up to God!

Then, says Christ, "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray. Pray to thy Father who is 'in secret,' and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Then, when human companionships forsake thee, the Lord will take thee up. Herein lies the unfathomed meaning of that eternal word of Christ. "All ye," mortal friends, "shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone," alone from men and yet not alone from Heaven, because the Father is with me. Absent and distant from the world, nearer and nearer to God. So shall it be in all trial and all suffering. Even in the valley of the shadow of death alone, and yet "the Father is with me." "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Oh, with what fervor and earnestness, then, shall we entreat the Saviour to be with us! Abide with me, blessed Jesus:

"Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes,
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me."

12. The Lie To The Holy Ghost.

Acts 5:3,4.

“Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” – Acts 5:3,4.

THIS IS ONE of the most startling scenes in the early history of the Christian Church. In the preceding chapter we have accounts of rich disciples who sold their lands and laid the money at the feet of the Apostles, to be distributed for the relief of the poor. Barnabas, who afterwards became, with Paul, a distinguished preacher to the Gentiles, had given up all his possessions for the poor. The law of the primitive Church did not require the richer members to do this; but, under the glow of their first love, and under the peculiar circumstances of the Church then, they for a time had things in common, as one family.

Under these circumstances, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who were disciples in Jerusalem, practiced the most flagrant dishonesty and hypocrisy. Ananias, wishing to appear as one of the devoted disciples, sold his property for the benefit of the Church, but kept back a part of the price, bringing to the Apostles the remainder, as if it were the whole, his wife also being privy to the same. Peter, by inspiration, saw through the fraud, and denounced Ananias as having lied to the Holy Ghost, that is, as having sought to pass upon the Holy Ghost, in the Apostles, an act of deceit. It was a great sin, falsehood, and hypocrisy.

It was all important that the new Church should be pure. Hence the judgment that followed. It was a visible manifestation of God’s hatred of all sin, and especially of the sin of falsehood and hypocrisy in holy things. This judgment stands on the very threshold of the Christian Church as a monument, saying: “Stand in awe, and sin not; be sincere; be honest!”

This is not merely a startling fact or incident of history, something that happened hundreds of years ago, but is of no practical importance to the

Church in our day. The circumstances were peculiar, but the principle which underlies them is the same now as then, and we ought to face that principle, and to try ourselves by it, as by the flame of the Lord's own fire.

This story of Ananias and his tragic end urges upon all sincerity in everything pertaining to religion, and a warning against hypocrisy. When a man professes to be more religious than he really is, it is hypocrisy, it is lying to the Holy Ghost.

I am not particular about the order of this discourse; but I want to show how hateful in the sight of the Lord are all false pretenses and professions, whether in the pulpit or in the pew, in the Church or in social life. Whether in worship or in giving, God looks not upon the outer act so much as the motive, the feeling that is back of what is seen. "God is a spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

"Nothing but truth before His throne
'With honor can appear."

A man may pray, he may worship, he may give outwardly,

"But God abhors the sacrifice
Where not the heart is found."

Consider first the possibility in the pulpit and in the pew that men may lie unto the Holy Ghost.

We would apply this to the pulpit, to ourselves who preach. I go back to my first entrance upon the work of the ministry, or even to the days of youth when I had a yearning to be a minister, an inextinguishable desire to preach, and when the whole future glowed to my fancy with pictures of the pulpit and the pastoral life. As the time approached, I said, If ever I am allowed to ascend the pulpit, my theme shall be the cross, and the watchword of my ministerial life shall be, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ." I said, I will aim to be simple and sincere, according to Cowper's ideal:

"I seek Divine simplicity in him
Who handles things Divine."

So have many of us purposed at the threshold of our ministry: 'Our ministry shall be marked, we said, with simplicity, unction, earnestness: We will labor for the conversion of men.' O, what noble aims and aspirations were ours!

In the main line and working of our ministerial career I trust the most of us can say we have, by the grace of God, kept our ordination vows.

But as we look back through the misty years, how often do we see that we departed unconsciously from that line. Sometimes, it may be, we were too much influenced by our sense of the beautiful; we paid too much regard to art and fancy and eloquence. Sometimes, it may be, we were too much affected and influenced by the opinions of men. Sometimes, it may be, we were tempted to take up the controversial questions of the day, or moral and reformatory movements, to the neglect of the great central doctrines of the cross. How possible it may be we, even in this holy place, the pulpit, have not always believed and felt and lived, as thoroughly as we should, what we preached. O, when we think that every pulse of our heart, every thought that flashed through the soul, every word that dropped from our lips, has been before the pure, sleepless eye of Him who says, "I search the heart and try the reins of the children of men," in the presence of Jesus, who represents himself as walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, how possible it is that we have sometimes lied to the Holy Ghost. Not so flagrantly as Ananias, but as really, in seeming to be what we are not. And we feel that only as washed in the blood of Jesus can we stand before the Judge of the quick and the dead. All the past, even in its holiest scenes, must be purified and sanctified by the blood of Christ.

"This is my hope, this my claim,
Jesus has died to hide my sin."

Again, let us look at this subject in the pew, in the worship, and in Christian life.

In worship: How possible, even here, that we may not be sincere, that we may seem what we are not, and thus grieve the Holy Ghost. In prayer, if we ask of God what we do not want, if we express, in words, adoration or desires which we do not feel, we are committing this sin of hypocrisy. If, in the hymns we sing, we take upon our lips, in song, sentiments and longings which we do not feel, what are we but hypocrites? If we sing, "Oh! for a

heart to praise my God,” when we are unthankful at heart, or “Jesus, lover of my soul,” when there is no answering throb of love within, or “Here, Lord, I give myself to Thee,” when the world is still supreme in our souls, — what do we do but ‘lie unto the Holy Ghost?’ How startled, at the close of some sweet hymn of praise or adoration, should we be if one gifted like Peter, and reading our hearts, should say: “Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God!”

How, in the light of this, should we pray to be sincere when we sing, in our prayers, in our devotions: “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”

And how possible is it that many commit this sin of hypocrisy in practical life.

A young man comes to the city, and he says: If God will give me a foothold in some lawful business, and give me success in that business, I will dedicate one-tenth of my income yearly to the cause of Christ and His kingdom." He gets into business, but by and by he is carried away with his business and the love of gain, and he begins to diminish the tenth that he had promised. Now, is not this something like the sin of Ananias? And so a new disciple, in the freshness of his religious experience, in the ardor of his first love, when he unites with the church, vows that he will be regular in attendance at church; he will, by precept and example, by his presence, by his prayers, by his personal labors, by his liberal donations, do all he can to advance the interests of the church and to glorify God.

After a while he begins to fall back. He attends church as he feels inclined; absents himself from the Lord’s table and the week day meetings. Ah! is not this like breaking one’s vows and making false one’s holiest promises? And might not one inspired like Peter say: “You have not lied unto men, but unto God!”

And so, sometimes, a man says: ‘I do not like this business I am in; I do not like this way of getting money; but then one must live, and I will give some of my gains to good purposes.’ Now, he who goes upon this ground, that a man must live, and if he cannot make a living without some violence to conscience and some question able honesty — why “he must live;” such a man is living in dishonesty and deceit. But such men forget that man does not live by bread alone. There is a higher life than the life of the flesh. It is

necessary a man should be true, honest, loyal to conscience and to God. It is not necessary he should live.

Let a man get what he does get, honestly. Let him be able to hold it up, and let the sun stream through it, and let him be able to see that there is no stain, no blemish in it.

Let him walk before God and man with sincerity and honesty, and trust in the Lord; and, whatever may come, he will in his heart be rich, and peaceful, and happy. Be able to say with the Apostle: "This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have had my conversation in the world."

It is easy to see in what various ways men may commit this sin. There come seasons of religious conviction to every man. The Holy Ghost arouses the soul; conscience speaks out. If men would speak out their deepest thoughts at such times, they would cry: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" But under these solemn convictions, struggling against their growing thoughtfulness, they go into the world; they laugh and jest with the careless as though nothing troubled them. What is this but a lie, and a lie not to men, but to God?

Almost every infidel has times when his skepticism breaks down. His strong arguments forsake him; he believes and trembles. But does he acknowledge it? No; it is all covered over with the sneer of incredulity. He lies to the Holy Ghost. How many are false in this matter of religion!

Some may say: "If all this be so, then I will have nothing to do with the profession of religion, with the church. I will get away from this peril of lying to the Holy Ghost."

Ah! but you cannot. You cannot get away from the Holy Ghost by shutting the church door behind you and rushing into the glee and merriment of the world, or going into the busy streets, or hiding yourself in the store or warehouse. Oh! no. How solemn are the words of the psalmist in this connection: "Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo! O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold! Thou art there."

Once more. This scene forces upon us the consideration of two facts:

1. Inner And Outward Lives

We have two lives, an outward life and an inner; a life of speech and one of thought. And these two may be moving along simultaneously on very different lines. The life of expression, of the lips, by which we are known in the world, may be aiming heavenward. By our profession, our prayers, our hymns of praise, we may be living what seems to be a life of worship, when, within, the heart may be going after the world. Ananias was in good repute in the church: his voice sounded as loud in the praises of the disciples as any; but within, all was cold and dead. The gulf between the outer and the inner was growing ever wider, until the whole fell in ruin, eternal ruin, into the yawning gulf. It came swiftly to Ananias, but, sooner or later, it must come to all who are leading divided lives, lives that are a lie to God. Woe to that man who is saying and wishing one thing in his heart, in the matter of religion, and another with his lips; for,

2. All Will Be Revealed

The time is coming when there will be a revelation of human life. How solemn are those words of our Lord:

“For there is nothing hid that shall not be known; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.”

That slow but sure passage of every concealed thing to the light which has been so often illustrated in history, of which we have had at times such startling instances in our own experience, thus solemnly affirmed by the voice of God himself, how it should send us to our closets, there to pray,

“Search me, O, God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

At last, nothing but truth can stand: nothing but truth in science; nothing but truth in history, — How all these have been sifted and bolted and tossed up and down, and the falsehood, however cunningly hidden, at last brought to

light: nothing but truth in a nation, — how the rotten places in kingdom and empire, one after the other, have been found out, and the whole fabric settled down on what was truth: nothing but truth in the life and heart: “Be sure your sin will find you out.” Not only will they be found out, but blazoned and published in the eye of the universe: God will set “our secret sins in the light of His countenance.”

And with the revelation will come the condemnation. The time is coming when all liars shall be cast into “the lake which burneth with fire.” Whither shall we flee but to the cross for forgiveness, to Jesus, “Who is the way, the truth and the life,” that we may be made pure; that we may have truth, and love, and life for evermore?

13. “What Is That To Thee?”

John 12:22-23.

“Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” John 21:22-23.

WE HAVE in this chapter the risen Saviour’s interview with the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius. Besides this general manifestation, Christ had a special, personal interview with Peter, and restored him to the pastoral office from which he might have been considered as deposed through the denial of his Lord. After this, the Saviour told Peter what he would have to undergo in His service, intimating in prophetic language that he should reach his crown through the pangs of martyrdom, and concludes with the command, “Follow me.”

Just at this juncture, Peter, turning round, saw John coming, and instantly asked, “Lord, and what shall this man do?” Under the circumstances, it was a very natural question, and to one of Peter’s curious and impulsive temperament, an inevitable question. Between Peter and John there was a peculiar intimacy and sympathy. They had been companions from their earliest discipleship. They had passed through peculiar scenes of Christ’s ministry and manifestation. Peter had just been told that his future path lay through trials and persecution, and would end in martyrdom. It was natural he should wish to know the future history of his personal friend and fellow disciple, and whether a similar destiny awaited him. “Lord, and what shall this man do?”

But, however natural the question, seeming to be prompted by personal friendship and Christian affection, there was evidently something wrong about it, for the answer was a gentle rebuke: “What is that to thee? Follow thou me.”

Peter allowed his mind to be diverted from his own personal duty and solemn future by over-anxiety about the destiny of his fellow disciple. Peter is not alone in this. It is a common weakness of our humanity. We are apt to lose our sense of personal responsibility in undue solicitude about the duty and destiny of others. To all such the Saviour says: "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." We find in this passage suggestions of doctrinal instruction, and a solemn admonition to practical duty. There is in the text an incidental testimony to the value of the Bible as the inspired written will of God, and an incidental exposure of the uncertainty and insufficiency of oral tradition.

Here is one of the points of controversy between the Church of Rome and Protestants. Protestants maintain that the Bible alone is the infallible rule of faith and practice. The Romanist claims equal authority for oral tradition. Here we touch what is vital and fundamental in Protestantism. Now, we find in the circumstances of the text, how little dependence can be put upon tradition. How easily the words of Christ may be perverted and distorted in their oral transmission. Here we have a saying of Christ himself, uttered in the hearing of the disciples. And yet that simple utterance, as it is reported, is wholly perverted. Christ says: "If I will that he (John) tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

It passes from one to another, and what shape does it assume? What does tradition make of it? Why, the idea is entertained by the church that John should not die; that he was either to linger on earth to the end of time, or that, like Enoch and Elijah, he was to be translated without seeing death. Now, Christ did not say this. He only said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" It was merely a hypothetical case, and yet, in its transmission from one disciple to another, it assumes the form of a positive affirmation, and the current idea in the church was that John should not die. Now, this incident shows the uncertainty there is in tradition. How easily the truth may be perverted by oral tradition, and how little dependence we can place upon any word that comes to us from apostolic times. Blessed be God for this inspired, infallible, written revelation of the Divine will. The Bible bears the signature and seal of the Almighty. It is sure, unerring, and authoritative, and it is sufficient for doctrine, reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness.

“’Tis like the sun, a heav’nly light,
That guides us all the day,
And through the dangers of the night
A lamp to lead our way.”

We notice as an incidental suggestion in this passage our cause for thankfulness that in a certain sense John did tarry till his Lord came. The Saviour in the expression, “till I come,” alludes to the destruction of Jerusalem. In this sense John did tarry till He came. He lived to an extreme old age, one hundred years. He lived to see the terrible judgment that fell on Jerusalem, the city and temple in ruins, and the Jewish nation scattered as the fragments of a mighty shipwreck over the world. Now, to us, the question of Christ, “What is that to thee?” is one of great practical interest. To Peter it was of no consequence, but to us it is a fact of great personal interest. John lived to combat the heresy concerning the person of Christ which in his day crept into the primitive church, and to give us the wonderful visions recorded in the book of Revelation.

In Ezekiel we have cherubic symbols which, according to the interpretation of the church from the earliest time, refer to the four Gospels.

In that symbolic representation St. Matthew is represented as the lion, as setting forth the royalty of Christ. St. Mark, with the face of a man, as dwelling most on the humanity of Christ; St. Luke as the ox, the animal used in sacrifice, as giving prominence to the sacrifice of Christ; St. John as the eagle, soaring toward heaven, gazing and teaching us to gaze on the uncreated glory of Christ as the Son of God.

Now, if you read the writings of John you will find his gospel rich and full of the divinity of Christ, and his epistles warm and gushing with the love which he caught from the very heart of Jesus. It is not Paul caught up into Paradise, but John, who reclined on the bosom of Jesus, who gives us the best definition of God. In the early church the eagle was the symbol of John, as if to indicate that he soared by love into the heaven of heavens, into the very heart of the Eternal, and brought back the glad message that “God is love.”

Now, if by John’s tarrying, spoken of in the text, he met and battled against that heresy concerning the person of Christ in the early church, and gives us in his gospel such an inimitable representation of the divine glory of Christ; if, leaning on his bosom, he caught the true inspiration from the very heart of God as it throbbed in that lowly bosom, and tells us that God

is love, then the question of the text, "What is that to thee?" must be answered, 'Oh, it is much to us that he tarried.'

But there is more than this. Look at his visions in the book of Revelations. I will not say that John might not have had these visions without tarrying so long. Still we know that it is the pure in heart that shall see God. It is often by a long and painful course of discipline that the heart is clarified for extraordinary manifestations of the invisible world. And it may be that through years of a long and painful pilgrimage was John prepared for the wonderful revelations in Patmos. There in lonely exile as he walked the seashore on a serene sabbath morning, he is startled by the summons to look up; and lo! the city whose gates are of pearl and its streets of gold opened its glories to his enraptured eye. Verily, we have much to do with John's having tarried till his Lord came. He tarried that he might receive the mighty figures of the Apocalypse. Dark in many respects may the book be, dark with excess of light! But it is that book which most fully unfolds the future history of the church, her trials, and conflicts, and victories, and culminating glory; that book which opens up to the believer what a victory and crown and glory shall be his if he is faithful until death. If, then, the question is put to us, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" the answer is, 'To Peter it was, indeed, nothing; but to us it is much every way.' It is much that he lingered to meet and expose that early heresy, and to portray the divine glory of Christ, to give us that precious definition of God, to open the gates of heaven, and show us the heavenly Jerusalem. Blessed, for ever blessed, be Thy name that John did tarry thus for us and the church in all coming generations.

Let us not overlook the great practical lessons. It is worthy of remark that tradition fastened on what was speculative and let go what was practical. Men hearing of the scene by the Lake of Galilee took up curious speculations as to whether John should die or not, but lost sight of the application Christ made to the individual life in His injunction, "Follow me."

This is common in reading the Scriptures. Men get hold of the mysteries of the Bible and indulge in useless speculation, whilst they pass over the plain and practical duties which everyone can understand. Let it not be so with us. There are mysteries in religion, but there is enough that is plain. If we will do the will of God, we shall know of the doctrine. This rebuke of Peter is applicable to many in our day. There is a tendency to meddle with

other people's business, instead of attending to our own. What an acute eye we have in detecting the faults of others; how dull to see our own. How readily we dissect the characters of our fellows; how reluctant to examine ourselves. Not such the temper of the godly soul; his prayer is, "Search me; try me." For one that rigidly scrutinizes himself, there are hundreds who pass judgment upon their brethren. With fatal facility we take for granted that we shall reach heaven, and then employ ourselves in debating the chances of others. Let us take this rebuke of Peter to ourselves. It is said: "Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith, and what shall this man do?" He must turn about to indulge his curiosity. Had he simply looked to Christ and followed Him, he would have seen nothing of John. So we, if intent on duty, will have no time for curious inquiries about our brethren.

Let us learn to exercise charity, rather than to indulge curiosity. Say not, with Peter, "Lord, what shall this man do?" but, rather, with Paul, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Not, 'Is my neighbor a Christian?' but, 'Am I a soldier of the cross?' Let us inquire not whether such an one shall be saved, but what after death is for me? We are quite safe in waiting until we are in heaven to know whether others shall be there too; but we may lose the path ourselves by turning round to see whether others are following. Let us see that religion is preeminently a personal thing, something that must be individualized.

It is not, what do others think of Christ, but what do I? I am a unit among thousands. The great question for me is, How shall I be saved? How shall I escape the perdition of ungodly men? How shall I go up to Heaven and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb? These are the great personal questions of life. There are many paths opening before us, but only one for me to the skies.

"A thousand ways in ruin end:
One only leads to joys on high;
By that my willing steps ascend,
Pleased with a journey to the sky."

The rebuke naturally suggests that we should not carelessly make others our standard of religion, character, and conduct. Here is one who is a member of the church, but is very careless of attendance upon Christian duties and ordinances; half the time he is absent from the church; but "What is that to

thee?” Here is another who is a mere idler in the field. He does nothing, and gives but little; and you say, looking at him, “Why should I be always working and giving?” But “What is that to thee?” Be not slothful because another lags. Go, work in the vineyard, though others idle in the marketplace; their indolence will never excuse your inactivity. Here is another, a professor of religion, but he is of the world; no difference can be seen between him and the veriest lover of pleasure. But “What is that to thee?” You have your rule: “Be not conformed to this world.” “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” How do you know that those over whom you are stumbling will ever reach the Kingdom of Heaven? Paul writes: “Many walk, of whom I tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.”

How touching that closing scene in Pilgrim’s Progress, where Christian says he saw Ignorance come up to the gate of the Celestial City and knock. “Then the man looked over the gate and asked, ‘Whence come you, and what would you have?’ He answered, ‘I have eat and drunk in the presence of the King, and he has taught in our streets.’ Then they asked him for his certificate, that he might go in and show it to the King. So he fumbled in his bosom for one, and found none. Then they took him up, and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the hill, and put him in there. Then I saw that there was a way to hell even from the gates of Heaven.”

How solemn are those words of Christ: “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?” The saddest of all the great company of mourners in that great day, surely, will be those who have dreamed that all was well, and, too late, discover that life has been one great mistake; “as a dream when one awaketh,” so shall it be with them. Oh! “let us fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

Once more, consider the great call. It is Christ who sends it forth: “Come to me; follow me.” It came to Peter now, as it had come often before: “Follow thou me.” And whither was Jesus going? To the right hand of His Father, to Heaven, to the glory that awaited Him. Thither, too, was Peter to come; but not now. The ways of Master and disciple seemed for the time to diverge. One was going to an infinite blessedness, to the joyous company of Heaven; the other to trials, to his cross at last, and, through tribulations and

martyrdom, to glory. The ways separated, but beyond the cloud they were to meet again. A few more struggles, days of toil and nights of weeping, and the path mounts above the cloud and storm into the eternal sunshine. So must we follow Jesus, through tribulations, to the cross, at last to Heaven.

“The way to bliss lies not on beds of down,
And he that had no cross, deserves no crown.”

14. The Widows Mites. Luke 21:1-4

“And he looked up and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all. For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God; but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.” Luke 21:1-4.

THIS IS the simple record of a pious deed performed hundreds of years ago in the city of Jerusalem, but which yet liveth in its memory and speaketh in its example. Perhaps no one in the crowd noticed that poor woman as she came modestly to put her gift into the treasury of the temple. But there was one eye saw the coin that dropped from that humble hand, and the record is on high, and that poor widow is had in ever lasting remembrance.

The treasury was a part of the Jewish Temple, devoted to the reception of gifts consecrated to religious purposes. At the time to which the text refers the Saviour had been sitting near it, answering the cavils of the Scribes and Sadducees till they were completely silenced. As Jesus sat over against the treasury the people came and went, some of the rich casting of their gifts into the treasury, but nothing is said. He mused and was silent. But when this poor widow came and cast in her two mites, there was something in that humble offering that broke the current of his thoughts, and calling his disciples, He directed their attention to that humble gift and giver, for He saw under that garb of poverty a sincere and loving heart. And that poor woman, unnoticed by the gay and flashing throng, must have a place in the memory of coming generations. And now, when the gorgeous temple has passed away, and the magnificent city is in ruins, desolation in her streets, and solitude in her palaces, that simple act of piety lives through the ages, fresh and beautiful as ever. And the little group, that day gathered in the temple, is fixed in a moral picture to be gazed at with admiration through all generations of men.

How imperishable is the memorial of goodness! Here it is in the Bible. A leaf from the history of the past is wafted to us, and yet, borne on the breath of ages, it becomes a heritage in all the dwellings of the church and all the homes of the world. Let us look at this moral picture, catch its spirit and beauty, and profit by its suggestions.

It suggests, among other things, that there is much spiritual beauty and goodness in the world that is not seen and has no record on earth. But for the eye of Jesus no one would have noticed the self-denying act of this poor woman. And so all over the world there blossom unseen some flowers of Eden. It is so in the natural world. There are wonders and beauties of God upon earth that no human eye has seen. There are floods of sunshine flung over the broad sweep of untrodden deserts, rivers that wander through voiceless regions, cataracts that hymn forever their praise in the deep solitudes, and sweet flowers that no eye has ever seen. Yes, amid Alpine peaks you will find some delicate snow-drop, untouched by frost, and in the bosom of the avalanche some lonely crocus, unburied by the wintry snows. And so there is much of spiritual beauty unnoticed by the busy world. Many a pious family like that of Bethany, enclosed in the sacredness of secluded virtue; many a poor widow like the one in Jerusalem, with almost sainted piety unknown on earth, but registered in heaven; many a devout Cornelius, whose prayers and alms have gone up as a memorial before God. And it is refreshing to know that amid all that is saddening in a world lying in sin there are everywhere the Lord's hidden ones, and when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, they also shall appear with Him in glory. Yes, when the Lord shall return to make up his jewels, from many an unknown place on earth shall they go up to take their place and crown before the throne of God.

Looking at this picture, it reveals the spiritual test of men and their actions.

As Jesus sat over against the Temple treasury, He noted that poor widow as she put her mites into the box. He saw under that garb of poverty the riches of faith and sacrifice. We have here Christ's estimate of genuine goodness. It is not so much in the outward deed or gift, as in the faith and sacrifice of the doer and giver. One may give much and it may cost him little; another may give little and it may cost him all.

How pure and simple is the goodness of this widow in Israel. She leaves her humble home, and modestly presses her way through the crowd to cast

her mites into the treasury of her country and her God. She had no thought beyond the simple gift to the temple. To her loving heart, the consciousness of devotion to God, the whisper of an approving conscience, was more than the echoing fame of ages. That heartfelt joy in that sincere gift of her love was more than all the blandishments of human praise, more than all the honors of the world.

This is goodness in its own sweet beauty, apart from all the fascinations of the senses and shows of the world. It is to this Christ points in the text, as something most pleasing and acceptable to Him. It was the feeling that beautified the gift. You may remember that you have often been most grateful for the simplest token of affection, while the glitter of the costliest gifts have fallen coldly on your eye. The purest love mostly chooses the simplest symbols. It knows that no price of pearls can equal its own richness. Thus more affection has been expressed by a flower, or some simple token, than by diamonds and rubies.

The Saviour commends this woman, in the humble walks of life so modest, so pure and unselfish, so unconscious of any outward show or pretension, going up to place her little sum in the treasury, and returning unnoticed to her humble home. He seems to say to us, "Strive not merely to seem, but to be good; to have within the principle, the life of genuine goodness, nourished from within and from above, that can pray and work for Christ, and give when there is no human eye to see, nor tongue to praise that pure and simple piety which, conscious of God's favor, can be happy in retirement, and sing.

"Nor ask a witness of her song,
Nor thirst for human praise."

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

And then notice the cost and self-sacrifice of her gift. She was a widow, left alone to struggle in the world, with none to share her toils and sorrows. She was poor, so poor that two mites, the earnings of her toil, exhausted all she had. And yet she comes from her poor and solitary home, with her two mites, the hard earnings of her hands, and puts them into the treasury. And she does this, not from some great excitement of the feelings or sudden impulse of piety, but from the calm, pure principle of love and duty. A person with some object of suffering before him to move his feelings, or

under some impassioned appeal or great excitement, might, from the strong impulses of the moment, give beyond his means. But it was not so in this case. There was nothing to arouse, unduly, her feelings, no great popular excitement. She came quietly to make her contribution to the Lord. The money in the treasury was appropriated to the repairs and sacrifices of the temple. The temple was to her the outward symbol of her God and religion. Her most religious ideas and feelings, therefore, were centered in the solemn pile.

This act was one purely of devotion to God. Under the impulse of a pure and simple piety, she takes the last farthing of her earnings and lays it upon the altar of God when there was no human eye to see, and none to know, the sacrifice and self-denial of her pious offering. Oh! it was this, the motive and the cost of those two mites, that made this act so pure and heavenly. It was a beam of Heaven's own goodness shining out from that poor heart and humble home. It seemed like a sweet surprise even to the Saviour. It was like one in some bleak mountain height suddenly coming upon a beautiful flower. Dr. Kane says he found, in one of his Arctic voyages, a little flower under a glacier, and was more delighted with it than by the most gorgeous bloom of a summer garden, because that delicate little flower grew beneath the cold shadows of eternal ice-cliffs. So piety, as it blossoms out of the cold hardships and toils of poverty, seems more beautiful than the same goodness in the summer of prosperity. Such was the piety of this poor widow.

Who among us can look upon this picture without a feeling of shame and self-condemnation? We are the disciples of the same Saviour, and animated by the same love to Jesus and His church. But when or where have we made an offering like this poor widow's? We have given our service and our contributions to the cause of Christ, but where have we denied ourselves a luxury or a comfort to do this? How much has it cost us? Who can look at this woman, putting her last farthing into the treasury of the temple, and not feel rebuked by her noble and self-sacrificing piety?

Shall we, brethren, for whom Christ died and rose again, and upon whom he has entailed the blessings of salvation and the glory of an eternal heaven; shall we give Him, in time and labor and gifts, only that which costs us nothing? God forbid!

Let us try to imitate, in some measure, the devotion, the self-sacrifice of this poor widow. Let us deny ourselves, and take up our cross and follow

Jesus. Let us feel this infinite debt of love:

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

This case suggests that we can do good in the Kingdom of Christ, however poor, feeble, or obscure we may be. In the great work of extending the Redeemer’s kingdom, nothing of right endeavor is useless, and nothing of the humblest work is lost. God judges of liberality, not by the gift in the hand, but by the grace in the heart; not by what a man can do, but by what he is willing to do. The mite which comes from a gracious heart is more than the costliest gifts which come from mere show and vanity.

According to this principle, the Saviour said of this widow that what she gave (about the one-third of a cent) was more than all the rest. It came from a sincere and loving heart, and it was all she had to give, all her living.

Those two mites! They were heavy with her toil and her prayers and her self-denial, and so, as they fell into the treasury, they rang in the ear of Heaven. It was the cost of those mites to her; it was the motive, the spirit, the loving heart, that consecrated the gift, and made it rich in the sight of Heaven. And here comes out the beauty of the Scriptural lesson. Small means, humble efforts, are exalted by the motive. Such deeds, wrought by faithful men and women in the spirit of love and duty, are their two mites; all they have, even all their living, and are counted in the treasury of imperishable good.

But not only are small gifts little services in the right spirit acceptable to God, but they actually accomplish great good. Look at the widow’s gift! How have those mites grown to an immense harvest. She gave not only to the Temple at Jerusalem, but to every Christian temple under heaven, whose foundations have since been laid. By a single act of self-denial, she has been charitable to the whole world. Truly, she did cast in more than they all. And, generally, it is not great but small things, not imposing, but humble deeds, that make up the sum of good influence. The mites and farthings are more than the shekels and talents. It is not a few splendid gifts, but countless small ones, that support the great benevolent operations of the day. A deluge does not water the earth, but the tender roots spring under the fine drops of the universal rain. The mighty floods you see holden in midair

went up in in visible drops upon the sunbeams, and it is but a slow perspiring from the hills that supplies the earth's exhaust-less fountains.

Look at the great streams of benevolence, Bible, tract, missionary, and education societies. These great streams are fed by small contributions all over the Church. Like the great rivers that start in the mountains, they gather countless tributaries, and then roll on to the sea, bearing the commerce of nations. So we see the importance of little gifts from all at all times. What you can do and give becomes a part of the great movement of Christianity for the conversion of the world.

“The mites my willing hands can give
At Jesus' feet I lay;
Grace shall the bumble gift receive,
And grace at large repay.”

There is something in this case to stimulate every Christian to deeds of pure and self-denying goodness. As Jesus sat over against the treasury he saw a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. One of the old philosophers recommended his pupils, as an incentive to worthy conduct, to imagine some great character as looking upon them; but what is the eye of Cato to that of Jesus?

The eye of Jesus is ever upon us, and He sees what we do and what we give as truly as in this instance. That sympathy which you felt for some poor sufferer when you had no power to help, he noted as true charity. Those deeds done in secrecy and silence; that cup of cold water given to a disciple; that gift cast unnoticed into the treasury of the Lord; those yearnings of your heart to good when the hand had nothing to give. All Jesus has seen. Yes; the humble deed and little gift or service flowing from a loving heart and self-sacrificing spirit, these are more beautiful to the eye of Jesus than many a proud achievement whose praise rings round the world. Who would not rather have even the earthly fame of this poor widow than the glory of Napoleon or Alexander? Who would not choose her place in heaven? And let no one say, with this beautiful incident of the Gospel before him, that he is too humble and too poor to gain much dignity or glory in the Kingdom of Christ. I come to such and say, that in true living, in pure and self-denying goodness, every one may attain the highest nobility and grandeur known on earth or in heaven: that in purity of heart and self-denying goodness in the humblest walks of life they may gather as

much of heavenly grace and glory as in the hour of martyrdom. Is it not enough for him who is poor, for him who is neglected and sorrowful, that he may be pure and good and happy for ever, that from his humble home and scanty fare and surrounding tribulation, he may look up and say: "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" "All else may fail; my heart and flesh may faint, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Look once more at this poor widow, shrinking in the crowd of the ostentatious and rich, and dropping the two mites from her trembling hand; how she stands out now before all ages! How grand those faded garments look! Christ has honored her, and a halo of brightness is around her for evermore, and her faith is known in all the world. You see how religious faith can dignify and ennoble the humblest life.

The great fact to be considered is not our lot in life, but what we make out of it. Let us, then, each accept the lot assigned us, simply to do the best we can in it and with it.

Wait not, then, for great occasions. The present moment, and the mite you can contribute as it passes, are your all. For, rightly viewed, what is the present moment but the index on the dial-plate, forever moving, till it makes up your whole life!

The whole of Christian duty, then, is compressed in one simple direction: "Do all you can for Christ from a pure motive *now*." Thus, inconsiderable as your actions may appear to men, like the widow's mite they will be great in the eye of heaven; and, though they attract not the admiration of the world, they will secure your eternal peace.

When Christ comes, and all men shall stand before Him in judgment, He will say to you before an assembled world, "Come, ye blessed of my Father; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many; enter into the joys of your Lord.

15. Christ's Sigh. Mark 7:34.

“And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.”
Mark 7:34.

WHEN CHRIST walked the paths of life, he drew around Him the sick and suffering. Matthew tells us, in general, that when he returned from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon unto the Sea of Galilee, “Great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet, and He healed them.”

Among this multitude of blind, maimed, and dumb thronging the Saviour’s path as he passed through the coasts of Decapolis, there was one case of peculiar interest that caught the eye of Mark. He reproduces the scene in all its particulars, giving us a description of his miraculous cure. It is the case of one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech.

The Saviour was ever ready to help. His heart was ever responsive to human suffering, his hand ever ready to save and bless. Of Him it may in truth be said, “He went about doing good.”

“He lived in deeds, not words; in thoughts, not years.” Christ during his earthly ministry healed all manner of diseases; but this was only incidental to his higher spiritual mission. He had come, the Divine Healer of the deeper and more fatal malady of sin, the great Physician of the soul. And while all physical evils fled at his command, and vanished at His touch, He sought thus to reveal His heart of compassion for the diseased and imperilled soul, and his power to save unto the uttermost. So that these works of healing upon the body were but types or symbols of His miracles of mercy for the soul.

Here is one brought to Him for his healing, bereft of two bodily senses. This poor man was deaf. The sense of hearing is one of the main inlets of knowledge and enjoyment — one of the sweetest bonds of communion with our fellow-men. When this sense is closed the soul is shut in from all the sounds of rejoicing nature, the breathing of love and friendship, and the

sweet melody of music. To such an one all nature is mute and all beings dumb. There is a feeling of isolation and loneliness, and there steals over the spirit a pensive sadness and depression. Surely, it is a great deprivation. To the loss of the sense of hearing, in this case, was added the loss of the faculty of speech. Language is a divine gift. The power of communicating by intelligent and articulate sounds our thoughts and feelings and wants, is one of God's most wise and beneficent arrangements.

But this poor man was dumb, or, at least, his faculty of speech was so greatly impaired as to render its exercise painful, if not useless. There is something affecting in the sight of a mute. All beings, all things, all events, seem to have a language, but the mute stands apart, insulated from his fellows. There may be in the deep recesses of his soul great thoughts, tender feelings, and holy sympathies welling up, but for these there is no utterance. How touching the musings of a mother over her dumb and only child—

“Oh! if she could but hear
For one short hour, till I her tongue might teach
To call me mother.”

And then as she watched that child in her long silence,

“I've watched her looking up
To the bright wonder of a sunset sky,
With such a depth of meaning in her eye
That I could almost hope
The bursting soul would break its binding cords,
And the long pent-up thoughts flow forth in words.”

This man, thus afflicted, deaf and dumb, they brought to Jesus, and besought Him to put his hands upon him.

Notice next the miracle performed by Christ. The method in this case was peculiar.

“And he took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers into his ear, and He spit, and touched his tongue.”

Manifestly there was no natural connection between the process and the result. If there was any virtue in that touch, it was because it was the finger

of God; if any power in that “Ephphatha” that unsealed the deaf ear, it was because it was the word of Him who in the beginning said: “Let there be light, and there was light.” The reason for this particular method may be found in the person on whom the miracle was performed. As this man was brought by his friends, it is likely he knew little, if anything, about Christ. It was, therefore, needful that the manner of his healing should be so ordered as to lead him to behold in the healer his Divine Lord.

Hence Christ took him aside from the multitude, that, removed from all outward distraction, the man’s mind might be fixed upon Christ. When alone, the Saviour addressed him through those senses which were left, sight and touch. Therefore Christ touched his tongue and put his fingers into his ears, thus indicating to the man that He was about to act on those organs. He looked up to Heaven, and by that upward glance of the eye informed the man that the healing power came from above, even from God.

We see why the Saviour used this particular process in the miracle. It was not enough for Him to heal the body; He must reach the soul. That opened ear must hear the voice of the Son of God, and that loosened tongue utter the praises of the Lord. But how shall this end be accomplished? The man is deaf, and, comparatively, dumb. In this way: The Redeemer, in adopting this method, seems to say, ‘I will speak to him through the senses left; sight and touch shall be instrumental in carrying the truth to his yet darkened soul.’

How wonderful the condescension of Jesus! How manifestly was it the great mission of His life to seek and to save the lost:

“To preach glad tidings to the poor,
Was His divine employ.”

There is one peculiarity in this miracle worthy of special notice. As Christ was about to speak the healing word, it is said: “And looking up to Heaven, he sighed.” This is strange.

If there is a moment of pure, heartfelt joy in life, it is when we have the disposition and the power to relieve human suffering. We know, too, how sad and painful it is to witness one of our fellows in great affliction, when we can do nothing but weep and pray. To look upon a sick child, to watch its agony as it tosses to and fro, and feel helpless, what anguish is this! Oh!

that we had but the power to alleviate that pain, to give a moment's rest; but we can only look on, and suffer with the sufferer.

You know with what secret, undefinable joy we witness what has been done for the blind and dumb. With what pleasure we have gone to the asylum to see the child learning to read the Bible with its fingers, and the mute to give out his hidden thoughts by signs and writing. It is cheering to think that, to the blind and dumb, inaccessible through the eye and speech, there may yet be given, through other avenues, all the illumination which hath flashed in these last days from the "Father of lights."

Now, if any of us had the power, with what joy and exultation would we speak the word which should give sight to the blind and speech to the dumb. And yet the Redeemer, at the very moment when about to deliver this afflicted man, seems sad and sorrowful. He looked up to Heaven and sighed when about to utter the word "Ephphatha;" i. e., Be opened.

What an insight this gives into the Saviour's life, as one of prevailing sadness; what a testimony to the scriptural representation that he was a "man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief." If at any time His spirit would be joyful, surely, when about to give speech and hearing to this afflicted man, He would be happy. If at any time a good man forgets his own sorrows, it is when able to relieve the suffering and comfort the mourner. But even here Christ is sad. He sighs, even when giving joy and gladness to others. Ah! he was acquainted with grief. Not only at times, not only when bearing reproach and mockery, not only in the garden and on the cross, but from the cradle to the grave, His whole life was a sacrifice. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, so that the few intervals that ought to have been bright and joyous were shaded and sad. He sighed, even when saying, "Ephphatha — Be opened."

But let us look at this a little more closely. Looking up to heaven, He sighed. It was a sigh awakened by the ravages of sin. In that deaf and dumb man at His feet He sees the humanity He had originally cast into a perfect mold, bruised and crushed, its organs impaired, its beauty marred, its nature tainted. Ah! He could not look upon the wrecks of sin without a sigh. That poor man before Him was but a specimen. The whole world had become a great hospital of the sick and dying, this earth but a vast burying-ground. And that physical deafness and dumbness was but a type of deeper and more fatal spiritual maladies, of the thousands who are spiritually deaf and dumb, who are deaf to the calls of God, and whose lips, cold and dumb,

never lisp the praises of the Lord. Ah! Christ could not behold the dreadful ravages of sin, He could not look upon His own image in man, so marred, so polluted, so ruined, without deep emotion heaving His bosom and breathing from His lips.

And when you, my Christian friend, sigh over sin, sin in others, sin in yourselves, be assured your holy sigh, as it rises, meets and blends with that of your Saviour. But, besides, there may have been reasons connected with the individual to be healed which caused Christ to sigh as He was about to perform this miracle. It may be He saw that this very man, for whose affliction He was touched with compassion, and upon whom he was about to exert his healing power, would not, when healed, use the opened ear to hear the Gospel, would not employ the loosened tongue to confess his Lord or speak His praise. O! if there could be sighs in heaven, He would still sigh and weep over those for whom he died, but who heed not his call,

“And rather choose in sin to die
Than lend an ear to mercy’s voice.”

Again, there may have been something in the dangerousness of the faculty he was about to bestow upon the man that made him sigh. It was language. He knew the power of speaking was specially the power of sinning; that no member was so difficult of control and so liable to offend as the tongue. James says: “The tongue is a fire; a world of iniquity. Every kind of beast is tamed, but the tongue can no man tame.” “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.” It was a perilous gift. It may help us to keep the door of our lips to remember that Christ sighed when restoring this faculty. When tempted to use the tongue for base and ignoble purposes, remember that Christ, in bestowing the faculty of speech upon this man, could not do it without indicating how perilous was the gift. He sighed, before he could bring himself to say to the deaf and dumb man, “Ephphatha: Be opened.”

This miracle affords encouragement to Christians to bring their children and friends to Christ in prayer, in the arms of faith, for His blessing. This man did not come of himself. There is no evidence that he had faith in Christ’s power to heal. His relatives or friends brought him to Christ, and besought Him to put His hands on him. Here the faith was not in the person healed, but in those who brought him. We may have children and friends who are spiritually deaf and dumb. If afflicted in body, how would they

enlist our sympathy and prayers! It is sad to behold one deaf, to whom no sound of all the voices of nature ever comes; to look on one dumb, who can never speak the thoughts and emotions that swell within. But sadder still is it to see one who is deaf to the voice of God, to the invitation of his Father, to the love of Christ; sadder still, the tongue that never lisped the name of Jesus.

Oh, my Christian friends, encouraged by this example, let us take our loved ones to Jesus, that their ears may be opened, and their tongues unloosed; that God may put a new song into their mouths, even praises to God.

We see how Jesus has recognized and consecrated the sighs of the Church. If Christ sighed, it is not sinful for his disciples to sigh. A sigh is often the expression of a holy desire, the utterance of a heart-breathed prayer. It has a meaning and an eloquence before God. For those who sigh over the wickedness of the world, there is favor from God. When the abominations of Jerusalem were great, God commanded the man with the ink-horn to go through Jerusalem, “and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof.” Yes, sometimes we can do little but mourn over the abominations of sin, and sigh, and pray over our sins, and the sins of those we love. But think not you are alone, that there are no responsive echoes awakened by your feelings. Take your sighs to Jesus, and if this is the only language you can command in giving vent to your sorrow, or expression to your want, employ it, and wait in hope God’s answer.

“A sigh can reach his heart;
A look can bring him down from heaven.”

In conclusion, let the sweet words uttered by the wondering spectators of this miracle find a ready response in every Christian heart. “He hath done all things well.”

Yes, from first to last, from the cradle to the grave, from the first cry for mercy to the first song in glory, let this be the inspiration and the chorus of all our songs of praise, “He hath done all things well.” These people waited until they saw the miracle of deliverance, before they gave utterance to this. It was easy then. But, even when the man was deaf and dumb, it was just as true.

Let us strive for grace to say this, even when afflictions are upon us, when the sky is dark and the storm is loudest, knowing that all is guided and controlled by the hand of God: Even then, "He hath done all things well."

It must be so, for Jesus can do nothing wrong. The difficulty is, that we are not fully in sympathy with Christ when He sighed.

Too often we sigh and look within; Jesus sighed and looked without. We sigh, and look down; Jesus sighed, and looked up. We sigh, and look to earth; Jesus sighed, and looked to heaven. We sigh, and look to man; Jesus sighed, and looked to God!

Study the ways of His Providence with the eye of faith; view them in every light; in their, minutest detail, as you would the petal of a flower, or the wing of an insect, and oh! what wonders, what beauty, what marvelous adaptations would you see in all the varied dealings of your glorious Lord! And when the next cloud darkens, and the next mist throws its veil around you, you will hope fully exclaim, "He hath done all things well." And hopefully dawns the solemn, yet blissful moment, when the last sigh will heave your breast; when, freed from sin and sorrow, you shall realize the magnificent picture of the far-seeing prophet; when the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Then—

"To Him who washed us in His blood
And made us kings and priests to God;
Hosanna, we will ever sing,
And make the heavenly arches ring.
Above the rest this note shall swell,
"My Jesus hath done all things well!"

16. Hagar, The Mother.

Gen. 21:17-18.

“And the angel of God called to Hagar out of Heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.” Gen. 21:17-18.

THERE is something very simple and touching in some of these old stories of the Bible. Hagar is ordered to leave the patriarchal tent; and with her domestic ties crushed and her heart bleeding, she goes forth a homeless wanderer in the wide world. There was one tie, however, which was not broken, and in her lonely exile in the wilderness she clasped her child to her almost broken heart, and, in the warmth of that one love left her, almost forgot her exile and her sorrow.

As she traveled on in the desert, around her the wide waste of sand and over her the burning sky, the child drooped and languished, and opened his parched lips and cried for water. In utter despair she bore him tenderly on, and laid him in the faint shadow of a desert shrub, and then turned away with that touching plaint of nature: “Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice and wept.”

“God stay thee in thine agony, my boy!
I cannot see thee die; I cannot brook
Upon thy brow to look
And see death settle on my cradle joy!”

God heard the cry of that sorrowing mother, and revealed to her tearful eyes a well of water in the desert. She gave the fainting child the cooling draught, and bathed his brow until he smiled

“In his reviving happiness, and lisp’d
His infant thought of gladness, at the sight
Of the cool plashing of his mother’s hand.”

That lonely mother, in that wide waste, laid the child down to die, and over her yearning heart came the dark cloud of oblivion and despair. But, no. A voice breaks from the gloomy sky and startles the hopeless mother:

“Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.”

That Egyptian woman, in that dim patriarchal age, in the solitudes of Beersheba, with her yearning heart for her child and God’s answer to her cry, is the type of every true mother. She may not, like Hagar, be exiled from her home; she may not have the hardships of the desert; but often, in her conscious weakness to meet her responsibilities, will she cry to Heaven for help. And, as for Hagar, so for every praying mother, there will come the answer of help and guidance.

I wish to speak of this first and holiest of human relations. The maternal: the mother and the child. The importance of this relation is evident from the fact that the mother first wakens in the child the sentiment of love.

All things, with us, begin with a feeling, next enlarge to an idea, then take the form of action. And, much as we may regret the want of early mental training, it is a greater loss to want the growth of love. It is a sad thing to be born, and yet not into a happy home; to lack the caresses, the fondness, the love, which, above all else earthly, the child needs. The cheeks which feel no touch of love, which no mother kisses, have always a sad look. What sad faces one sees in asylums for orphans. It is more fatal to neglect the heart than the head.

It is the mother’s office to waken first the feeling of love in the child. To every little child in the beginning this earth is without form and void; and the first great light that God brings out of the darkness is the face of its mother, and the first sound that ever enters the silent sea of the infant soul is the voice of the mother as she bends over it; and the first sound the mother hears breaking out of that silence is more to her than the great harmonies that were heard when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

Yes, mothers, your heart is the first Paradise to every little child God gives you. He finds there the fruits and flowers of his earliest human world. You first unlock his heart and awaken his first smile. To you he clings with his first idea of dependence; and, embosomed in that first love, he feels happy without a fear or care.

So this first mother-love is the strongest thing and the last thing that can be lost from his heart. Through all after life it carries him back with sweet memories to his first home. However hardened by the sins of life, he never becomes wholly insensible to that first love. The face that bent over his cradle looks in through the shadows of time. And however hardened by the rough contacts of the world, or even by sin, he will feel the touch of that mother's hand as he knelt by her side to lisp his first prayers. The very memory of his mother, like a charm, will calm his passions and softly restrain his wayward impulses.

A most remarkable illustration of this early love is seen in the touching story of a mother and her idiot child. A poor widow in the North of England had an only son, and he was an idiot. He seemed wholly destitute of mind. But there was one ray left to guide him, one ligament of life to which he clung. He trusted in the love of his mother. His whole occupation, as he sat upon the ground, was to swing backward and forward, singing in a low pathetic voice an unmeaning strain. Thus day by day he sang his strange, sad song, and clung to his mother's presence. When that mother died the boy was found sitting by her side holding her hands, swinging and singing his old song in most pitiful tones. It was the only way he could speak his loss. When the neighbors spoke to him he looked up with a tear in his eye, clasped the cold hand more tenderly, and sung in a softer and sadder key. "Poor boy," said the friends, "what shall we do with him?" At that moment he lifted the dust from the floor, sprinkled it over his head, and broke out anew with a clear, mournful, heart-piercing pathos, in his old song. Ah! the only ray of light left to linger in that dark, chaotic mind, was the sense of a mother's love. Oh! what a holy charge is that of a mother's! What a princely power her love to mold and shape and develop the new-born mind!

How absolute the mother's control over the mind and heart of the child. Her thoughts and words and precepts are imbibed as nutriment, and become assimilated into the whole character. Thus she does a work which no mere system of instruction can accomplish, because she has the aid of the affections. She weaves the warp of truth into the woof of love. Her

teachings are to the child as the sunshine and the air which he enjoys without being conscious of the powers which they nourish.

Consider this, that the mother watches by the earliest springs of thought, and molds their channels and directs their courses; that she unfolds the first germs of love and inweaves the first sentiments, and thus fashions the heart and gives direction to an immortal soul. Yes, she impresses her own image and inbreathes her own spirit into the child, yet plastic and ductile; so that the mother foreordains the destiny of the child.

O mother, mother, name of the earliest relationship, symbol of the divine tenderness, how does your mystic influence, imparted from the soft pressure and the undying smile, weave itself through all the brightness and darkness of our after life! All men feel it. The statesman, hero, philanthropist, the soldier by the camp-fires or on the edge of battle, the sailor on the high and giddy mast, murmurs the name of mother next to God's! In life's greatest duties and perils men look back and feel the power of some remembered time when, as timid little children, they knelt by a mother's side in prayer, and, from looks of love and simple words of prayer, first learned piety at home.

No wonder Paul exhorts, "Let them learn first to show piety at home; for out of the home comes the elements that make society, government, the Church."

Home is the sanctuary of childhood, and the mother is the priestess of that temple of our earliest education. Wherever it exists, on the plains of Idumaea, or in the deep forests of the great West, under the roof of the Christian or the tent of the Arab, there are the roots of social and religious life.

As an illustration I take the scene sketched by Jeremiah 7:18:

"The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger."

This is the picture of a heathen family. There is one spirit in the house, and they are all engaged in a common work. The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, the women prepare the cakes for an offering, and the queen of heaven receives it as the joint sacrifice of the whole family. The worship is family worship. The God of one is the God of all; the spirit of

one is the spirit of all. And so it is with all family transactions and feelings. They ordinarily implicate the whole circle of the house, father and mother, sons and daughters. There is a common spirit and life and practice. This has been called the organic unity of the family.

Now, where the house has a domestic spirit of grace dwelling in it, the home becomes the church of childhood. There is the atmosphere of faith and love and prayer and holiness, all glowing about the young soul. This warm and genial nurture infuses the very life of piety into the child, embosoming the young immortal in the very love of God. Thus it grows into the nurture of the Lord as naturally as a spring flower opens its beauty and fragrance to the sun and air.

What most we want is piety at home, mothers to make an atmosphere of godly influence.

Now, the mother is to educate the child. At first it is held in her arms, a passive thing; it opens into conscious life under the smile of the mother, whose spirit streams into its soul, through the eyes and ears, and by the warm contact and sympathy of her love. Then there is the dawn of intelligence and the first pulses of love. Then words of prayer. Then the mother's will is expressed in command, which the loving child can no more resist than the violet can cool the summer sun, or the tattered leaf can tame the hurricane. And so the child, taught the great truths of the Bible about Jesus and salvation, grows up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Such an one was Timothy:

“From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Mother, put back the golden hair from the brow of that bright-faced boy; that face yet undisturbed by guilt or care, serene as heaven. How your heart yearns in prayer that God would bless the boy. Can you think it possible that placid face should flash with anger; that sweet voice break out in curses; that tender countenance be bloated with drunkenness! Alas!

And yet there is a mother who could tell you of two bright boys. She laid her hands in blessing on their heads. They mingled in her happiest dreams of the future. But one died in his youth, and her heart quivered with anguish as she laid him, with his sunny brow, in his little grave. The other grew up to manhood, but he came a prodigal in sin and shame. Ah! if that mother

could have foreseen the future, would she not rather, a thousand times, have laid him beside the other, in his green and silent bed? Ah, yes!

How solemn the charge, "Train up a child in the way he should go." Every mother should hear the voice of God saying: "Take this child and nurse it for me;" and then train the tender soul, repeating daily to herself, It is for God and eternity. How easily the lightest touch may turn it aside. The absence of an holy example in your life, some sin, may turn the scale.

"The child
That shuts within its breast a bloom for heaven
May take a blemish from the breath of love,
And bear the blight forever."

I think it must be evident that what we need above everything else in human agency is the pious home, mothers in the true sense. We want virtuous citizens and God-fearing statesmen and rulers. The Church wants ministers and missionaries with a Christ-like spirit and a Paul-like zeal. And they must come from Christian homes, where mothers like Mary keep watch. Oh! if mothers could lift the veil and catch a glimpse of the future, and realize that in the secret springs of the nursery and the home they are determining what that future shall be, it seems to me they would be inspired with a holy zeal and enthusiasm to lay their children upon the altars of the Church and their country. If the three millions of mothers in this land were in the earnestness and faith and prayer of Christian love, devoted to this work of Christian nurture, what tongue could tell, what imagination conceive, the vast and beneficent results to the Church and the world.

Here I wish to speak a word of encouragement. And first of all, do not be discouraged if your boy has a heavy foot, a loud voice, a great appetite, a boisterous way altogether. These may be elements to make a great and useful man. Do not try so much to break his robust and noisy way, as to guide aright those impulses. Dr. Kane, in childhood, was full of boisterous energy, climbing trees and roofs, projecting himself against all obstacles, until he got the name of being the worst boy in town; but that very boisterous energy, rightly directed, made him the daring adventurer, bearding the ice king in his own domain, and leaving a name second to none in Arctic exploration.

So Sydney Smith, as a boy, was a marvel of boisterous clamor. But when that voice set itself to be heard in the *Edinburgh Review*, it roused a whole

kingdom. Let the mother guide youthful impulses, not crush them.

And, then, let the mother feel that her lessons from the word of God put into the mind of the child, the kindly words, the solemn prayers, all will tell upon the future manhood or womanhood of the child. There is no labor for souls and Christ that is so certain of good results as that a mother spends upon her child.

What, after his genius, stands foremost in the life of Byron? There can be only one answer, his utter want of faith in woman. That one thing turned his whole life into wormwood and gall. He lost faith, first of all, in his mother. All through his childhood this subtle poison from the ill-temper and pride of his mother, entered into the very springs of life, and made him the most miserable of men. From his mother he took the subtle poison and bore the blight forever.

But, on the other hand, what is the foremost thing in Washington? His purity, his spotless, radiant integrity. No man believes that a letter, dispatch, or State paper will ever be found that will stain or shade the honor, truthfulness, or integrity of Washington. Among the few books his mother gave him when a boy was one on morals by Matthew Hale. The place in that book most dog-eared and soiled was the chapter on the final account we must all give for the deeds done in the body. Before that boy went out of his home, his mother took care to stamp the image and superscription of integrity deeply in his soul.

When Benjamin West was a boy, he made a sketch of his little sister in the cradle. His mother, when she saw the skill, kissed her boy. The renowned artist used to say, "that kiss of my mother made me a painter."

There are thousands saved who can make their own those touching words that Dr. Bethune wrote of his mother:

"And if I e'er in heav'n appear,
A mother's holy prayer,
A mother's hand and gentle tear,
That pointed to a Saviour dear,
Have led the wanderer there."

Mothers, you have a great work. To you, more than to the fathers, belong the care and responsibility; but to you, more than to them, belong also the joy and the great reward.

There is a picture that illustrates your position. It is of a mother who, with her infant child, has fallen from the deck of a vessel at sea. The wild billows dash about her and exhaust her strength. Yet still she clings to her infant and lifts him above the hungry billows, crying, "Save my child!" The waves grow wilder; the thick mists swim before her eyes; the sea now flings her close to the ship, then madly dashes her back. Still she only thinks of her child, and holds him aloft, crying, "Save my child!" And, lo! from that vessel a strong arm is reached down, and they are saved. So bear up in the arms of faith and prayer thy child, and a redeeming hand shall be reached down from heaven to save. If it should live, it will be to grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and bless the world. Or, if it should be gathered early, as a lamb, to the fold, you will feel a solemn gladness at the thought of your nursling now in heaven.

"Forever and forever,
There in a happy home;
And there to stay a little while
Till all the rest shall come;
To lie within the light of God,
Like a babe upon the breast,
And the wicked cease from troubling,
And the weary are at rest."

Let every mother, then, take her child and train it for God, and He will reward the laborer. He who heard the voice of Hagar in the desert, hears your prayer. He who guided the destinies of her child, will guide yours. You may not lead out an Ishmael upon this scene of life; you may not rear a Washington, or "leave your name —

Wrought out in marble, with a nation's tears
Of deathless gratitude; yet may you raise
A monument above the stars; a soul
Led by your teachings and your prayers to God!

17. Temptation. Matt. 6:13.

“And lead us not into temptation.” Matt. 6:13.

THERE IS A very obvious connection between the prayer for forgiveness and the petition of the text. It is natural that a prayer for pardon should be coupled with a sense of spiritual weakness. When under conscious guilt, we say, “Father, forgive us,” it is natural that with a keen sense of our weakness and a dread of returning to folly, we should pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

True penitence for the follies of the past implies a keen vigilance against the snares of the future. It was natural for the maniac of the mountain, when delivered from the power of Satan, to wish to remain with Jesus. And, when humbled and penitent for our sins, we plead for forgiveness, we dread a return to the snares and conflict of the world, lest we should fall from our steadfastness. Conscious of our weakness and need of Divine help, we utter the petition, “Lead us not into temptation.” So that the two petitions are inseparable: “Forgive; Lead.”

But what do we mean? Is man’s Maker, man’s tempter? The language seems at first repulsive to our feelings, as implicating the Divine goodness. Our heart instinctively revolts at the bare suspicion that God in any way leads men into sin. Hence, James, who was present and heard Christ give this formula of prayer, says, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.” In the sense of alluring men to sin, the thing is utterly impossible.

From the poverty of human language, however, many words have more than one meaning. Temptation is a word of this class. It means, often, the trying of a man’s character. God may permit his child to be enticed to sin by others, and he may allow him to be placed in circumstances where he will be tried in his faith and Christian virtue. So Adam and Joseph and David were permitted to be tempted by others. And so God tried Abraham. So he

tried Israel in the wilderness, to prove them, and to know what was in their hearts.

Let us look at the nature of this prayer considered in this sense. And I remark, it is not a prayer against temptation, that is, against the circumstances of temptation. For this would be a prayer against all our powers and opportunities. If a man should ask that he might never be liable to bodily pain, it would be essentially a petition that he might never experience bodily pleasure; for his prayer could be answered only by the destruction of those nerves which alike convey both sensations. If one should ask that his capability of seeing evil might be quenched, he would really ask for blindness; for the faculty of beholding the evil as well as the good is the very faculty of vision itself. And so following the analogy, I would say that to pray that we never may be tempted would be to pray that the circumstances of our present existence may have no moral significance for us. It would be a prayer that we may have no self-consciousness and no spiritual freedom. The ability to do right is the ability to do wrong. To pray, therefore, that we may not be liable to temptation, is to pray that we may never know or feel moral excellence, that we may put out the eye and paralyze the nerves of the soul. It would be to take away our moral nature and spiritual manhood, and make man as a brute, nay, as a planet driven and attracted upon the plane of an inevitable orbit.

It may be asked whether God could not have made man holy and happy without this tremendous exposure, without going through these battles of temptation. We need not perplex ourselves with these metaphysical questions, inasmuch as the blame is not in the fact of being tempted, but of yielding to temptation. Our nature may be feeble; and our circumstances may teem with evil suggestions, but we are not obliged to surrender. No necessity drives us to sin. We are encouraged by God and by every good thing to resist and stand fast; we are furnished with divine help, and our highest achievement is, by that help, in overcoming evil. When we yield to temptation, we do it freely.

Therefore we cannot pray that we may not be liable to temptation in this sense, or that we may not be tempted. We must not seek out temptation, nor rush heedlessly into it. Nay, we should do all we can honestly to avoid it. But when it lies directly in our path, and there is no escape, we dare not refuse it. To shrink from the battle, then, is moral cowardice. It is through many such scenes of conflict that the way lies to heaven. Nay, God sees

often that the only arena for the exercise of our strength and virtue is some stubborn fought field of sore trial and besetment.

“Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord.”

What, then, is the true meaning of the text? Some “have rendered this petition, Abandon us not to temptation.” This translation is sustained by good authority, and opens to us the real meaning. The spirit of this prayer, then, is not directed against the circumstances of temptation, but against its power and in behalf of our weakness. “Abandon us not to temptation.” We are in a world of evil suggestions and enticements; leave us not alone, O God, to meet them; give us ever Thy help and guidance; let us not go among its hosts unsheltered. “Lead us not into temptation;” let us not be ensnared by it; but lead us safely and victoriously through it.

The protest and supplication of the text are directed against temptations too strong. The prayer is a virtual urging of the promise, elsewhere given, that we shall not be tempted above what we are able to bear, and that with every temptation there shall be a way of escape.

Now look at the danger, whether temptation be either a solicitation to sin or a trial of our virtue. In either sense, or both, the occasions of temptation are continual and multiform. They open upon us everywhere, and we have always need of this prayer.

Our danger is, first, from our sinful nature. Even when converted, our spiritual convalescence is imperfect, slow, and tedious. “Elias was a man of like passions with us.” The best of men are but brands plucked from the burning, all charred with the fires through which they have passed, and readily rekindling at the slightest contact of the casual spark. We carry about us an internal enemy, an evil heart, ready to respond to the solicitations to evil from without.

We are told that the earth and every substance around us is full of the electric fluid, but we do not constantly perceive it. A little friction, however, brings out the latent spark. And so in the moral world, a slight collision, a single turn of some wheel in the social machinery, and there comes, like the electric spark, a flashing from the eye, a hasty word, perhaps a muttered oath, that sounds ominous as the tone of distant thunder. Just as a little friction of material substances brings out that hidden electric fire, the same

power that, gathering its tremendous forces, rolls through the heavens and rends the mountains in its might, so the little round of our daily cares and occupations, the humble mechanism of daily life, bring out those electric flashes of evil that lie hidden in our nature.

Now, with this lurking sin in the heart, man goes out into a world full of evil, full of enticements to us. Two conditions are indispensable to temptation, inclination and opportunity. If we are surrounded with facilities and have not the will, we are not tempted. If we are ever so much inclined to evil and have not the means, we are not tempted. No doubt a great deal that is called virtue is of this negative sort. Men are innocent of particular sins, because they are not attracted to those sins. But do they resist those to which they are attracted? Are they loyal to righteousness when both desire and occasion conspire against it? This is the test of virtue. Here it is that we are tempted.

Every man has his temptation. One condition is really no more exposed than another. We think otherwise. We may imagine that our condition is one of special trial, and that if we could only occupy our neighbor's sphere we should live better lives. This is all delusion. Every man and woman, every profession, every employment, every condition, has its peculiar temptations.

The minister, removed from the rough collisions of the world, has more subtle and perilous trials. The man of business meets temptations that are open, palpable, appreciable by all. In the retirement of home comes still another class of besetments. Everywhere opportunity and allurements lurk to betray the unwary. We are all exposed, each to his own special temptations.

The personal history of Christ himself is, in respect to temptation, representative of our own. It is so because, although He committed no sin, He was tempted as we are. But more than this, he was tempted in all points, as we are. The three attempts upon his spiritual integrity were in the three grades or spheres in which temptation assails us. Each temptation touched a different point in his condition, and although the specific forms of our trial are innumerable, they may all be generalized in three classes.

The first appeal of evil to the Saviour was a suggestion to appetite. Hungering as he was, it said to him: "Command that these stones be made bread." So temptation meets us and appeals to the lowest part of our being, our animal nature, our senses. How manifold the temptations here!

The next appeal to Christ was to his sense of personal consequence. Take away the circumstances and it is an appeal to selfishness. Do as you will, the whole universe is for you and will serve you. It matters not how it is with others, so you are gratified.

The tempter's last appeal was to ambition, that "last infirmity of noble minds." And here, too, we find our Lord subjected to solicitations in a part of His nature where we all have a notably weak side. To be lifted up above others, to exercise power upon men, to shine and be admired — how often, when we have escaped from the lower, baser snares of appetite and selfish greed, we are caught here. It seems noble and worthy to rise, to grasp influence, to be eminent for skill, knowledge, accomplishments, virtues, and we fall into the net.

And, then, see the strange alchemy of sin that makes God's best gifts occasions of temptation, and renders our very blessings a curse. Thus, a mother's kindness may injure the child on whom it is lavished. Friendship and kindred, and home and love, all may ensnare us. Health, in itself God's gift, may be a source of great temptation. The power of turning good into evil by our nature, is most tremendous and appalling. Aye, the blood of a rejected Saviour may be made by unbelief, the deadliest element in our present sin and in our coming woe. Resistance to the Holy Spirit may convert His ministerings of mercy into the foundation of the sin that hath no re mission before God.

And, then, in addition, to our own nature, and the world, the Bible tells us of the Great Adversary that goeth about seeking whom he may destroy. This spiritual, invisible enemy is a great adept in the dark tactics of sin. He sports with the imagination, and trifles with the conscience. Satan can misquote Scripture, and misinterpret Providence. He can assume the sage or sophist, or the form of an angel of light. And there is no season too holy for him to work his machinations of evil. When our Lord came up from His baptism, with cloud and voice and dove all attesting His divine mission, He was led away to be tempted of the Devil in the wilderness.

When Moses came down from the mount of Revelation, he met at the foot of the mount the idolatrous camp dancing round the golden calf. When the entranced apostles came from the mount of transfiguration they met with the scorn and cavils of unbelief. So it is. Our holiest times and seasons are not free. When we rise from our knees, evil suggestions rush into our hearts. When we go from the sanctuary, Satan's emissaries, as birds of the

air, glean away the scattered seeds of truth from the memory. Yes, temptation is everywhere.

Now it is with a sense of our exposure to evil, to the temptations of the world, to the subtle arts of the Great Adversary, with dread of falling, with conscious weakness, it is with such mingled feelings we look up to heaven for help, and leaning upon the Almighty, cry, "Lead us not into temptation."

There is in this prayer intercession for others. We look not only at our own exposure and peril, but also at others, who are with us in this road beset with snares.

This petition, in its true spirit, how sympathetic, how comprehensive, how world-grasping, "Lead us not into temptation."

When we look at the feeble and glimmering piety of the best, and see how much it is as "bruised reed and smoking flax," how much need have we to pray for others as for ourselves, that the Lord would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. And to be consistent with this prayer, lest we should by our carelessness or worldliness become tempters of others, and lead our children and friends into evil, we pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

The rash word may touch in the heart of another what is as a poised and trembling balance, and send the quivering purpose earthward and downward forever. Whilst we are but encouraging carelessness, we may be pushing the bark of some thoughtless voyager into the eddies of the boiling whirlpool, or sending the inexperience of childhood to pluck a worthless flower on the crumbling edge of a precipice at whose foot, dizzy fathoms down, lies many a white skeleton of preceding adventurers. Oh, my friends, we who pray, "Lord, lead us not into temptation," should we not be careful lest we ourselves should lead others into temptation?

Lastly, tempted as we are, weak and imperilled, we turn in this prayer to our Father for help; we turn to our tempted and overcoming Saviour, in whom we have an unfailing refuge.

He was tempted in all points like unto us, and yet without sin, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest. We come to Him for counsel, and He bids us watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. We come to Him for sympathy, and He can "be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." We come to Him for might, and "in that He himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted."

We see how Christ overcame. To the subtlety and audacity of the tempter, the Redeemer had ever one answer, " It is written." He who came to deceive went away rebuked and foiled.

All the spears of hell sought in vain to pierce the infallible word; and even in our weak hand this shield of faith can yet quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Put on the whole armor of God. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness — above all, taking the shield of faith.

We will be tried. God may permit us to be tempted, but if we are faithful, He will overrule the temptations of our own hearts, of the world, and of the Devil, for good. The Lord permits evil, and then hems it in just as the architect designs the walls and ceilings that, adjusted and adorned by his wisdom, hem in the space on which the spider stretches his web. Satan and sin are as much intruders on God's plans as is the spider an intruder in the King's palace; but as the insect cannot, by all her spinning and building, alter the architecture of the edifice which she is suffered for a time to infest and disfigure, so Satan's malice and art are all kept within the margin and circuit of God's wise design; and the wrath, the sinful, malignant, and tempting wrath of man and of fiends, shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath will he restrain. Yes, the believer, though tempted and tried, shall overcome, through the blood of the Lamb; yes, even the feeblest saint shall, in the end, trample Satan under his feet.

But let those offering this prayer remember that with it must go the spirit of watching also. With an abiding sense of God's presence and spirit, looking to Jesus, we are safe. A conscience quick and sensitive with the indwelling spirit, is like the safety-lamp of the miner, a ready witness and a mysterious guardian against the deathful damps that, unseen but fatal, cluster around our darkling way. To neglect prayer and watching is to lay aside that lamp, and there, though the eye see no danger and the ear hear no warning, spiritual death may be gathering around us, her invisible vapors stored with ruin and rife for sudden destruction. We are tempting God, and shall we be delivered? Using this prayer in all honesty, we must watch and pray. Then shall Christ help us and lead us; and sharing with Him his sorrow, we shall share his victory, and pass through these tribulations to the white robe and the palm and the song and glory.

And if it is thus with the Christian, how will it be with those who obey not the gospel of God? You, too, have a depraved heart surrounded with a

tempting world and assailed by the powers of darkness, exposed to the arts and power of the great adversary, and yet no word of God, no Saviour, no prayer. Ah! your way is full of peril.

You are like a presumptuous and unskillful traveler passing under the arch of the waters of Niagara. The falling cataract thundering above you, a slippery, slimy rock beneath your gliding feet, the smoking, roaring abyss yawning beside you, the imprisoned winds beating back your breath, the struggling daylight coming but mistily to the bewildered eyes, what is the terror of your condition if your guide, in whose grasp your fingers tremble, be malignant and treacherous and suicidal, determined on destroying your life at the sacrifice of his own.

And such is Satan. Lost himself and desperate, he is set on swelling the number of his compeers in shame and ruin. If you are his unresisting and credulous follower, how infinite the terror of your dim way! God's law is thundering above. As deep calls unto deep, that cloud of wrath which deluged once a guilty world, which has swept off nations into perdition, is thundering over your guilty heads from the dread throne: "Lord, how long!" And His forbearing patience is sliding from beneath you as you struggle and stumble blindly onward with sin for your burden and death for your attendant, the aid of the spirit and the light of conscience and Scripture fast failing you, as you rush on to the awful gulf!

Can you afford to be thoughtless and prayerless and Christless? The cross, the grave, the judgment, Paradise and the pit, all answer, no. There is no peace, no safety to the wicked. Awake. Escape for your life. Resist the Tempter. Be not ignorant of his devices or you are lost soon, and lost forever. Lay hold now, and in haste, on the hope set before you in the gospel, even upon Christ Jesus, the only name given under heaven among men whereby we can be saved.

18. Through A Glass. 1 Cor. 13:12.

“For now we see through a glass, darkly.” 1 Cor. 13:12.

THE APOSTLE, in this passage and its connections, is contrasting the present with the future. The contrast is between a Christian on earth and a Christian in heaven. Here his vision of God and the great truths of the gospel is dim and shadowy; there it will be clear, distinct, and satisfactory. The antithesis is expressed in the words ‘now’ and ‘then.’

“Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

The proposition of the text, that here our vision is dim and our knowledge limited and imperfect, is true both in relation to nature and religion, to this world and the next. Such is the restricted sphere of our present vision, and such the mystic veil that enfolds the present and the future, the world around us and the world above and beyond us, that in regard to both it is true, we see through a glass, darkly.

Let us look at this fact of our present being, and the lessons we should learn from it. Rightly viewed, this very imperfection should make us humble, and at the same time inspire us with hope.

As to the facts: “we see through a glass, darkly.” We see darkly, but we see. We need not ascend above the skies nor go into the grave for mystery. Everything around is partly veiled from the eye of man. It is not only the sublime things of religion, but everything, the most common and familiar, that we see through a glass, darkly.

Consider the works of nature around us, wherein we see so many traces of divine wisdom and goodness and power; yet how little do we really understand of these hidden wonders. Look at the tree in your garden. You

are familiar with its form, its foliage, and its flowers. But what do you know of its growth, of the secret chemical and vegetative processes that are going on within? How is it that the rose-tree, covered with its fragrant and beautiful flowers, no sooner hears the autumn wind chant its vesper song than it drops its leaves, parts with its flowers, contracts its fibers, and, like a gallant ship with its sails taken in prepared for the storm, stands bare, prepared for the coming winter? And how is it that the little bird which sang the summer through, the moment the hues of autumn tinge the trees, takes its flight to sunnier climes and milder airs?

Look at other departments of nature. Why should the carbon in its hidden laboratory produce the coarse fuel for our fires and the most beautiful gem for adornment, the coal and the diamond?

Why should the little bar of steel, in the darkest night, amidst tumultuous seas and under a frowning sky, still tremblingly point to the North? Whence come the meteor shapes that shoot in flickering, ever-varying beauty, and weave and shimmer across the polar sky? And how are those old worlds that roll above us held to their centers, moving forever, by hidden powers with immutable regularity? What do we know of the earth or the worlds above us? "We see only through a glass, darkly."

Look at man. When we consider the earth, which is but God's footstool, and the heavens, which are but the work of his fingers, we ask, "What is man, that God is mindful of him?" But man is greater than the earth and greater than the heavens; and man, too, is more a mystery than the earth and more a mystery than the heavens. I speak not now of his body, so fearfully and wonderfully made, but of his mind. Can you tell all the phenomena of this curious thought that flies swifter than electric flashes to the bounds of the universe? It quivers in the face of a little child, and in Milton soars and sings as the lark at the very gate of heaven. It gushes out in love and tenderness from the well-springs of a mother's heart, and yet nerves the martyr to hold his hand in the consuming fire.

Do you know the mind of man in its mysterious workings, its modes of existence, its connection with other beings, its heaven-reaching destinies? No! you know none of these things.

And yet there have been men who in their stolid conceit scratching the rind of our globe professed to find in the strata, a register by which we learn:

“That he who made it, and revealed its date
To Moses, was mistaken in its age.”

Others, in the strides of science, along the star-paved firmament, profess to find some rolling worlds that falsify the word that God hath spoken. And yet what do they know of the vast universe around them? They are as emmets on their little hillocks, presuming to measure the stars, as an ephemeral insect lost in the glories of a rose bud trying to scan the rolling worlds. Thus has man, inflated with pride, assumed to sit in judgment upon the ways and works of the Almighty. And in his fancied wisdom discarding the light of the Bible, such an one proudly declares. “We have light enough without the word of God.”

“They draw pride’s curtain o’er the noontide ray,
Strike up their inch of reason on the point
Of philosophic wit call’d argument,
And then, exulting in their taper, cry,
Behold the sun! and, Indian-like, adore.”

How sublime the language of the Bible, showing man the narrowness of his wisdom, and rebuking his arrogant pride of intellect, “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or, who laid the corner-stone thereof, when the morning stars sang together?”

Like illustrations of the text may be found in everything that is the subject of human knowledge. Take the great truths of the Bible, and we see them only through a glass darkly. The great fundamental fact in all religion is God. But there is mystery in every conception of God. What do I comprehend of a God present in the remotest star and in the minutest particle of dust. Mysterious with infinite sacredness is that awful Being from whom all things have sprung; mysterious in his essence, shrouded in darkness, silent and unapproachable.

“Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.”

Take the doctrine of Trinity — “The Father is God; the Son is God; the Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one.” What do I comprehend of this? The Socinian “says, I reject the Trinity, because I can not comprehend it.” But can he comprehend eternity or the omnipresence of God? Such a mystery also is the truth that God is in Christ; such the mission of the Holy Spirit. They are facts revealed, but the modes and relations of the facts are incomprehensible. So, also, is the fact of the admission of sin into the world. What a mystery is here! Why did omnipotence allow it? Why not have preserved this beautiful world from the blighting curse of sin? Why must suffering and wrecks and sicknesses and battlefields and sorrows and death still revel in the midst of the human family. God is love; God is omnipotent; why does he not prevent it? Why should there be any section of God’s universe in which there shall be forever and ever the moan of despair and the blackness of darkness? These are awful and unsounded mysteries. Clouds and darkness are round about them. We see through a glass, darkly. There is a Providence in the least as well as in the greatest concerns of life; but the designs and movements of that Providence are often but dimly seen.

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.”

That severe stroke which swept from your eyes the near, the dear, the beloved, is all wrapped in mystery; you have but glimpses of its meaning. That storm which burst upon you like the thunder-cloud and swept away your possessions, the fruits of the honest labors of many years, you see but obscurely its meaning. So of many other dispensations; they are wrapped in partial mystery, visible only through a glass, darkly. But then there are certain great facts which we can see clearly, such as that “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous; but it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness;” that “All things work together for good to them that love God.”

With this light running through all the dark" providences, we can still trust and be strong, and wait for greater light.

“Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain.
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.”

The fact that our vision here is thus dim and bounded, is replete with instruction and spiritual suggestions. That here we see so dimly and know so little, so far from being a matter of regret, indicates at once the greatness of our origin and the grandeur of our destiny. Animals know all they do know in full and at once. The bee constructs its cell now just as it did six thousand years ago. The bird builds its nest today just as it will to the end of time. What they know they know as well in the first years of existence as the last. But man knows only in part, and this creates the desire to know more; and thus, to “know in part” is not a weight, but a spring, the ground at once of that capacity of improvement and of that yearning after it which together constitute man’s highest glory.

It is easy to see how this very dimness of vision, this partial knowledge, is a perpetual stimulus to progress and improvement.

Everything opens gradually, as the sun rises, not full-orbed and fiery red, but gently heralded by the gray twilight and the kindling clouds.

Take an intelligent little child and talk to it of the wonders of nature, and how its soft, earnest eyes are fixed upon you. Show it the beauties of a flower, or the crystallizations of a mineral, and how is the mind enchanted, and how simple the expression of wonder and delight in the gradual dawn of new truths and relations upon the mind. And it is so through all life. What joy does it give to the inquiring mind to catch a gleam of an undiscovered truth! What ecstasy when he has made the discovery! And what is all this but a foreshadowing of the joy and rapture we shall feel in those realms of light where we shall no longer see these things through a glass, darkly.

The text does teach the dignity of man and the grandeur of his destiny. What does Paul say here?

“For *now* we see through a glass, darkly.”

“*Now!*” Then we may know more hereafter; light may yet break upon our shadowed vision. Does it not mean this? Wherefore do we see at all, if we

are ever only to catch glimpses of things? We see darkly. True, but we see. Shall we always see thus dimly? Does it say always? No; it says now we see “through a glass, darkly.” But not always. Let these fleshly bars be laid aside, and these earthly scales drop from our eyes, and the wide range of immortality spread out before us, and we shall no longer see through a glass, darkly. If I thought that the present cold and misty dawn were to last always; if I thought this dark and smoked medium, through which I see the things of God and glory, were never to be removed, I should feel sad and miserable. But I know that the glass will be broken, that the veil will be rent, that the clouds will be scattered, and amid the unclouded splendors of everlasting day, what I see now dimly I shall see face to face.

The fact in the text is adapted to make us humble and yet inspire us with hope.

Apply it to our Christian experience and our spiritual endeavors, what paradoxical creatures are we: knowing and still resisting; repenting and still sinning; pressing up until we can almost hear the music of heaven, and then turning back to grovel in the dust; following Jesus in his teachings and his miracles, and denying him at his trial and his cross; sitting at his feet, and then going out to follow sin! Can it be, with such sad alternations and inconsistencies, that we see clearly? Do we not see through a glass, darkly? We have not a clear vision of the beauty and loveliness of religion; we do not see clearly the beauty of Jesus; we do not see distinctly the prize, the glory of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Else, why this alternation between heaven and earth, this entanglement in the meshes of temptation, this indolence and drowsiness and insensibility, when God is inviting, and Jesus bleeds and prays upon the cross, and Moses and Paul and reason and conscience all appeal to us to awake and act. Ah! “We see through a glass, darkly.” This teaches us a deep, sincere, lowly humility.

But, then, hope springs from such humility. Imperfect as we feel ourselves and our works to be, we yet have a conception of perfection and a yearning after it. And hope springs up, and the idea of immortality is born amid these crude works, these unfinished fragments, these imperfections and errors that lie around us.

In this very darkness and imperfection we feel there must be something better for us. Else, why this ideal of something higher and holier than we have ever realized here? Why these faculties for something better and this yearning after holiness and heaven? It cannot be that these powers, when

rising to their highest development, are to be crushed and broken forever; that the strings of this lyre of the soul are to snap asunder when they have just been tuned to melody and are uttering their sweetest music! No! there must be something better awaiting us in the future. These imperfect statues, these half-formed monuments, are attempts of the pupil, poor in themselves, but that fit him by his very failures to go into a wider and more perfect field, there to do the work of a master. The poorest child of God as in the last moments he clasps his toil-worn hands, and murmurs his dying prayer and falls asleep in Jesus, passes into a sphere of perfect vision and perfect goodness. Oh, yes! we do see through a glass, darkly, but still we see. Shadows fall athwart our vision when we seek to look across that stream of death, but still we catch glimpses of something beyond. So that hope is born of our very humility. From these embers is kindled an undying flame and the voice of a heavenly destiny sounds from the crumbling shrine of mortality.

“We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

But again, the fact that “we see through a glass,” that we know so little of the universe of God and his designs and purposes, should make us humble.

How often do men talk and act as if they knew all the designs and processes and ends of God’s providence and works, as if they knew the whole as well as a part of his ways.

We used to hear in the city, in the still night, the cry of the watchman, “All is well!” And all was well to his eye. All was well in the quiet streets. But, oh! in many homes how many hearts were aching, how many sick heads throbbed upon their pillows, how many tears were flowing beside the couches of the dying, how many sorrows and griefs were all around that lonely watchman! And yet he cries in the silent streets, “All is well!” His all was well; all that he saw and knew, but that was not the whole city. But a fire breaks out, and the inmates of some dwelling rush from their sleep and see their home crashing down in ruin, their possessions shriveling in the flame; homeless and beggared. Ah! to them it was all ill; their world was darkened; they saw no light or beauty; and yet the heavens were sweet and fair, the stars looked down as brightly, and the morning sunshine would

linger around those ashes and wake up slumbering thousands to joy and gladness. Their all was dark; all else around was bright and joyous as ever.

Is not this a picture of the world? Do not men, beholding good or evil through a glass darkly, with but limited vision, say, 'all is good,' or 'all is bad?' And yet, how little of the all of the universe, of the working of this great economy of things, of its objects and results; how little do they know? Conscious of this ignorance, let us be clothed with humility, and never presume to judge the Lord by feeble sense.

Apply the fact in the text to scenes of trial and affliction. Often are we called to pass through scenes of deep and dark and painful tribulations, when all around is gloom and sadness, and the hand of God has touched us. But if then we look up with a calm, Christian faith, although we shall see through a glass, darkly; yet, if we wait in pious trust, the mystery even here may disappear, and we discover that they who sow in tears shall reap in joy; that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, hath worked for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Many have found the loss of health to be the spiritual health of their souls; many have found the loss of a fortune the restoration of peace and the gain of heaven; yes, that the bitterest cup had a blessing in it, the darkest cloud a fringe of light, and the blackest sky an unseen, but true and covenant rainbow. Though now we see through a glass, darkly, still we often do see, if but dimly, the goodness of God in our most painful trials.

Thy trial, oh, Christian martyr! was grievous and cruel; chained to the stake, clasped by the flame, derided and smitten by the persecutors, thy sufferings and tortures were great. Yet, looking through the fire, thou didst catch a glimpse of the martyr's heaven, and thy ashes and blood have become the seed of the church. Thy weeping, oh, gray-haired sire! for that prodigal boy was long and bitter. Dark was the hour when he thrust aside thy love and left thee with thy bowed head to mourn. Thou couldst not read the meaning of this sorrow then; thou didst read it when thine arms were around the penitent; when his tears mingled with thine, and you pressed the lost one to your heart.

Thy grief, oh, mourning mother! was sad and stern; it was hard to part from that loved child; it was hard to look upon his pale brow and kiss his quivering lips, and see him die; it was hard to lay him in his little grave and place the green turf above him, and then to return to hear the music of his voice no more. Oh! all this was hard; and in thy season of bitter agony thou

didst not see why it was so; but when days shall glide on, and thou dost find how much of thy treasure now is laid up in heaven, how the pressure of trial and bereavement has led thee to commune with God, how the holy resignation, the peaceful hope, the upward looking faith, have taken up their abode within thy heart, then thou wilt understand and see. When we shall stand up before God, clothed in white, and all will be luminous, when every mystery of the past shall burst in light, when the veil shall be rent, and we shall see God no longer darkly, but face to face; then all the dark, crooked way we have come, as we look back, we will see to have been the straightest way home to God.

Let the text teach us to be humble and hopeful. We are pilgrims seeking a better country. Let us be humble; we are frail and weak and sinful. Let us be hopeful; we catch glimpses of the promised home; we have encouragement upon our way; unseen messengers of mercy are around us; we have a Father in heaven.

Sinners, let us repent. Let us follow Christ and rejoice. Let our life be hid with Christ in God, until this mortal glass through which we now see darkly shall be broken at the sepulchre, and we shall rise to “see as we are seen, and to know even as we are known.”

19. The Marks Of The Lord Jesus. Gal. 6:17.

“From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” Gal. 6:17.

PAUL UTTERED these remarkable words in the vindication of his apostolic office and Christian profession. The sentiment is expressed by a figure that makes his words start, as it were, into life and touch the heart with fire. The allusion here is to an ancient custom of branding slaves to prevent their escape, some letter or mark being burnt in upon the body as a sign of ownership. Sometimes the devotees of an idol-god caused the name or image of the divinity which they worshiped to be put upon their body. Now, in this sense, Paul takes this ancient custom of branding a slave or a worshiper of an idol, to indicate, in the one case, ownership, in the other, a sign of devotion to the idol whose name or image was borne.

Paul, it seems, was vexed by some who questioned his claim to be an apostle, and by others who sought to divert him from his devotion to Christ and the work of preaching the gospel. And kindling with holy enthusiasm, he declares that, like the ancient slave, he bears in his body the marks of his servitude and devotion to the Redeemer. The very essence of slavery is to have no free will, to be the possession, the property of another. It is to enjoy nothing, and to have nothing, and to do nothing, and to be nothing, save at the command and will of another.

A dreadful state, if the owner be a man like myself; one no wiser and no better than myself; just as liable to the impulses of passion and the caprices of temper and the accidents of circumstance. But if my owner be my Creator, all wise and merciful, all just and good, omnipotent, my God and my redeemer, then to bear the marks of his ownership and my servitude is my highest pledge of safety and peace, my highest felicity and glory. And so Paul felt and wrote. He gloried in being the servant of Jesus Christ. It

was the title which he put in the forefront of his epistles, "Paul a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle."

So in the text, "I bear in my body the marks of, the Lord Jesus;" I am a servant; Jesus has put his mark upon me. "Whose I am, and whom I serve," may be read, not in my epistles only, not in my professions only, not in my life only, but upon my very frame and front; in my body I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Paul refers to the stripes and sufferings which he had received in the service of the Redeemer. "Thrice was I beaten with rods. Once was I stoned. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes, save one. My feet have been hurt in the stocks. Thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep. In perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. These sufferings have left their brand upon me."

Who can see this worn and wasted body, this dimmed and clouded eye, this sunken cheek, this weakened bodily presence, this life ebbing into a daily dying, and not read the marks of my ownership. This death, which I bear about with me is the dying of the Lord Jesus; this life which irradiates the wasting body is the life of Jesus. I bear in my body the marks of a servitude in which I glory. I belong to Christ, and He has put His mark upon me.

You may have seen an old soldier who, with a sort of pride, showed his scars as the honorable signs of his patriotism. You feel a drawing to one who has battled for liberty, country. When Lafayette was struck by a musket ball at Germantown, he said exultingly, "I prize this wound as among the most valued of my honors." So Paul felt about the scars he had received in the service of Christ. Some had in their bodies the marks of circumcision, the evidence that they were the disciples of Moses; others had on their persons the name or image of an idol to which they were devoted; but the marks upon his body were the signs of his suffering in the service of his Lord and Redeemer. To that Redeemer he felt himself united by an undying attachment. These marks were his boast and his glory. Therefore, he says, "Let no man trouble me." There can be no mistake as to the Master to whom I belong and whom I serve. It may be read in letters branded upon my body. I belong to Jesus. Let no one hope to win me by flatteries or drive me by threatenings into a course inconsistent with my devotion to Jesus. He

may promise an exemption from the offense of the cross, but what is that to one to whom the cross is his glory? He may offer me the applause of men and the smile of the world; but what is that to one who died in Christ's death and rose in His resurrection? Leave such solicitations to the undecided and vacillating; my heart is fixed; my line of life is taken; come what may, weal or woe, Christ is my Lord. I bear His marks in my body; God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ.

There is something in these impressive words of Paul for every disciple of Jesus. There is ownership, legible and decisive, and this ownership by Jesus forecloses all future controversies. "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus; therefore let no man trouble me."

Have we any marks upon us of the Lord Jesus? You see what they mean. They are signs of our belonging to Christ. Some such sign all have. The body itself is such a memento. "All things were made by Him, and without him was not anything made that was made." "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." All the works of God are done in Christ Jesus. These bodies and souls fearfully and wonderfully made, this material structure, these immortal souls, with capacities of knowledge and religion, all are traceable to the hand of Christ. "Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of his pasture." And still more profoundly is this true of us if we are born again. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Our whole being, physical and spiritual, is his. Upon every bodily power, upon every faculty of the mind, every pulse of our spiritual life, is the mark of Christ's ownership in us. Upon the whole, man is the image and superscription of the Son of God. We bear these unmistakable signs that we belong to Jesus.

And then how many of us have a divinely appointed, positive mark of proprietorship upon us? When, in obedience to the command of God, we were brought by our parents and were presented to Jesus, and his hand put upon our infant brow the sign and seal of the holy sacrament of baptism, our whole life and being was thus consecrated to the loving service of the Holy Trinity. Every one who has been consecrated to God in holy baptism bears upon his body a mark of the Lord Jesus.

But Paul in the text speaks of something more marked and distinctive. He wrote of marks which, legible upon the body, were also impressed upon the soul. Such, perhaps, were the effects of the blinding light seen on the

way to Damascus, after which he was three days without sight, and from which, it may be, he never wholly recovered. At all events, the scourging, the imprisonments, the hungering, the bodily suffering and mental anxieties which he endured, were so many visible signs, marks in his body, of that devotion to his Saviour which made him bold to confess and strong to suffer.

Now, it may be that none of you have any such marks of Jesus upon you. These are not days of physical suffering for Christ, especially in this country and under the shadows of the temple of liberty. But has the offense of the cross ceased? Is there not something to be borne by all who will live godly in Christ Jesus? Yes; something without, and much within.

The very word which Paul uses here has come to be applied in a metaphorical sense, "the stigmas" of the Lord Jesus. And though there are now no bodily tortures, no fires of martyrdom, these stigmas and reproaches for the name of Christ remain; and every Christian should rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ. Paul would seem to say, 'Let it be no secret whom you serve and whose you are.' Moses counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. Be not afraid of suspicious looks or hard words. Let the stigma of the Lord Jesus mark you as his. If you cannot see a thing to be right, say so. If you feel a thing to be duty, say so. Do not vacillate between God and Mammon. Refuse a doubtful gain or ambiguous pleasure. Let men at least take knowledge of you, not only that you have been with Jesus but that you belong to Christ. Count it not a success, but a failure, when you can satisfy conscience without contradicting fashion. Have some genuine marks of true ownership. Let it be no secret that you must hearken to God rather than to men; that you cannot but do what Christ commands, and avoid what dishonors or grieves him. In this way you may make the nearest approach possible in this generation to that experience which Paul placed on record, when he wrote the memorable words, "I bear upon my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

Now, see what follows such marked distinctive and unfaltering adhesion to Christ. Such firm, decisive discipleship saves trouble. Most of the perplexities and troubles of the Christian profession arise from want of decision. Take a young man. His childhood and youth have been enjoyed in a Christian home. The first lessons of truthfulness, reverence, daily prayer, were learned from the lips of a pious mother, whose indefinable influence surrounds his after years as the atmosphere of heaven. He is environed by

hallowed memories and associations. But now he goes out into the world; to the college, the distant city. Everything is changed. He is thrown into new scenes. His companions, the store, the shop, all are new. He left the home of his childhood with moral habits and good resolutions. But how changed everything seems and is. Temptation, seductive influences, bad examples begin to act on him. He gets new ideas of living. The whole atmosphere about him is different. How many such are there in every great city? Now, what is the great weakness and peril of such an one? Why, just this want of decision in the Christian profession. His companions are not certain about his firmness. They want to see what spirit or stuff he is of; whether he is fixed in his principles, so that it is next to impossible for him to follow the multitude into any evil.

Now, let the signs of discipleship, the marks of Christian character, be once clear and decisive, and the world will let him alone. Why, there are persons in every community whom no one would ever think of trying to divert from following Christ. The theater, the dance, temptations to dishonesty, are no temptations to them. The world sees whose you are and whom you serve, and they will let you alone. Now, to any who are troubled by various perplexities; here a solicitation to some questionable conduct, there some delirious fascination, we say, take upon you resolutely one of the marks of the Lord Jesus. Let it be seen that you belong to him. Let there be no mistake and no confusion as to whom you belong. By your baptism, by observance of the Lord's Supper, by unfaltering adherence to principle, let people see and know that you have taken the pledge, that pledge of discipleship which binds you at home, abroad, on the Sabbath, every day, at your store, to be a Christian. What a help; how it would take from your path stumbling blocks, and let heaven's light down upon you. Say, "From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

It is a great step, when a man, young or old, has made up his mind to be a Christian. There is great power in will. We do not trust it enough. We do well to lay it low, at the foot of the cross; to say before Him who hangs thereon, 'My strength is weakness; Thou alone art strong.' But, having done this, we may go forth as if strong in Him. Then must we look upward in the confidence of faith and say, "I have sworn and am steadfastly determined to keep Thy righteous judgments, and move onward through the strife of this world, a simpler, bolder, and more resolute man, knowing that, bearing the

marks of Jesus. He will uphold and bear me onward with the power of omnipotence.”

The application of this train of thought is obvious and important.

We do not fancy eccentricity. The mere affectation of singularity is ridiculous. But to be singular in the noble fashion of Paul in the text is grand. It saves from a world of trouble; it is the curse of this age to be half and half for everything; an age of compromise between good and evil; men would be friends of the world without being at enmity with God. The professor will be a good neighbor, a good church goer, a good Christian, and yet stand well with every one else; friendly with this man who is dishonest and profane; with that one, a Sabbath breaker, living openly without God in the world. Hence, come fears, doubts, unhappiness. We do not know what he is, nor where. By what law is he living? On Sunday it is the law of Christ; on Monday, the law of the world.

Facing both ways, seeking to compass this world and the next, and in the end missing both, what can be so wretched? What so delusive and perilous?

There may be such here. If you could only make up your minds to say out from a heart polarized by Christ: ‘My heart is fixed; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord; I am doing a great work and cannot come down.’ What an illumination would fall upon your path; how all perplexity and doubt and hesitancy would vanish; what a comforting sense of safety and peace, what an inspiration of strength and hope, would be yours.

At last there will come a time when all trouble will have ceased forever; when not only these marks, but the likeness of the Lord Jesus, will be impressed upon body and spirit; when the body shall be fashioned like unto His body of glory; when we shall see Him and be like Him, and admitted forever into the joy of the Lord.

This is the inspiriting blessed prospect of every one who here has the marks of belonging to Jesus, walking in His footsteps, bearing His cross.

There is coming an hour, the fated hour, that brings us to look out on death, the dawn of eternity, when to bear upon us the marks of the Lord Jesus, the signs that we are His, will be of more value to us than the coronets of nobles; more precious than the brightest jewel that ever sparkled on the brow of royalty. Oh, let us have then some marks that we are His! By a holy life, by our giving of alms, by our zeal for His cause, by separation from the world, let there be on us these unmistakable marks which He and all men shall recognize.

20. The Problem Of Life. Eccles. 1:3-4.

“What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever.” Ecclesiastes 1:3-4.

THERE IS something sad and plaintive in this question of Solomon. It is the moan of a disappointed worldling — of one who had gone through the spheres of life, worn its honors, tasted its pleasures, shared its glory, and as the result of all his experiences, exclaims: “All is vanity and vexation of spirit.” But the text expresses a problem of life which most men deeply feel. Many before and since the days of Solomon have paused amidst life’s cares and disappointments, amidst life’s fruitless toils and withered hopes, and sadly repeated the question of the text. It is a question that has touched the hearts and fallen from the lips of men in all ages of time. It is the sigh of humanity echoing down the passing generations. It is a question as to the use of human effort, as to the purpose of human life itself: “What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever.”

“This world is all a fleeting show
For man’s illusion given.”

Man, looking at the world around him, is conscious of two facts, one of change and the other of stability. He sees symbols of permanence and symbols of change, something that passes away and something that “abideth forever.” His eye rests on the drifting clouds, on the falling leaves, on the rapid round of the seasons. But, on the other hand, there is beneath him the abiding earth, and above him the pillar’d firmament. These contrasts are everywhere. The frail summer-flower blooms and dies at the

foot of the everlasting mountains, and the morning dew exhales beside the sea that rolls on now as at creation's dawn.

These symbols of nature represent the twofold condition of existence, the permanent and the transient; and these two things belong to man himself. No summer cloud or leaf of autumn is more sure of change and dissolution than man. His generations come and go like the roll of successive waves. And yet there is a consciousness of something in himself that abides forever. In spite of all the mists of error and sin, he feels within the pulsations of an undying soul, which outlives all visible things, something that shall abide when the mountains have departed and the hoar [ancient] ocean has ceased to roll. 'Tis the Divinity that stirs within and intimates eternity to man.

This feeling finds utterance in the very question of the text. What, then, is man himself who is thus frail and yet enduring, whose life is a vapor, and yet as the everlasting mountains? What is the purpose of his life? "One generation passeth away and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever." In this flowing tide of change he lives and acts. But "what profit hath he of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?"

What is the answer to this question of the text, this sigh of humanity in all ages? How shall we solve this problem of human life?

Various answers have been given. Let us see what is the true solution of this mysterious problem of human existence.

There are three ideals of human life, the sentimental, the worldly, and the moral. Let us examine these three ideals, and see which is the true Scriptural ideal of life, which best corresponds with all the facts of our being and destiny.

1. The Sentimental View

In this ideal the main thing considered is life as frail, shadowy, and transitory. It is founded upon the fact that "one generation passeth away and another generation cometh." Its symbols are the vanishing clouds, the fading leaves, and all the frail and passing signs of the autumnal season. Such, men say, is human life, such all human glory and achievement. They are but clouds and shadows, and as the emptiness of a dream. Like the mists that drive across the heavens and dissolve, so is the entire procession of

human history. So men are as leaves that flourish for a few brief days and then fade and drop in shrouds of silence, in the solemn twilight of the year.

Now, some may think that this is peculiarly a religious view, and that it shows a high degree of spirituality to talk of the vanity of all human things, of the utter nothingness of all we gain and all we accomplish. Such sentimental talk may seem very pious; but it is not a religious view of life, or of man's position in the present world. It is not mainly the conclusion of Solomon in the text. There was a sense in which he saw that human labor was vanity; but he saw that in this passing life there was something that was not vanity. He discovered that it was not vanity to fear God and keep His commandments, and that however much there may be of vanity in many of our wishes and works, that whenever there is really anything for us to do, we should do it with our might.

Let us repudiate this sentimental idea of life found in trashy novels and sickly poetry, the idea that life is only a dream and vanity. No true, thoughtful, Christian man, no man who looks upon all sides of human life, and into its hidden depths and meaning, will ever take the sentimental as his ideal of life.

Paul said, "the time is short," and the "fashion of this world passeth away," but he had too much to do with life's realities to think it all a dream. And John, who looked through these material veils and saw the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, found in this present state too much to love and pray for to treat it as a mere shadow. And Luther, whose words were battles; and Howard, who saw and felt the meaning of the saddest and the worst conditions, never thought of brooding over life as a dream or shadow. No; they saw there was substance in these shadows, and grasped it, and endeavored to make the best of life, and make the most of it.

But how are you going to make the best of a dream or the most of a shadow? In such a case, would it not be better to lie still and sleep, or simply to take care that we may not be cheated by an illusion? Even if life were a dream, we might say, Surely it is not a dream to be despised, filled as it is with elements of wonder and images of beauty. A grand dream-scene, truly! through which the generations of men come and go; a great dream-scene, set round with the magnificence of the earth that abideth forever, and overhung by the illimitable sky! Even if it were all a dream, a pageant transient as the vapor, fading as the leaf, still, what is there in this dream that we should speak of it lightly, and denounce it as only vanity?

But out of such a view of life, as vain and shadowy, there comes no impulse of moral action, no inspiration of noble effort, no true religion.

No; this ideal of life, as a dream and vanity, does not lead to religion, but rather to skepticism; and a gloomy renunciation of the world is closely allied to sensual indulgence. At the foot of the pillar on which Simon Stylites¹ seeks to escape from the world, sits the Epicurean, with his maxim: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." If life is thus a mere glittering vision, why be in earnest? Why not make what we can out of it in present enjoyment, and in scorn of all anxiety? As in a sinking ship, men grow reckless and drown the conviction of near peril in a delirium of the senses, so do men sometimes act in the feeling that life itself is but a painted bubble on the tide of time. Oh! there is no mockery like that which looks around in the world and believes that all is emptiness, and sneers at everything as a hollow mask; which laughs alike at the good and the evil; at the delirium of passion and the repose of faith; at the scramble of ambition and the self-sacrificing works of charity. "All is vanity!" Yes, true in one sense; but these sentimentalists and skeptics make out nothing but vanity, make the shell and the substance all one thing; it is all shell and sham and falsehood. Yes, there are men who can sit in a world of mysterious lights and shadows, of man's heroism and woman's love, of toils and prayers, of household sanctities and graves; a world steered by unseen power through seas of starry space; and yet, call it all vanity, all an empty and vanishing shadow! Oh, no; this is not the true ideal of life. It is in the tone of sensualism, or of scornful recklessness, or of cold and cheerless infidelity, that they ask, in the words of our text: "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?"

2. The Worldly View

Next to the sentimental is the worldly view of life. Those who take this view make the present life final. The main article of their creed is "that the earth abideth forever." Not so much in theory as in practice do men adopt the worldly ideal of life. Practically, they live as if this world were the only good, and a permanent good. Their standards of action and their ideals of life are all of the world. They live as if this were their perpetual dwelling place and they were never to know any change. "The earth abideth forever,"

and so they act, trusting in that faith. They hold existence with a tenacious grasp. Shall they not always look upon these familiar forms? Shall they not always behold these daily and nightly heavens, these rolling seasons, the perpetual changes of this wonderful and beautiful world? Ah! the earth abideth forever; but “one generation passeth away and another generation cometh.” The earth abideth to tell of these tides of life that have flowed over it without return. It bears upon its bosom the footprints of the once living and the burial places of forgotten names. Eyes have long since ceased to weep or laugh to which its face was once familiar, and hearts that tasted of its delights have now become part of its dust. It has many a familiar place that reminds us of loved ones once here but now passed away. The earth abideth forever; but it abides as the transient home of a humanity that per petually comes and goes.

“’Tis but at best a narrow bound
That heaven allows to men,
And pains and sins run through the round
Of three score years and ten.”

And yet, thousands aim and act as if all of good for man were in this world. What they get or what they lose of earth is their measure of failure or success. To them life is a dream, or game, and the great object of their being is to get what of good or joy they can of the world.

Is not this ideal of the world the view of thousands, practically? To the man of ambition it is a game of honor, nothing but the airy bauble which vanishes with the grasp; only a round of enjoyment, only a game, to him who scrambles for a fortune; who cares neither for God nor for Caesar, but only for the coin that bears the superscription. So he who strikes a vein of worldly for tune is called “a made man,” and he who has lost coin or credit is “broken.” His fortune is broken, but let me ask, is he really broken? Some portion of the dust of this earth that abideth has been scattered from his hand; but is he nothing more than dust?

Oh, you, whom worldly fortune presses hard, and to whom life seems vanity, gloomy, a failure: how do you estimate the failure or success of life? Is there nothing for man but the earth that abideth, and nothing but the good that springs out of the earth? Is there nothing born of this wondrous life itself that comes and goes with every generation, in its toil, its struggle, its manifold experiences? Is there nothing in it all better than silver or gold, or

carnal joys? Are there no joys, no hopes, no tender and immortal affections, no inner spiritual life, that misfortune cannot break or change extinguish? Is there nothing left when business fails and possessions vanish, nothing but vanity, emptiness, and the grave? And is the soul, despairing, to cry out: “What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?” Oh, if this were all, we might well despond, and in utter gloom and sadness, say:

“Then melt, ye elements that formed in vain
This troubled pulse and visionary brain;
Fade, ye wild flowers, memorials of my doom,
And sink, ye stars that light me to the tomb.”

3. The Moral/Religious Ideal

Look now at the moral or religious ideal of life. In the religious ideal, life is viewed neither as transitory nor, in its present conditions, as final, but as real. Life is transitory; life is enduring. In its present form passing away; in its essence enduring. In the one it is symbolized by the cloud and the leaf; in the other it is typified by the earth that abideth forever.

The religious ideal blends these separate conceptions, and inspires man with the truth that he is working in changing conditions for permanent ends. He endures, while his form of being changes. Not what he gains of outward good, but of inward blessedness, is the end of existence, is the solution of life’s problem, is the noblest answer to the question, “What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?”

The great fact for us to know and feel is that life is real, as real as our experience of good or evil, of joy or sorrow; and the absolute profit that we may gain here under the sun, is that good which will abide with us, that good which becomes part of ourselves.

“Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.”

It is not a mere dream, that we may let it thoughtlessly glide away. It may give us illusions; we may cherish hopes in it that are never realized. The boy's ideal of the world may not be the actual world, and yet by that ideal he is urged to go forward into the world. The philanthropist's hope may not appear in the coming future, yet the inspiration of that hope may make him a hero, perhaps a martyr. There may be visions along our way, visions on the path of duty, visions in the scope of faith, and by them we may often be deluded; but by them we may also often be helped and improved. But visions do not constitute the sum and substance of life, and such as they are they indicate the greatness, not the littleness, of life. They prove that life is not a dream, but that life is real. For who are we that dream, and for what end are these dreams given?

Life is not a game. It is not a field merely for selfish uses, limited by worldly ends, as though it were only of this earth that abideth forever. It is an arena for noble effort; it is a school for our immortal faculties; it is a training of holiness and preparation for heaven. It is an opportunity for us, not merely to get, but to attain, not simply to have, but to be. Its standard of failure or success is not outward fortune, but inward possession.

The true ideal of life is the religious. We admit life is a dream, but out of these dreams we are working the problem of life's end, which is the glory of God and joys for evermore. In Christ we see the perfect ideal of life. It is to be holy; it is to do good; it is to glorify God; and when life's cares and work are over, to go up; to be with Christ and God forever. Such an ideal imparts grandeur, a glorious reality, to this life, which, in its outer forms is as a vapor, or a dream, or passing shadow.

Now, take these different ideals and answer the question of the text: "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" Do you take life as a dream and shadow, and give yourself to a life of careless ease, or the round of sensual pleasure? Well, what, when the dream is ended and the night is spent, and the twilight of eternity dawns! Do you take the worldly ideal, live only for this life, business, gain, money? What profit, when life ends? What the result of all your labors and toils? What were they to the rich man in the gospel when, amid his hoarded treasures, he was startled with the summons: "This night thy soul is required of thee!" Oh, what an utter failure of life! How sad and irrevocable the awful future!

“No matter which my thoughts employ,
A moment’s misery or joy;
But oh! when both shall end,
Where shall I find my destined place?
Shall I my everlasting days
With fiends or angels spend?”

Permit me, then, to put this plain, direct question, What do you think of life? Surely, you have some thought concerning it. We live, we act; life to each of us is something. What is it? Surely, you are not living without some idea of why you live and what the end is to be. All men have some ideal; you are all laboring to some end, even the most careless, frivolous, and worldly.

Now, here rises the question, “What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?” It is true, life in its outward form is frail and dreamy, a life quick vanishing like the mists of the morning, like the leaves that are falling in yellow showers through the sun shine and shadow of these autumn days. But then this shadowy life runs into a vast future, and culminates in Heaven or is eclipsed in darkness forever.

Oh, my immortal friend, choose your ideal of life. You are careful and troubled about many things. Choose that good part; seek first the kingdom of God. Seek for glory and honor and immortality in Christ, and you will be inspired with the thought that life is a great and solemn reality.

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1. Fifth Century ascetic who lived for 37 years on an elevated platform.↩

21. Lingerin Lot. Genesis 19:16.

“And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand.” Genesis 19:16.

THIS IS SAID OF LOT. It is a simple fact of sacred history, but contains a solemn admonition to Christians in all ages. The Saviour himself has admonished the hesitating and undecided to remember Lot’s wife. Her tragical end stands on record in the Bible, as a warning to the halting, of the perils of indecision. It speaks the solemn warning:

“No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

But the attitude of Lot, in the text, a professed believer, lingering, when the clouds of wrath hung over the doomed city, is full of warning to all who profess to be the people of God.

We note, first, the character of Lot. From the testimony of the Bible we learn that he was a good man. Peter, speaking of his residence in Sodom, says:

“For that righteous man, dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.”

It is evident from this testimony of the inspired Apostle that Lot was a believer and comparatively a good man. It is equally manifest from his history that he was defective as a man of God. He does not stand forth in the full stature and graceful proportions of a man of faith and holiness, and of entire consecration to God. He is the type of many professors of religion in our day. The text reveals the temper of his mind and spiritual attitude. “He lingered.” When and where? Why, in Sodom, and the very morning

when the whole city was to be overwhelmed in fire. Lot knew the wickedness of the city, for the cry of its abominations had gone up to heaven. And yet he lingered. He knew the fearful judgments that were impending the city, for the angels had said, the “Lord hath sent us to destroy it,” and yet he lingered. He was so fully assured of the impending evils that he warned his sons-in-law: “Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy ’this city!” And yet he lingered. He saw the angels standing by, urging him and his family to flee. And yet he lingered. He heard the voice of those angelic ministers ringing in his ears: “Arise, lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city!” And yet he lingered.

Strange! passing strange! that a professed believer, under such circumstances, in such a city, with the gathering storm of fire and warning of the angels to hasten away, strange, that Lot should linger!

But why should we wonder at Lot? Are there not those in our day, and within the pale of the Church, who repeat his conduct? They profess to believe the Bible. They accept its great facts and doctrines. They are sound in the creed. And yet how many such linger about the gates of Zion, and falter in the work of the Lord? Often, their love to Christ is so faint and questionable, even to themselves, that they have to sing:

“’Tis a point I long to know —
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?”

They have a hope of Heaven, but it is so feeble that it is impotent before the attractions of the world. They believe there is a future hell for the wicked and unbelieving, and yet they have little heart or will to labor for the salvation of souls. They know that the time is short, and that judgment and eternity are at hand, and yet they linger.

Such professors have but little of the peace of God, or the joys of salvation. They linger in the divine life, following Christ, like Peter, afar off, and are in danger of falling before the power of temptation. Now, it is for the admonition of all such lingerers in Zion that we hold up Lot as a warning, repeating to all feeble, double-hearted, hesitating professors of religion the solemn words of the Lord: “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.”

Why did Lot linger? One thing is manifest; in early life he made a wrong choice and took a false step. At one time Abraham and Lot lived together. But as their possessions increased there was strife among their herdsmen, and it became necessary to separate. With characteristic humility, Abraham gave Lot the choice of the country. "If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

And now observe upon what principle Lot selected his future home. He saw that the plains of Jordan, near Sodom, were rich and well watered. It was a good land for cattle, and full of pastures. It was in fertility and physical beauty as the garden of the Lord. That one fact determines his choice. It was near Sodom; he would be surrounded by abounding wickedness. No matter; it was a rich valley, that was enough. He made that choice without prayer, without faith. It was worldly. He looked only at the things that are seen. He had regard only for what would advance his worldly prosperity, leaving out the interests of his soul, of God, and eternity. That step was fatal.

Another bad symptom in Lot was his unnecessary association with an ungodly world. In looking at the history, we find that at first he only pitched his tent toward Sodom. This was in itself a mistake; but afterward he dwelt in Sodom. He left the rural district. He left his tents and country life and made his home in that wicked city. Why he did this we know not. Perhaps his wife, who was a worldly woman, wanted more society, or pled the education of the daughters. Perhaps the daughters, evidently very frivolous young ladies, pled with the father for the city, for the sake of gay company and worldly amusements. Whatever were the reasons of this change, he dwelt in Sodom. Here are two causes which will account for the fact that he lingered: first, his wrong step in early life, and then his unnecessary association with an ungodly world.

Similar causes will produce similar results. If any person follows in the footsteps of Lot, he will become a lingerer in Christ's kingdom, and peril his soul.

Make a wrong choice in early life, and make the wicked and ungodly your intimate and choice companions, and by and by your spiritual pulse will beat feebly, your heart grow languid in its affections, your whole spiritual life insensibly waste away, and if you continue at all in the heavenly way, you will go with faltering steps along the road to Zion,

sighing, “Oh, that it were with me as in months past!” And in the end, you may turn away with apostates, and draw back to perdition.

Let the young professor of religion remember Lot, when choosing a profession or business of life. This choice should be made not merely in its relations to temporal positions and profits, but with some regard to your soul’s prosperity and spiritual destiny. So in that most important step of an earthly life, the choice of one to share our joys and sorrows, it is not enough that you regard merely outward beauty and congeniality of temperament, what may please the eye and fancy, but also how your choice will affect your spiritual life, growth in grace, and prospects for heaven. So in the selection of your residence, your earthly home. It is right that you should consult your natural taste, your love of the beautiful, and your sense of comfort. But do not overlook spiritual relations, the Church, and your preparation for a home beyond the stars, and your fitness for a place in your father’s home in heaven.

Do not imitate Lot, lest you, too, become a lingerer. There are many motives to be drawn from Lot’s history that might have led him to a different course. And first, Lot did no good among the inhabitants of Sodom. For many years had he been in God’s service, and many opportunities were offered to him, yet he had exerted no influence, he had accomplished nothing for that wicked city. Not one believed his testimony. His religious life was powerless, and not a single soul had he converted. More than this, not one of his own family was pious. We are not told how large his family was, but we know that he had at least his wife and two daughters. Not one of them feared God. When he warned his sons-in-law to flee, he seemed to them as one that mocked. They may have answered to his warning: “Who cares for anything you say!”

But what became of Lot’s wife? Did she, too, despise the weak, inactive child of God? She was a woman of the world, and could not but look back on the world of gaiety she was leaving, and she perished. His daughters did, indeed, escape, but only for a deeper shame in wickedness and ruin.

Lot accomplished no good for Sodom and no good for his family, because he was half-hearted and world-conforming in his religion — he lingered.

Such a Christian is without power in a community. If he is vacillating and worldly, his very efforts to do good will be powerless.

Such parents are not likely to impress their children with the importance of religion. The eye is more to the child than the ear. They observe what you are and do more than what you say. If parents would train their children for Christ and eternity, they must live religion before their children,

“Allure to brighter worlds and lead the way.”

In a community let your light so shine that others may see your good works and glorify your father.

Finally, Lot left no testimony in death. After his flight from Sodom we know but little, and that little is a sad record of human weakness and sin. We know not when or where or how he died. We have notice of the last hour of many of the prophets and patriarchs of the Bible, but nothing is said of Lot; a dark veil rests on his end, and we are left to conjecture whether he ever reached the Kingdom of Heaven.

Such is the end of the lingerers in religion. Their hesitancies and worldliness meet them in the closing hours of life. The past is full of painful memories, the future is overhung with clouds and darkness. If they reach the haven of eternal rest it will be through darkness and storm. If saved at all it will be as by fire.

Is there one present who feels that he is a lingerer, a backslider? Come back to Christ; come into the old paths. The Lord says to you: “Return, ye backsliding child;” and if you say, “Dear Jesus, let thy pity rest on me,” then He who looked on the weeping Peter will receive you and seal you for himself.

O, impenitent one, without Christ and without hope, you are not even a lingerer. If the righteous scarcely be saved; where shall the ungodly and the sinner be found? You are at rest in Sodom; the storm of fire is coming; escape for thy life. Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in the plain. Escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.

“Delay not, delay not, Oh, sinner, draw near;
The waters of life are now flowing for thee!
No price is demanded, the Saviour is here,
Redemption is purchased, salvation Is free.”

Christian friends, you see how many lingerers and world-conforming professors there are in the Church. Oh, do not ye be conformed to this world! Come out from among them!

Would you be a happy Christian? Then do not linger. Would you win souls for Christ and be useful to the world? Would you help your children and your friends to Heaven? Would you have peace and joy and triumph in death? Would you be ready for Christ's coming? Then do not linger. Time does not. The Judgment does not.

22. Elisha And The Children. 2 Kings 2:23-24.

“And he went up from thence unto Bethel, and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him: Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.” And he turned back and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.” 2 Kings 2:23-24.

THIS TOUCHING INCIDENT in Old Testament history has special claims upon our attention. When Elijah went up in his chariot of fire, his mantle fell on Elisha. The prophet, now an old man, is on his way to Bethel, and is met by a band of children from the city, who mock him. Elisha turned and denounced upon them the judgments of Heaven. They are destroyed by wild beasts from the forest, and there is heard the wail of bereaved mothers in Bethel, over the forty-two children that were slain.

Elisha was no weak and impulsive man; it was in no sudden gust of passion, excited by the mockery of the children, that he uttered this curse; it was with no feeling of revenge he pronounced this judgment.

He was the servant of the Most High, and in the calm dignity of his office, as the prophet of God, he delivered this judgment upon the children, just as other prophets, at the command of God, pronounced judgment upon wicked communities and nations.

This tragical incident deserves our attention. It needs some explanation, and contains some great moral lessons for our admonition.

Let us attend to the particulars in this incident, that we may understand its moral meaning and bearing.

This scene took place near Bethel, one of the strong holds of idolatry. It was there Jeroboam set up one of the golden calves which he wished his subjects to worship. Elisha, as the servant of the Lord, as the bold reprobator of idolatry, protesting against their sins, had drawn upon himself the hatred of the priests of Baal, and the scorn of the people of Bethel.

Knowing that Elisha was on his way to the city to visit the school of the prophets, they sent out the children to mock him. Some think the word here rendered little children, means young persons grown up — so the word is sometimes used — it is applied to Isaac when twenty years old. This does not relieve any seeming difficulty in the narration. It is more natural and consistent to take it according to our translation, little children.

The children, no doubt, had been taught by the priests and parents to utter these words of derision and mockery. This conduct of the children was, therefore, a manifestation of the hatred and scorn of the citizens of Bethel against Elisha, and hence the Lord interposed to vindicate the honor and sanctity of his servant.

It was not merely a band of rude and riotous children, meeting an old man upon a public road, and insulting him. No, that taunt, and insult, and mockery, were premeditated and arranged. The children had been taught and trained, and were sent out to meet the old prophet as he came near to Bethel. That taunt and mockery was not the sport of childish rudeness to an old man. It was the hatred and scorn of a whole city towards the prophet of the living God.

This was displeasing and insulting to God for several reasons. It was making a bodily infirmity, the baldness of Elisha, a subject of sport, and the means of holding up the prophet to derision. His bald head, though a blemish, can hardly be reckoned a deformity. But it shows the temper of the people. They were ready to jeer a man for the least personal defect. If Elisha had been lame or blind, they would have made the contracted limb or defective vision the subject of their insulting taunts and derision.

We have in the Lord's address to Moses, the divine view of such conduct. "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?" Bodily deformity is not accidental, but of divine appointment or permission, and, hence, to make these deformities a matter of sport is an insult to God, the author of life and being. Children, in their thoughtlessness, are prone to catch at any outer deformity for sport and mockery. Parents and teachers should guard children against this. They should be made to know that to make sport of a man for any physical deformity is very offensive to God. It was in part this very contempt of the prophet for a mere physical blemish, pointing to it, and making him the subject of derision, saying "thou bald head;" it was this, in part, that drew down Heaven's judgments upon those children.

Parents should instruct their children to venerate the aged. “The hoary head is a crown of glory, when it is found in the way of righteousness.”

But the main thing here was the sneering insult offered to Elisha as the prophet of God, saying, with contemptuous scorn, “Go up, go up, thou bald head.”

A short time before, Elijah had ascended in his chariot of fire. It was in derisive allusion to that glorious translation that the expression refers. It was the sarcastic sneer of the skeptic. They said the translation of Elijah was a mere fancy or delusion. For who ever heard of a chariot of fire taking a man up to Heaven? It is against the laws of gravitation, against reason and experience, it is all a fiction, a hallucination, an illusion.

Now, the translation of Elijah was a great fact in that age; it was like a flash of light through the dark night that hung over the grave, revealing life and immortality. It was to the old world a beautiful symbol of the future. It was to the old world what the rising of Christ is to us, a symbol and pledge of the resurrection. And the fact was attested by ample witness, attested by fifty witnesses and by Elijah himself, and yet it was scorned by the people of Bethel. Such a fact condemned their idolatry, and held them to a solemn retribution. Hence they rejected the translation, turned it into ridicule, and taught their children to mock this great doctrine in their scorn of Elisha.

If the people of Bethel believed the report of the translation, then there is another explanation of their conduct. They were glad that Elijah was gone, for he protested against their idolatry and wickedness. They were glad to be rid of the prophet who rebuked them for their sins and disturbed their peace. But here was Elisha, his successor, another reprover and protester against their sins. It may be they were annoyed by this faithful servant of God, and desired to be let alone in their sins, and with this feeling the children were taught to say to the venerable prophet, “go up, like Elijah, and let us alone.” This may have provoked the Almighty to send swift destruction upon them.

Such conduct is not uncommon, even in our day. Persons who do not like to be disturbed in their sins, avoid the places where their peace is disturbed, and the ministers that deal honestly and faithfully with them, and rouse their conscience. They shut their eyes against the truth. Oh, what madness! As if by shutting their eyes they could avert the awful retributions of the future. You may shun the truth, you may get rid of the prophet, God’s minister, but all the while you are going blindfold to meet your sins, and

God, and judgment. O, do not follow the people of Bethel, lest the judgment of Heaven should fall upon you!

Now look at the punishment of these children. It seems at first strange that whilst the sins belonged mainly to the parents, the punishment should fall upon the children. They, it is true, had mocked God's prophet, but it was their parents that had taught them to do it. But the fact that the children were punished, shows how carefully the Lord tempers judgment with mercy. It is true, the parents had sinned; it was their infidelity, their mockery of God's prophet. In all probability the children only did what they were taught by their parents to do. They were but the instruments, and it may be, the unconscious instruments, of this sin and mockery. It may seem strange that the children should be smitten, whilst the wicked parents go unpunished. Ah! but the parents were smitten through the children, and so smitten that they had still an opportunity and a most powerful motive for repentance and reformation.

This judgment, which at first seemed so strange and harsh, like a dark thunder cloud of wrath and destruction, as we gaze is suffused with light. It gleams with mercy, and on its dark bosom is seen the bow of peace and promise. Life's dreariest path has some sweet flower, its cloudiest day some sun. Here it is true, as it always is:

“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for His grace,
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face.”

Now look at this judgment in this light. Had the parents been devoured in their infidelity and sins, they must have perished everlastingly; but punished and warned through the death of their little ones, they might yet repent and believe, and escape the death that never dies.

They were punished for their sins. Ah! who can tell the anguish of those parents as they witnessed the destruction of their children! They had sent them out to mock the holy prophet, and now they see the little ones mangled and torn by wild beasts. How would their own sins flash upon their conscience as they gazed upon those little ones torn from their bleeding hearts and devoured. Ah! most painfully did they feel the punishment of their sins; and in a way which, while it marked God's displeasure against their iniquity, still left to them the opportunity and the

motive to repentance and salvation. What mercy was mingled with the judgment! “As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” And then the children thus destroyed on earth, were not really and permanently injured. Leave them to grow up in such a city of idolatry, and in such familiarity with wickedness, under such infidel parents, and what could be expected of them, what but that they should grow up idolaters and infidels?

It was an infinite blessing for these little ones to be taken from such a city as Bethel, to the New Jerusalem, the city of God, to be taken from such homes on earth to their father’s house in Heaven. What seems a harsh judgment was the hand of mercy.

I should never grieve to see a little child taken from a wicked home and infidel parents. Ah! better, infinitely better, humanly speaking, that such children should be taken from the evil to come. What a childhood that which has no religious home, no Bible, no Jesus, a childhood left to grow up into a manhood of sin, exposed to wild beasts and to him who goes about seeking whom he may destroy. Infinitely better for these children that they were taken away.

In this light, how changed appears this dark judgment; now it stands forth bright with mercy, mercy to the parents, mercy to the children.

It shows that God often chastens the parents by removing the children. He punishes them through their children, giving them thus the opportunity and the motive of repent and prepare for Heaven. There are some homes, even in this day, that, like those homes in Bethel, are the homes of infidels. Think of a little child in such a home, a little flower to open and unfold under the blight and curse of such a home.

But there are homes, not infidel, but where the whole education and training is for time and not eternity: earth, not Heaven, where the parents are worldly and prayerless, the aims, example, atmosphere, all tend to rear the child for business, society, and pleasure; but no regard is paid to the soul, no thought is given to Christ and to his kingdom. Be not startled if God in his mercy should take your child early to Heaven. It may be in mercy to the child and in mercy to you. If God has taken your child, it is a call to you to meet it in heaven.

23. Mary Magdalene. Luke 7:37-38.

“And behold a woman in the city which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.” Luke 7:37-38.

THIS GOSPEL SCENE in the home of Simon is one of great moral beauty. Not a word is spoken; it is a moral picture; it represents a transaction simple and touching, full of intense feeling and gushing affection, a scene of tears and of love.

The Saviour is reclining at the social meal according to the Oriental custom. A female unbidden enters the room, evidently convulsed with deep emotion. She comes and stands at the feet of Jesus, and bursts into tears. She had not come for that purpose, but standing beside the Saviour, she is overcome with feeling, and as her tears fell upon the feet of her Lord, she wiped them with her hair, and kissed his feet and anointed them with ointment.

The whole transaction is so natural and tender, so impulsive and impassioned, that we feel at once an absorbing interest in the stranger; we are anxious to know her history, and the feelings which prompted such tears and acts of devotion. This was not Mary Magdalene, nor Mary the sister of Lazarus; her name, for wise and kind reasons, is withheld from the church. But we are not left entirely in suspense; we are told she was a sinner, a great sinner, but she had been reclaimed and forgiven. We ask who is this woman? What is the meaning of these tears, this intense affection, this box of ointment? To all these questions, Christ’s simple answer is, “her sins, which are many, are forgiven.” This tells the whole secret of her feelings and conduct, those gushing tears, that kiss and ointment, and the graceful

freedom of her coming unbidden into the house of the Pharisee, that she might give this expression of her love to the Saviour.

Let us look a little further at the history of this woman. From several incidents in this chapter, we infer that she lived in the city of Nain. She had doubtless met Christ in that city; she had, perhaps, witnessed the funeral procession of the widow's only son; she had seen the compassion of Jesus for that sorrowing mother; His words of sympathy and His miracle of mercy in the restoration of that son. The miracle made a great sensation in the city. The people were awed with fear, and glorified God, saying "a great prophet is risen up among us, and God hath visited his people."

Christ had performed other miracles there. Never had the people witnessed such works. Wonder, joy, and thanksgiving filled the streets. The impression which this woman received was that which Christ intended all his miracles should produce, namely, that He had come to save men from their sins.

This view of Christ, not merely as a worker of miracles, making a display of power to astound and startle men, but as the saviour of sinners, met the case of this sinful woman. She was not only a great sinner, but, it would seem, an outcast from home and friends. Alone she stood in the world, with no ties of sympathy or friendship; with no one that cared for her; with the burden of sin cold and heavy upon her desolate heart. In lonely, sinful isolation she wandered over the earth like a condemned spirit, haunted with visions of coming doom.

Such we have reason to believe was the sad and deplorable condition of this woman. What, then, must have been her feelings when she heard Christ preach, heard him declare that he came to save the lost, to call sinners to repentance, and that there was mercy with God for the vilest sinner.

Perhaps it seemed to her at first as a dream, and made her weep, as one in exile wakes and weeps over a dream of home and friends. But when she saw this miracle, how Jesus pitied the bereaved widow in her affliction; when she saw those that were healed prostrating themselves before Jesus, receiving his forgiveness and blessing, she was encouraged to hope there was mercy and forgiveness and salvation even for her. We do not know whether this was her first personal interview with Christ or not; but we know she had obtained forgiveness, through faith in Jesus.

She had learned that the greatest sinner was not forsaken of God; that sin — a whole life of sin — need not shut out the sinner from the mercy and

forgiveness of God; that Jesus had come to save sinners; that he was able to save to the uttermost all that came to him; to snatch even such as she as brands from the burning, and make them the trophies of his grace, the eternal monuments of his glory.

Now, this discovery, with faith in Jesus, had transformed this woman, who was a sinner. She found a free and plenteous redemption even for her sinful soul. It lifted her up from despair even to heaven's gate. Let others now think of her as they might, she was forgiven; her peace was beginning to flow as a river, and, believing, she rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

All this is evident from what is revealed in this scene, and the words of Christ. She was forgiven, and in the assurance of forgiveness and salvation, could sing from a grateful and joyous heart:

“Salvation! Oh, the joyful sound,
'Tis music to my ears.”

Now, this woman, when she heard that Christ was in the house of the Pharisee, felt that she must see him. But what excuse shall she make for going, uninvited, into the house of Simon, a stranger? Love is fruitful in inventions to reach its object. She devised an expedient at once ingenious and expressive of her deep and yearning affection. She resolves to go as a servant, whose place it was to wash the feet and anoint the guests. She procures a beautiful box of ointment (the celebrated India spikenard, a compound of the most rare and costly aromatics, of which spikenard was the basis, and which gave the ointment its name). It was costly, but not too costly for her love. Her heart, her all, she had given to Christ, and nothing within the compass of her means was too much for her Saviour. With that precious offering she goes to the house of Simon. You see her standing at the feet of Jesus. She is overpowered with feelings of inexpressible gratitude, and weeps for joy, and pours the precious ointment upon the feet of that Saviour who had forgiven her sins, and kindled in her desolate soul the joys of salvation. The language of her heart overflowed with the sentiment and feeling of that beautiful hymn:

"Hail, my ever blessed Jesus,
Only Thee I wish to sing;
To my soul thy name is precious,
Thou my Prophet, Priest, and King.

"Oh, what mercy flows from heaven!
Oh, what joy and happiness!
Love I much? I've much forgiven;
I'm a miracle of grace!"

This beautiful and touching scene is suggestive of several instructive and practical lessons. We have in this woman a test of our religious condition. We are all sinners by nature and practice. We are by nature the children of wrath, even as others. There is none that doeth good and sinneth not. As sinners, we are under condemnation. We are under the curse of God's broken law; for it is written: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

One of the most important questions is, "Are my sins forgiven?" Has the curse of guilt and condemnation been taken away? Have I found redemption in the blood of Jesus, even the forgiveness of sin? We have here a practical solution of this question, which is clear, intelligible, and of personal application to all.

Here is a woman who was a great sinner. Christ declares her forgiven, and states the evidence of her forgiveness. He gives Simon the Pharisee the parable of the two debtors. One owed his creditors 500 pence (about \$69), and the other owed only 50 pence (about \$7). Both had "nothing to pay," and both were forgiven freely. And then came the searching question: "Which of them will love him most?" Here was the true explanation; our Lord told Simon of the deep love which the penitent woman had displayed. Here was the cause of her tears, her reverence, and the anointing. She had been much forgiven, and so she loved much. Her love was the effect of her forgiveness, not the cause; the consequence of her forgiveness, not the condition; the result of her forgiveness, not the reason; the fruit of her forgiveness, not the root.

In the narrative we read: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much." This looks as if her sins were forgiven because she loved much. But no, this would be contrary to the whole teaching of the New Testament, contrary to the whole order of salvation, which makes faith in Christ the only condition of pardon. No one is ever forgiven because he

loves Christ; but he loves Christ because he is forgiven and renewed in the spirit of his mind. We prefer reading the passage: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; wherefore she loved much." So Christ interprets it. Her love is a proof of forgiveness. She loves much because she is forgiven. Now, Christ called the attention of Simon to this woman, and to the marked contrast between his cold, ceremonious deportment and her warm, heartfelt devotion. She stood at his feet behind him weeping. She washed his feet with tears. She wiped them with the hair of her head. She kissed his feet, and anointed them with costly ointment. All this was the spontaneous outflow of grateful love. Her heart was full of love, and could not withhold this outward expression. This sinner, with a deep sense of pardon, was so full of gratitude that no service was too humble, no sacrifice too costly for him who had forgiven her. Her act was as natural and spontaneous as the dandelion's when it lifts its sparkling dew-sprinkled face to the sky, or as the violet raising its tiny head to catch the free air of heaven.

And then it was a love that made her happy. It mingled with her humiliation and shame, and took away their bitterness. It turned her sorrow into joy. Of all the women on the earth she, perhaps, was the happiest. It seems as though a step would have taken her to heaven; as though she could, in a moment, have broken out into its song and opened her heart to its joys.

Long has that forgiven sinner ceased to weep, for God has wiped away all tears. Long has she been clothed in white and standing before the throne with her psalm and song. Long since has she cast her crown before the Lamb, and united with the redeemed in heaven, saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

Brethren, have you these indubitable marks of forgiveness? Do you see in this silent, tearful, loving penitent, anything of your own experience? Do you love Christ not only for what He is and what He has done for all men, but specially for what He has done for you? Do you love Him because you have received from his hands a pardon bestowed by his mercy and bought with his blood? Do you esteem his favor above all the world can give? And does the remembrance of your past sins make you tearful and lead you more than ever "to abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good?"

If you are really forgiven you will have these invariable concomitants and sequents of forgiveness. Your experience may not correspond exactly to

that of this woman. Your feelings may not be as distinct, intense, or potential as in her, but you must feel.

Do not dismiss this subject without a personal test. "Am I forgiven?" You may not be able to point to any one day or hour of forgiveness. It may have come to you as the light in the east, before sunrise: you cannot tell when; or it may have come suddenly, as the sunrise at the equator, with no twilight dawn.

We are all sinners under condemnation until we have found peace and forgiveness from Jesus. We must be forgiven or perish. Have you been forgiven? Have you the blessedness of the man whose sins are forgiven, to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity? It is your privilege to know this, to feel the happy assurance of sins forgiven. For there is redemption in the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sin. And what on earth so full of blessedness as that word from Christ's own lips, "Thy sins are forgiven; go in peace."

A sense of having our sins forgiven is the mainspring and life-blood of love to Christ. This made the difference between this woman and the Pharisee. We all desire more zeal and activity in good works. How can we stimulate men? Only by love? The fear of punishment, the hope of reward, the sense of duty, — all these are stimulants; but they are all weak and powerless until a man loves Christ. Once let this love get hold of a man, and he becomes instinct with life and power. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again." What a power this love was in the great apostle to the Gentiles, so that for its sake he bore trials, prisons, and death itself.

Let us remember this. However much the world may sneer at "feelings" in religion, and however spurious and spasmodic religious feelings may sometimes be, the great truth still remains that feeling is the secret of doing. The heart must be engaged for Christ, or the hands will soon hang down. Nothing but love — the love of Christ — can brace us for the conflict of life. Nothing but this, as a life-force and passion, will open our heart and hand. Only this will bring forth the precious ointment and anoint Christ.

We see here the amazing love and compassion of the Lord Jesus to the chief of sinners. We see his kindness to this woman. It was the gospel, with its offers of mercy and forgiveness, that subdued the heart of this sinner and

brought her in tears and penitence and faith to the feet of Jesus. This gospel we preach. Are any conscious of their sin and ready to despond? Look here, and take courage. Go to this Jesus. Begin to love this Saviour.

"Canst thou not love the Friend who died
Thy burden to assume?
Who shrunk not from the crown of thorns,
The scourge, the cross, the tomb?"

"If heavy is thy weight of guilt,
Thy love should greater be;
Then He whose blood for man was spilt
Will shed His peace on thee."

24. The Power Of Conscience.

Mark 6:16.

“But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead.” Mark 6:16.

THE NAME of Herod in the New Testament bears a terrible association. The father murdered the children at Bethlehem, and sought the life of the infant Saviour. The son, Herod Antipas, murdered John the Baptist. This is the one mentioned in the text. Under the fascination of Herodias’ beauty and graceful dancing, and the exhilaration of wine and music, he yielded to the demand for the head of John the Baptist. The herald of the Saviour was murdered, and his gory head was brought into the festal hall.

Time wears on, and that festive night, with its murderous deed, seemed to be buried in oblivion. But Herod is haunted, ever, by the memory of that night. At the time of the text, the country was filled with reports of the miracles of Jesus. All minds were directed to the wonders of the Son of God; and various were the conjectures as to who this Jesus was.

Some said, “It is Elias;” others, “It is a prophet, or, as one of the prophets.” But when Herod heard thereof, he said: “It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead.” This is a remarkable declaration. Herod had murdered the Baptist, it is true, but the deed was almost forgotten. He had plunged into dissipation and revelry to obliterate the past. To still more effectually lull all fears of the future, he had embraced infidel sentiments, and denied a resurrection and a future life. Now see him in the text, when he heard of the miracles of Jesus; see how conscience, that seemed to be dead in his sensual soul, rose up; see the ghost, that all along haunted his soul, coming out into vivid shape. “It is John!” he exclaims, “It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead!”

Epicurean as he was, immersed in pleasure; Sadducee as he professed to be, believing that there was no resurrection of the dead; yet through all his

pursuits of pleasure, and his infidelity, conscience smote him. This outburst of Herod, this outflashing of conscience from his slumbering soul, is the most wonderful illustration of the power of conscience in all the history of the past.

Let us look at the power of conscience, as illustrated in this history of Herod. Some writers may have gone too far in their speculations, upon the nature and power of conscience; but that there is something in man which approves the right and condemns the wrong, that there is a law written on man's heart, no one can deny. It is found in all men and everywhere;

“Whatever creed be taught or land be trod,
Man's conscience is the oracle of God.”

Now, conscience as it works through fear and hope, points distinctly to a future retribution, and implies a moral governor, who will bring every man into judgment for the deeds done in the body. See how conscience acted on Herod. He is haunted by the murdered Baptist, and is in constant dread. Why? Can the fearless preacher of righteousness speak even from the tomb? Can he come forth from the silent grave and confront the murderer? Ah, no! And yet Herod, when he hears of a prophet filling the land with wonders, is startled, as if the Baptist had risen up equipped with vengeance for the murderer. Does it not reveal his secret dread as if he saw in every shadow the minister of retribution.

This was the power of conscience. Conscience kept living in his soul the record of his crime, and pointed to coming retribution. After the feast and revelry of that tragical night, he has no peace. Terrible images of his crime haunt alike the revelry of day and the visions of night. In vain does Herodias seek to cheer his gloomy spirit. In vain does Salome, the idol of his heart, seek, with her youthful beauty and hilarity, to charm away the evil spirit of his guilty conscience. In the midst of revelry and pomp, a boding form was ever flitting before the terrified visions of his guilty conscience.

“The austere remembrance of that deed
Still hung upon his spirit like a cloud,
And tinged its world Of happy images
With hues of horror.”

It came in the silence of midnight and the glare of noon; it mingled in the festive hall and glided into the solitude of the chamber. As the ghost of Banquo to Macbeth, or the ghost of Caesar to Brutus, so was that gory head of the murdered Baptist ever haunting the guilty soul of Herod, and amidst social glee and softest strains of music, blanched his cheeks with the hues of death.

And thus was Herod a witness to himself that this world is under a moral government; and though crime may for a time go unpunished, there is a terrible retribution for the guilty. And if any of you feel the remembrance of sin, and cannot shake off the dread of punishment, you are just such a witness as Herod to the fact of God's moral government and the coming judgment. Such a person may be an atheist, or call himself so. He may say he sees no footprints of God in the marshalled stars or the splendors of creation; he may say he hears no voice of God, either in the melodies or tempests of nature; it matters not — the footprints are in his own soul, and the voice of God is sounding in his conscience. As long as there is to the guilty the pangs of conscience, the dread of something after death, the fear of coming judgment, there is evidence enough. Though all traces of divinity should be blotted from the outward universe, though the Bible itself should be swept from the world, still, in man's own soul there would remain a testimony to the divine government and to a coming retribution. It is a testimony like that of Herod when he heard of the miracles of Jesus, a compulsory testimony that forces the unwilling soul to cry: "It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead."

Look again at Herod. In his alarm, he acknowledges a truth which he had banished from his creed. Herod was a Sadducee, and denied the doctrine of a resurrection and of a future world. To admit, or even conjecture, that the Baptist had reappeared in the person of Jesus, was to concede a resurrection and a future world. And yet, Sadducee as he was, denying in theory a resurrection and a future life, Herod here practically confesses these truths. How shall we explain this? Had he reasoned himself out of his creed? Had he examined the subject; had he listened to the arguments of the learned, and was he convinced in this way of his error? No, not at all. There is great inconsistency between his creed and the confession wrung from his heart by fear. But this is not uncommon with men who embrace error because it suits their sins. They adopt a theory that suits their sinful passions. They have no conviction of its truth; but it suits

them, and as long as there is nothing to test their creed it does well enough; but when judgments come and their fears are roused, their creed gives way, and there is nothing but terror and despair. Herod professed to be a Sadducee, he denied the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and the future life. It suited his wicked life; but all the time there was no conviction of the truth of his creed, and all the while conscience was whispering a remonstrance, and waiting for some crisis to assert its power and to scatter to the winds every subtle argument, and wring from the murderer a confession of his guilt and a denial of his creed. The crisis came. When he hears of one passing through the land working miracles, he is alarmed, and shrinks appalled from Jesus, as if he were really the murdered Baptist. He could not trust his creed; it is swept away like gossamer, and his conscience compels him to confess the very truth which he had denied, to confess that there was a resurrection, a judgment, and a future life. And so it is with infidels and unbelievers. A professed atheist was once caught in a storm on Lake Erie. Terrified by the fury of the tempest, he confessed the God he had denied in the calm, and exclaimed, in his distress: "Oh, my God! what shall I do?" And so men who have denied revelation and denied Christ, on their dying beds called upon Jesus to have mercy on them.

It is a marvelous power of conscience that compels a man to deny those doctrines with which he has labored to deceive himself and others, a power that forces him to become a witness, in his terror, for the very truths which he has tried to deny and disprove.

The fears of a guilty heart have often belied the creed of skepticism. Many an infidel has trembled amid the very tombstones on which he had written: "Death is an eternal sleep." And many a professed atheist has quailed in the storm or in the silent night, under the eye of that very God whose existence he had denied. It shows that the guilty mind has an inward sight as clear as the outward vision.

"I hear a voice you cannot hear,
I see a hand you cannot see,"

the guilty soul might say. The great dramatist has represented conscience as giving body and shape to the conceptions of the guilty mind. The usurper is made to cry:

“Methought the souls that I had murdered
Came to my tent, and every one did threat
Tomorrow’s vengeance on the head of Gloster.”

It was thus with Herod. The specter of the murdered Baptist troubled his guilty imagination, and when he heard of the wonderful works of Jesus, the ghost that haunted his soul starts out in visible, terrible form, and in spite of his skepticism he exclaims: “It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead.”

If any have adopted the creed and life of Herod; if any live in sin and reject Christ, and soothe their conscience with the hope that God will not reckon with them, or that in some way all will be well, let such see in this history the peril of living in sin, unmindful of the future. Sooner or later there must come the day when all delusions will be broken up, and that conscience that has been hushed and resisted will struggle up with superhuman power and preach to them — yea, and compel them to preach to others — the very doctrines which they now deny with scorn.

If there be no prophet in the land, armed with miraculous power to strike terror into those who have made their creeds to suit their sins, yet, when the footstep of death is heard, of death which comes to wrest the wicked from every object of their choice and delight, conscience will awake and utterly confound their sophisms, and fear fully agitate, by bringing up to vivid and terrific light, despised and forgotten truth.

And if men tell me that they know of no such power of conscience, that they have sufficient reason for believing as they do, and they will not fear for the future: let me point such to Herod and warn them by his experience, so sad and tragical. He thought he was safe in his creed. He flattered himself that there was no resurrection; that there was no judgment and no hereafter. See this self-complacent Herod, his creed scattered to the winds, his soul tortured with guilt and aghast with terror. Such a time comes to every sinner.

Look at the power of conscience in another respect. Herod had a plausible pretext for the crime he committed; perhaps to his own heart it was an apology for his conduct. But when conscience rose! these apologies could not quiet his anxieties, or drive away his fears of coming judgment.

Herod had made an oath to give to his daughter what ever she might ask, to the half of his kingdom. She asked the head of John the Baptist. Here, then, was an obligation, he reasoned, that he was compelled to fulfill at any

sacrifice. So he excused his sin, and sought to quiet his fears. And for a time he went the round of his revelry and sin, only now and then disturbed by some sudden flash of conscience. But the time came when conscience could no longer be silenced by his flimsy sophism and self-delusion, when the oath would no longer excuse the murder of the Baptist. When there were signs of danger, of impending judgments, away went all his apologies and excuses. Truth spake with terrible emphasis, and its tone and tenor made the royal sinner tremble. For Herod heard of a strange prophet in the land, a prophet whose miracles showed him able to punish the guilty. Then he did not say: "This cannot be John come back to punish me for my sin. I could not help what I did. There was the oath. It was against my will. Surely it cannot be this prophet is sent to visit me with judgment!"

All this he might have said once; but now conscience is too mighty to be soothed with flimsy pretexts and excuses for his crime. He stands with terror before the victim of his guilt, and Jesus, though he had come as a Saviour, is recoiled from as though he were the Baptist risen from the dead to take vengeance on his murderer.

And are there none now who, like Herod, flatter them selves that they have good excuses for their sins; that peculiar circumstances excuse what otherwise might be sinful. You are not a Christian; you have not forsaken the world and received Jesus, and confessed him; but you have some apology, some excuse that for the present seems to satisfy your conscience. But learn from this man what is before you. Be assured that the time will come when all these apologies and sophisms and excuses will be swept away. God allows no apology for sin. He can forgive it, but He cannot excuse it. Be assured that when the earth rings with the foot-tread of the Judge, you will start and tremble as did Herod, and fill the whole scene round you with the ghosts of your sins and neglected opportunities.

Herod shrank away from Jesus, thinking it was John whom he had beheaded.

And what will the wicked do hereafter? They will hear of wonders more amazing than those which startled Herod. There will be a trumpet peal such as never yet shook this creation, and scenes of terrific splendor and sublimity;

"A God in grandeur, and a world on fire!"

And what then shall the wicked say? Now they may flee to Jesus, as a Saviour, and make Him their friend in that day. But if they continue in their sins instead of forsaking them, then will they exclaim, at his second coming, as Herod did at his first: "This is Jesus whom we pierced, whom we crucified by our sins. He is risen from the dead, and is come in power and glory to take vengeance on those that know not God and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." And the kings of the earth and the great men hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains. And they called upon the rocks and the mountains: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." "For behold the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

Herod's fears were not mere fancies of a morbid imagination. Though John had not come back, judgment was hanging over the head of that guilty man.

"The foe, the foe was on his track, patient, certain, and avenging;
Day by day, solemnly and silently, followed the fearful past."

The monarch whose daughter he had divorced took the field against him, and after a dreadful battle Herod was defeated. To add to his misfortune, the Roman Emperor hurled him dishonored from the throne. And as if justice were not yet satisfied, he was banished to the solitudes of Gaul, where he and his abandoned queen died in exile, without a tear to bedew their memories in this world, and without a hope to cheer them in their expectations of another.

Thus we see Retribution, with its foot of down and its hand of steel, overtake the guilty. But who can picture the sad and tragical end of this royal sensualist and worldling! Driven from his throne, divested of all his princely vestments and honors, a lonely exile without a friend, goaded by remorse, haunted by the grim specter of the murdered Baptist, he dies.

25. Parting. 2 Kings 2:12

“And he saw him no more.” 2 Kings 2:12

AS THE TWO PROPHETS walked along the river road beyond Jordan, and talked of their approaching separation, there suddenly appeared to them the chariot of fire. Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven. Elisha is startled, and then overcome with the sense of orphanage, loneliness, and desolation. In the outburst of his feelings he exclaims, “my father! my father!” then it is said, “and he saw him no more.” This fragment of Old Testament history, short, simple, and touching, is a picture of human life. That parting of the prophets by the river has been repeated through all generations. Life is full of partings. Every day we see some one whom we shall never see again.

One of the consequences of sin was separation. At the tower of Babel, “the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth.” Speech, the medium of heart communion, was made a babel of sounds, making bodily separation which followed, as inevitable as it was judicial. In that separation of the human family at Babel was the type of all subsequent partings, suggesting but one true reunion, begun on Calvary, realized in Pentecost, to be consummated in the second coming of Christ, who is to gather all the world into one family.

The Bible, that mirror of life, abounds with these partings, and they are pictured to the eye of the reader that they may touch his heart and awaken the yearning aspiration for that final re-union in the love and home of Heaven. To this end we use this text as suggestive of these partings.

It suggests the first and most common parting, outward and bodily separation. This is something of every day experience, and often without any lasting impression. It is probable that every day we meet some one whom we shall never meet again. We take no notice of it, and yet there is a solemnity in the fact. We meet a person on the street and talk; for the time he is my neighbor; when next we see him we may be standing side by side before the judgment-seat of Christ. Even these chance meetings in life may

have in them vast results. Thoughts, feelings, impulses, may be started that shall abide forever. They may change a life and save a soul.

There is always an element of sadness in parting from old places, and associations, and persons. Every young man who leaves his simple country home for college, or to go into business in some distant city, knows this. As he looked for the last time on the old homestead and the familiar scenes of his childhood, what a feeling of sadness came over him.

“Farewell, my home, where many a day has past
In joys, whose lov’d remembrance long shall last.”

I remember, when a youth, I left my home in the south for college. How I lingered at the threshold of the house, how every old familiar spot seemed to hold me, how as I went down through the meadow, I stopped at the stream where I had spent so many happy hours. I knew nothing then of Tennyson, but many a time since have I recalled the sadness of that hour, and felt those words of the poet, in his farewell to the brook:

“A thousand suns will stream on thee.
A thousand moons will quiver,
But not by thee, my steps shall be
Forever and forever.”

This is true even when people are comparative strangers to each other. I remember the last night I heard Dickens read in Concert Hall. When he spoke a few parting words, and said they were his last before leaving, as I caught the last glimpse of his retiring form, a feeling of indescribable sadness came over me, and with it came the thought that I should never see him again until we met in the judgment.

When such parting, even bodily and for a time, is between friends and loved ones, it has a touch of peculiar sorrow. When the wife parts from her husband, or the mother with her son, who is going to some distant place for trade or speculation, or with a daughter newly married, going to some home in the west, or as the wife of a missionary to a heathen land. When hearts, grown into each other by love, are called to part for a season, it is like a bereavement; long days and years may pass, yet are they present in dream

and vision, and all the while there is hanging over them the possibility of not meeting again.

“But oh! what words can paint the fears
When from those friends we sever,
Perhaps to part for months, for years,
Perhaps to part forever.”

But partings such as these, the wife from her husband, the mother from her child, are not real and permanent separations. These partings are only bodily, the hearts of the loved and loving are drawn closer and knit firmer by the bodily separation. There is another parting even in this life, sadder far than any separation of body. There are partings between Christians and between souls forever and forever. You may recall the parting of Paul with the elders of the church of Ephesus. Standing on the beach at Miletus before he embarked, the apostle spoke to them his farewell, concluding finally, “Ye all among whom I have preached the Kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.” And when he had finished he knelt down in prayer with them on the shore, and the sand was wet with their tears. “And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.” That was a tearful separation, but it was brightened by an immortal hope; and Paul could commend those weeping elders to God and the word of his grace, which would give them an inheritance at last with him and the saved. Such parting is not all sad, for there is in it the sweet hope of reunion.

But how different are the partings that are of daily occurrence between souls. There are those who once knew each other intimately, who called each other friends, who have parted spiritually. They have drifted asunder, not because one is a lawyer and the other is a merchant, not because one is engaged in literary pursuits and the other is a mechanic, not because separated by seas and continents, one in America and the other in Europe or Africa, not because hands once clasped in friendship can never meet again in loving embrace. They have parted not in body, but in spirit. Ghosts of old worn-out friendships haunt the memory, only to remind us of the vanity of all friendships save one. Still more painful is it when old friends not only lose their early friendship, but become alienated and hostile by reason of conflicting opinions and antagonistic creeds. Political differences have sometimes separated friends, and turned the love of youth into the discord

and dissension of age. Sometimes there are religious convictions where men differ, and one goes off in some by path of error, or what is believed to be error, in the direction of Ritualism or Romanism. How often, then, there steals over one coldness, variance, conflict, utter alienation. Some of us may have experienced something of this in the unhappy divisions of our own church.

But more painful still when the change is not from one form of Christianity to another, but from Christianity itself into settled unbelief. Oh, what partings between souls in the same family, in the same congregation, in the same social community! What a sad and prophetic warning is suggested by the words of Christ when he declares: "A man's foes shall be they of his own household. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother." This is not the object, but it is the effect, of his coming.

How sad are the soul partings between sometimes a father and his own son, a mother and her child, between sister and brother. The one is in Christ, the other is not. The one, with a life of faith, is growing upward and Godward; the other, with a mere earthly life, is growing downward. Every day, every week, they are separating more and more. There is no unity of sentiment, feeling, or hope. For what communion hath light with darkness? What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And so even the communion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is saddened by these partings, when the wife or the sister comes to it alone, leaving the husband and brother behind. How unutterably sad is this conscious separation of souls, between a parent and child, a sister and a brother, between friends. There is a sense of severance far as earth and heaven asunder. So when David and Absalom were separated, the father and his own son, when David in his grief exclaimed: "Oh, Absalom, my son, would to God that I had died for thee!"

At last comes, after the partings of time, the death-parting; and this is inevitable.

"Have not all past human beings parted,
And must not all the present one day part?"

Set yourselves in full view of that. Try to realize what it is. Ask, in each several aspect of earthly association and relationship, what for you will be

the meaning of the text: "He saw him no more." The various separations of the family and of friends derive their significance and solemnity from that one certain last momentous death-parting. "He saw him no more." That parting of the prophets at the river was memorable. That mantle falling on the prophet as Elijah went up in his chariot of fire, changed a common life, a life of plowing and farming, into a life of special consecration to the service of God and his generation.

This parting of the prophets was indeed a meeting. It brought two lives and two souls into one as no length of bodily converse could have united them. The spirit of Elijah then began to rest on Elisha when they were parted outwardly. It is always thus with the highest unities of man, with man, and with God. It is through the death parting that the everlasting meeting begins. Never whilst we live shall we quite discard those weaknesses which cling to the friendships and loves of the fallen. That perfect union of soul with soul, for which we yearn, can never be fully realized in the flesh; never until this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal is clothed with immortality. The death parting must come first, and then, for such as have lived for it, will come the immortal meeting. It was so with Jesus. Who can read his earthly life and recall the sorrowful words which from time to time fell from His lips; especially His last long discourse with his own concerning the things which were to happen after his departure, and not feel that the highest communion was waiting for the death parting; that then only could He truly come to them, when through cross and grave He had first gone away.

Now, from this it is evident that mere bodily presence is not absolutely spiritual union. Persons may live in the same house, in the same family, without knowing each other. Sometimes, from the chance sight of a letter, from the casual word dropped by a third person, we learn more than by dwelling together for years. Sometimes the last word at parting reveals what they were. Elijah was nearer to his friend after his departure than ever before. Often when we are present in the body, we may be farthest away in spirit. You may be really nearer in spirit to a friend who lives on the opposite side of the globe than to some one who lives in the next house or in your own family. A young friend who had years ago been in my Bible-class, and whom I had confirmed, moved away to San Francisco. A short time ago I received a letter from that friend asking me to come out and start a church there. I felt as if I knew that friend far better in San Francisco than

when here in Philadelphia. There was a spiritual union between us, although we were far asunder.

In this light, what, to a Christian, is the parting at death? It is the true and eternal meeting. You have not lost that Christian friend, or child. No! You have only then truly possessed them.

Mother, your child is not truly your child until you have lost him. That which you can put your arms about, is that which you cannot afford to lose. That child in Christ and with Christ is yours really in everlasting possession and love.

These earthly separations are sad and painful, but they are inevitable. We cannot live for ever on earth: One here, another there, is taken away. This separation is a good discipline. The great point is to so live that the death-parting may be an eternal meeting.

Last and saddest of all is the soul-parting; two persons of the same household drifting asunder, one from the other; the one in Christ, the other out of Christ; the one growing heavenward, the other earthward; present in body, but divided in spirit. The spiritual separation widens until the death-parting comes, and then the great gulf is fixed, and the text becomes an awful fact to the friend, to the mother, to the child — “He saw him no more.”

Oh, that God may save any of us from such a parting! Oh, that in our families and in the church we may seek to be one in Christ, to live in the unity of faith and love, that when the final parting of earth comes, we may not have to say, in utter desperation of soul: We shall see thee no more!

No; we part, but it is only for the consummation of our union for ever.

“Soon shall we meet again, meet ne’er to sever;
Soon will peace wreathe her chain round us for ever.”

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Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

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Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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