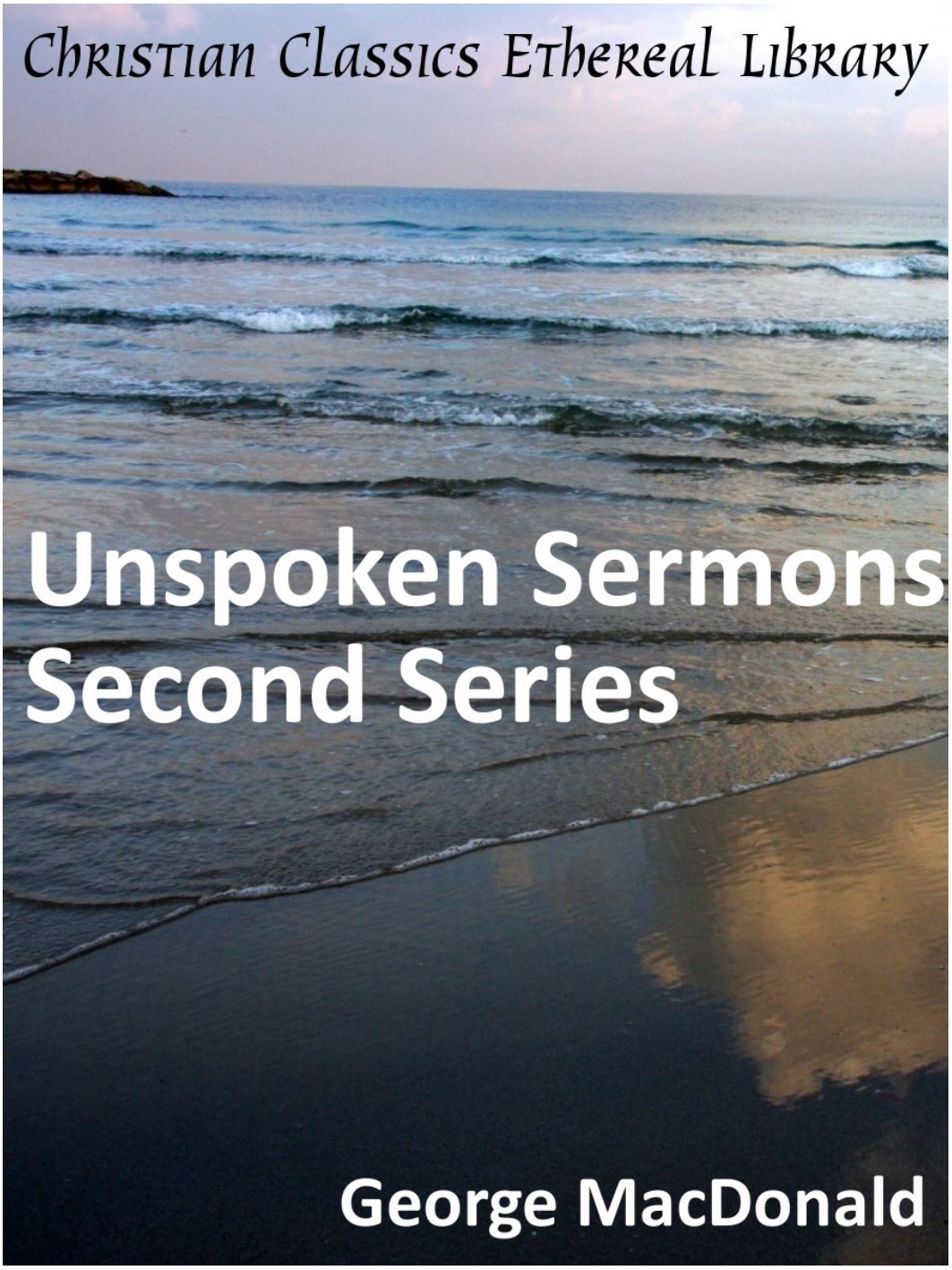
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Unspoken Sermons
Second Series
George MacDonald

Unspoken Sermons Second Series

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Description: George MacDonald was a well-known and well-loved Christian author and poet in the 19th century. He had an important impact on figures such as C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and G.K. Chesterton. Although he wrote much beloved fiction, MacDonald's *Unspoken Sermons* is some of the most wonderful and profound literature a person can read. The sermons are arranged in series, so that they build upon one another. Throughout, MacDonald is more concerned with a person developing a love of God than developing dogmas. That is, MacDonald's sermons are more concerned with *doing* the will of God than *believing* true things about God. Though MacDonald's approach to theology is not the usual one, nevertheless the results are astounding. Many readers feel they are being swept into the presence of God upon reading these sermons. MacDonald's *Unspoken Sermons* truly provide a chance for a person to more closely love God and humankind.
Tim Perrine
CCEL Staff Writer

Subjects: Practical theology
Pastoral theology
Preaching. Homiletics
Sermons

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Unspoken Sermons Second Series

By George MacDonald

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1885

THESE ALSO
AFTER EIGHTEEN YEARS
TO
MY WIFE
Coraggio, Bordighera
January 1885

THE WAY.

'If thou wouldest be perfect.'—St. Matthew xix. 21.

For reasons many and profound, amongst the least because of the fragmentary nature of the records, he who would read them without the candle of the Lord—that is, the light of truth in his inward parts—must not merely fall into a thousand errors—a thing for such a one of less moment—but must fail utterly of perceiving and understanding the life therein struggling to reveal itself—the life, that is, of the Son of Man, the thought, the feeling, the intent of the Lord himself, that by which he lived, that which is himself, that which he poured out for us. Yet the one thing he has to do with is this life of Jesus, his inner nature and being, manifested through his outer life, according to the power of sight in the spiritual eye that looks thereupon.

In contemplating the incident revealing that life of which I would now endeavour to unfold the truth, my readers who do not study the Greek Testament must use the revised version. Had I not known and rejoiced in it long before the revision appeared, I should have owed the revisers endless gratitude, if for nothing more than the genuine reading of St. Matthew's report of the story of the youth who came to our Lord. Whoever does not welcome the change must fail to see its preciousness.

Reading then from the revised version, we find in St. Matthew the commencement of the conversation between Jesus and the young man very different from that given in the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke. There is not for that the smallest necessity for rejecting either account; they blend perfectly, and it is to me a joy unspeakable to have both. Put together they give a completed conversation. Here it is as I read it; let my fellow students look to the differing, far from opposing, reports, and see how naturally they combine.

'Good Master,' said the kneeling youth, and is interrupted by the Master:—

'Why callest thou me good?' he returns. 'None is good save one, even God.'

Daring no reply to this, the youth leaves it, and betakes himself to his object in addressing the Lord.

'What good thing shall I do,' he says, 'that I may have eternal life?'

But again the Lord takes hold of the word good:—

'Why askest thou me concerning that which is good?' he rejoins. 'One there is who is good.—But if thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments.'

'Which?'

'Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

'All these things have I observed: what lack I yet?'

'If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'

Let us regard the story.

As Jesus went out of a house (see St. Mark x. 10 and 17), the young man came running to him, and kneeling down in the way, addressed him as 'Good Master.'

The words with which the Lord interrupts his address reveal the whole attitude of the Lord's being. At that moment, at every and each moment, just as much as when in the garden of Gethsemane, or encountering any of those hours which men call crises of life, his whole thought, his whole delight, was in the thought, in the will, in the being of his Father. The joy of the Lord's life, that which made it life to him, was the Father; of him he was always thinking, to him he was always turning. I suppose most men have some thought of pleasure or satisfaction or strength to which they turn when action pauses, life becomes for a moment still, and the wheel sleeps on its own swiftness: with Jesus it needed no pause of action, no rush of renewed consciousness, to send him home; his thought was ever and always his Father. To its home in the heart of the Father his heart ever turned. That was his treasure-house, the jewel of his mind, the mystery of his gladness, claiming all degrees and shades of delight, from peace and calmest content to ecstasy. His life was hid in God. No vain show could enter at his eyes; every truth and grandeur of life passed before him as it was; neither ambition nor disappointment could distort them to his eternal childlike gaze; he beheld and loved them from the bosom of the Father. It was not for himself he came to the world—not to establish his own power over the doings, his own influence over the hearts of men: he came that they might know the Father who was his joy, his life. The sons of men were his Father's children like himself: that the Father should have them all in his bosom was the one thought of his heart: that should be his doing for his Father, cost him what it might! He came to do his will, and on the earth was the same he had been from the beginning, the eternal first. He was not interested in himself, but in his Father and his Father's children. He did not care to hear himself called good. It was not of consequence to him. He was there to let men see the goodness of the Father in whom he gloried. For that he entered the weary dream of the world, in which the glory was so dulled and clouded. 'You call me good! You should know my Father!'

For the Lord's greatness consisted in his Father being greater than he: who calls into being is greater than who is called. The Father was always the Father, the Son always the Son; yet the Son is not of himself, but by the Father; he does not live by his own power, like the Father. If there were no Father, there would be no Son. All that is the Lord's is the Father's, and all that is the Father's he has given to the Son. The Lord's goodness is of the Father's goodness; because the Father is good the Son is good. When the word good enters the ears of the Son, his heart lifts it at once to his Father, the Father of all. His words contain no denial of goodness in himself: in his grand self-regard he was not the original of his goodness, neither did he care for his own goodness, except to be good: it was to him a matter of course. But for his Father's goodness, he would spend life, suffering, labour, death, to

make that known! His other children must learn to give him his due, and love him as did the primal Son! The Father was all in all to the Son, and the Son no more thought of his own goodness than an honest man thinks of his honesty. When the good man sees goodness, he thinks of his own evil: Jesus had no evil to think of, but neither does he think of his goodness; he delights in his Father's. 'Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God.'

Checked thus, the youth turns to the question which, working in his heart, had brought him running, and made him kneel: what good thing shall he do that he may have eternal life? It is unnecessary to inquire precisely what he meant by eternal life. Whatever shape the thing took to him, that shape represented a something he needed and had not got—a something which, it was clear to him, could be gained only in some path of good. But he thought to gain a thing by a doing, when the very thing desired was a being: he would have that as a possession which must possess him.

The Lord cared neither for isolated truth nor for orphaned deed. It was truth in the inward parts, it was the good heart, the mother of good deeds, he cherished. It was the live, active, knowing, breathing good he came to further. He cared for no speculation in morals or religion. It was good men he cared about, not notions of good things, or even good actions, save as the outcome of life, save as the bodies in which the primary live actions of love and will in the soul took shape and came forth. Could he by one word have set at rest all the questionings of philosophy as to the supreme good and the absolute truth, I venture to say that word he would not have uttered. But he would die to make men good and true. His whole heart would respond to the cry of sad publican or despairing pharisee, 'How am I to be good?'

When the Lord says, 'Why askest thou me concerning that which is good?' we must not put emphasis on the me, as if the Lord refused the question, as he had declined the epithet: he was the proper person to ask, only the question was not the right one: the good thing was a small matter; the good Being was all in all. [1] 'Why ask me about the good thing? There is one living good, in whom the good thing, and all good, is alive and ever operant. Ask me not about the good thing, but the good person, the good being—the origin of all good'—who, because he is, can make good. He is the one live good, ready with his life to communicate living good, the power of being, and so doing good, for he makes good itself to exist. It is not with this good thing and that good thing we have to do, but with that power whence comes our power even to speak the word good. We have to do with him to whom no one can look without the need of being good waking up in his heart; to think about him is to begin to be good. To do a good thing is to do a good thing; to know God is to be good. It is

1 As it stands, it is difficult to read the passage without putting emphasis on the me, which spoils the sense. I think it would better be, 'Why dost thou ask me concerning &c.?'

not to make us do all things right he cares, but to make us hunger and thirst after a righteousness possessing which we shall never need to think of what is or is not good, but shall refuse the evil and choose the good by a motion of the will which is at once necessity and choice. You see again he refers him immediately as before to his Father.

But I am anxious my reader should not mistake. Observe, the question in the young man's mind is not about the doing or not doing of something he knows to be right; had such been the case, the Lord would have permitted no question at all; the one thing he insists upon is the doing of the thing we know we ought to do. In the instance present, the youth looking out for some unknown good thing to do, he sends him back to the doing of what he knows, and that in answer to his question concerning the way to eternal life.

A man must have something to do in the matter, and may well ask such a question of any teacher! The Lord does not for a moment turn away from it, and only declines the form of it to help the youth to what he really needs. He has, in truth, already more than hinted where the answer lies, namely, in God himself, but that the youth is not yet capable of receiving; he must begin with him farther back: 'If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments;'—for verily, if the commandments have nothing to do with entering into life, why were they ever given to men? This is his task—he must keep the commandments.

Then the road to eternal life is the keeping of the commandments! Had the Lord not said so, what man of common moral sense would ever dare say otherwise? What else can be the way into life but the doing of what the Lord of life tells the creatures he has made, and whom he would have live for ever, that they must do? It is the beginning of the way. If a man had kept all those commandments, yet would he not therefore have in him the life eternal; nevertheless, without keeping of the commandments there is no entering into life; the keeping of them is the path to the gate of life; it is not life, but it is the way—so much of the way to it. Nay, the keeping of the commandments, consciously or unconsciously, has closest and essential relation to eternal life.

The Lord says nothing about the first table of the law: why does he not tell this youth as he did the lawyer, that to love God is everything?

He had given him a glimpse of the essence of his own life, had pointed the youth to the heart of all—for him to think of afterwards: he was not ready for it yet. He wanted eternal life: to love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, is to know God, and to know him is eternal life; that is the end of the whole saving matter; it is no human beginning, it is the grand end and eternal beginning of all things; but the youth was not capable of it. To begin with that would be as sensible as to say to one asking how to reach the top of some mountain, 'Just set your foot on that shining snow-clad peak, high there in the blue, and you will at once be where you wish to go.' 'Love God with all your heart, and eternal life is yours:'—it would have been to mock him. Why, he could not yet see or believe that that was eternal life! He was not yet capable of looking upon life even from afar! How many

Christians are? How many know that they are not? How many care that they are not? The Lord answers his question directly, tells him what to do—a thing he can do—to enter into life: he must keep the commandments!—and when he asks, 'Which?' specifies only those that have to do with his neighbour, ending with the highest and most difficult of them.

'But no man can perfectly keep a single commandment of the second table any more than of the first.'

Surely not—else why should they have been given? But is there no meaning in the word keep, or observe, except it be qualified by perfectly? Is there no keeping but a perfect keeping?

'None that God cares for.'

There I think you utterly wrong. That no keeping but a perfect one will satisfy God, I hold with all my heart and strength; but that there is none else he cares for, is one of the lies of the enemy. What father is not pleased with the first tottering attempt of his little one to walk? What father would be satisfied with anything but the manly step of the full-grown son?

When the Lord has definitely mentioned the commandments he means, the youth returns at once that he has observed those from his youth up: are we to take his word for it? The Lord at least takes his word for it: he looked on him and loved him. Was the Lord deceived in him? Did he tell an untruth? or did the Master believe he had kept the commandments perfectly? There must be a keeping of the commandments, which, although anything but perfect, is yet acceptable to the heart of him from whom nothing is hid. In that way the youth had kept the commandments. He had for years been putting forth something of his life-energy to keep them. Nor, however he had failed of perfection, had he missed the end for which they were given him to keep. For the immediate end of the commandments never was that men should succeed in obeying them, but that, finding they could not do that which yet must be done, finding the more they tried the more was required of them, they should be driven to the source of life and law—of their life and his law—to seek from him such re-inforcement of life as should make the fulfilment of the law as possible, yea, as natural, as necessary. This result had been wrought in the youth. His observance had given him no satisfaction; he was not at rest; but he desired eternal life—of which there was no word in the law: the keeping of the law had served to develop a hunger which no law or its keeping could fill. Must not the imperfection of his keeping of the commandments, even in the lower sense in which he read them, have helped to reveal how far they were beyond any keeping of his, how their implicit demands rose into the infinitude of God's perfection?

Having kept the commandments, the youth needed and was ready for a further lesson: the Lord would not leave him where he was; he had come to seek and to save. He saw him in sore need of perfection—the thing the commonplace Christian thinks he can best do without—the thing the elect hungers after with an eternal hunger. Perfection, the perfection of the Father, is eternal life. 'If thou wouldest be perfect,' said the Lord. What an honour for

the youth to be by him supposed desirous of perfection! And what an enormous demand does he, upon the supposition, make of him! To gain the perfection he desired, the one thing lacking was, that he should sell all that he had, give it to the poor, and follow the Lord! Could this be all that lay between him and entering into life? God only knows what the victory of such an obedience might at once have wrought in him! Much, much more would be necessary before perfection was reached, but certainly the next step, to sell and follow, would have been the step into life: had he taken it, in the very act would have been born in him that whose essence and vitality is eternal life, needing but process to develop it into the glorious consciousness of oneness with The Life.

There was nothing like this in the law: was it not hard?—Hard to let earth go, and take heaven instead? for eternal life, to let dead things drop? to turn his back on Mammon, and follow Jesus? lose his rich friends, and be of the Master's household? Let him say it was hard who does not know the Lord, who has never thirsted after righteousness, never longed for the life eternal!

The youth had got on so far, was so pleasing in the eyes of the Master, that he would show him the highest favour he could; he would take him to be with him—to walk with him, and rest with him, and go from him only to do for him what he did for his Father in heaven—to plead with men, be a mediator between God and men. He would set him free at once, a child of the kingdom, an heir of the life eternal.

I do not suppose that the youth was one whom ordinary people would call a lover of money; I do not believe he was covetous, or desired even the large increase of his possessions; I imagine he was just like most good men of property: he valued his possessions—looked on them as a good. I suspect that in the case of another, he would have regarded such possession almost as a merit, a desert; would value a man more who had means, value a man less who had none—like most of my readers. They have not a notion how entirely they will one day have to alter their judgment, or have it altered for them, in this respect: well for them if they alter it for themselves!

From this false way of thinking, and all the folly and unreality that accompany it, the Lord would deliver the young man. As the thing was, he was a slave; for a man is in bondage to what ever he cannot part with that is less than himself. He could have taken his possessions from him by an exercise of his own will, but there would have been little good in that; he wished to do it by the exercise of the young man's will: that would be a victory indeed for both! So would he enter into freedom and life, delivered from the bondage of mammon by the lovely will of the Lord in him, one with his own. By the putting forth of the divine energy in him, he would escape the corruption that is in the world through lust—that is, the desire or pleasure of having.

The young man would not.

Was the Lord then premature in his demand on the youth? Was he not ready for it? Was it meant for a test, and not as an actual word of deliverance? Did he show the child a next step on the stair too high for him to set his foot upon? I do not believe it. He gave him the very next lesson in the divine education for which he was ready. It was possible for him to respond, to give birth, by obedience, to the redeemed and redeeming will, and so be free. It was time the demand should be made upon him. Do you say, 'But he would not respond, he would not obey!'? Then it was time, I answer, that he should refuse, that he should know what manner of spirit he was of, and meet the confusions of soul, the sad searchings of heart that must follow. A time comes to every man when he must obey, or make such refusal—and know it.

Shall I then be supposed to mean that the refusal of the young man was of necessity final? that he was therefore lost? that because he declined to enter into life the door of life was closed against him? Verily, I have not so learned Christ. And that the lesson was not lost, I see in this, that he went away sorrowful. Was such sorrow, in the mind of an earnest youth, likely to grow less or to grow more? Was all he had gone through in the way of obedience to be of no good to him? Could the nature of one who had kept the commandments be so slight that, after having sought and talked with Jesus, held communion with him who is the Life, he would care less about eternal life than before? Many, alas! have looked upon his face, yet have never seen him, and have turned back; some have kept company with him for years, and denied him; but their weakness is not the measure of the patience or the resources of God. Perhaps this youth was never one of the Lord's so long as he was on the earth, but perhaps when he saw that the Master himself cared nothing for the wealth he had told him to cast away, that, instead of ascending the throne of his fathers, he let the people do with him what they would, and left the world the poor man he had lived in it, by its meanest door, perhaps then he became one of those who sold all they had, and came and laid the money at the apostles' feet. In the meantime he had that in his soul which made it heavy: by the gravity of his riches the world held him, and would not let him rise. He counted his weight his strength, and it was his weakness. Moneyless in God's upper air he would have had power indeed. Money is the power of this world—a power for defeat and failure to him who holds it—a weakness to be overcome ere a man can be strong; yet many decent people fancy it a power of the world to come! It is indeed a little power, as food and drink, as bodily strength, as the winds and the waves are powers; but it is no mighty thing for the redemption of men; yea, to the redemption of those who have it, it is the saddest obstruction. To make this youth capable of eternal life, clearly—and the more clearly that he went away sorrowful—the first thing was to make a poor man of him! He would doubtless have gladly devoted his wealth to the service of the Master, yea, and gone with him, as a rich man, to spend it for him. But part with it to free him for his service—that he could not—yet!

And how now would he go on with his keeping of the commandments? Would he not begin to see more plainly his shortcomings, the larger scope of their requirements? Might he not feel the keeping of them more imperative than ever, yet impossible without something he had not? The commandments can never be kept while there is a strife to keep them: the man is overwhelmed in the weight of their broken pieces. It needs a clean heart to have pure hands, all the power of a live soul to keep the law—a power of life, not of struggle; the strength of love, not the effort of duty.

One day the truth of his conduct must dawn upon him with absolute clearness. Bitter must be the discovery. He had refused the life eternal! had turned his back upon The Life! In deepest humility and shame, yet with the profound consolation of repentance, he would return to the Master and bemoan his unteachableness. There are who, like St. Paul, can say, 'I did wrong, but I did it in ignorance; my heart was not right, and I did not know it:' the remorse of such must be very different from that of one who, brought to the point of being capable of embracing the truth, turned from it and refused to be set free. To him the time will come, God only knows its hour, when he will see the nature of his deed, with the knowledge that he was dimly seeing it so even when he did it: the alternative had been put before him. And all those months, or days, or hours, or moments, he might have been following the Master, hearing the words he spoke, through the windows of his eyes looking into the very gulfs of Godhead!

The sum of the matter in regard to the youth is this:—He had begun early to climb the eternal stair. He had kept the commandments, and by every keeping had climbed. But because he was well to do—a phrase of unconscious irony—he felt well to be—quite, but for that lack of eternal life! His possessions gave him a standing in the world—a position of consequence—of value in his eyes. He knew himself looked up to; he liked to be looked up to; he looked up to himself because of his means, forgetting that means are but tools, and poor tools too. To part with his wealth would be to sink to the level of his inferiors! Why should he not keep it? why not use it in the service of the Master? What wisdom could there be in throwing away such a grand advantage? He could devote it, but he could not cast it from him! He could devote it, but he could not devote himself! He could not make himself naked as a little child and let his Father take him! To him it was not the word of wisdom the 'Good Master' spoke. How could precious money be a hindrance to entering into life! How could a rich man believe he would be of more value without his money? that the casting of it away would make him one of God's Anakim? that the battle of God could be better fought without its impediment? that his work refused as an obstruction the aid of wealth? But the Master had repudiated money that he might do the will of his Father; and the disciple must be as his master. Had he done as the Master told him, he would soon have come to understand. Obedience is the opener of eyes.

There is this danger to every good youth in keeping the commandments, that he will probably think of himself more highly than he ought to think. He may be correct enough as to the facts, and in his deductions, and consequent self-regard, be anything but fair. He may think himself a fine fellow, when he is but an ordinarily reasonable youth, trying to do but the first thing necessary to the name or honour of a man. Doubtless such a youth is exceptional among youths; but the number of fools not yet acknowledging the first condition of manhood nowise alters the fact that he who has begun to recognize duty, and acknowledge the facts of his being, is but a tottering child on the path of life. He is on the path; he is as wise as at the time he can be; the Father's arms are stretched out to receive him; but he is not therefore a wonderful being; not therefore a model of wisdom; not at all the admirable creature his largely remaining folly would, in his worst moments, that is when he feels best, persuade him to think himself; he is just one of God's poor creatures. What share this besetting sin of the good young man may have had in the miserable failure of this one, we need not inquire; but it may well be that he thought the Master under-valued his work as well as his wealth, and was less than fair to him.

To return to the summing up of the matter:—

The youth, climbing the stair of eternal life, had come to a landing-place where not a step more was visible. On the cloud-swathed platform he stands looking in vain for further ascent. What he thought with himself he wanted, I cannot tell: his idea of eternal life I do not know; I can hardly think it was but the poor idea of living for ever, all that commonplace minds grasp at for eternal life—its mere concomitant shadow, in itself not worth thinking about, not for a moment to be disputed, and taken for granted by all devout Jews: when a man has eternal life, that is, when he is one with God, what should he do but live for ever? without oneness with God, the continuance of existence would be to me the all but unsurpassable curse—the unsurpassable itself being, a God other than the God I see in Jesus; but whatever his idea, it must have held in it, though perhaps only in solution, all such notions as he had concerning God and man and a common righteousness. While thus he stands, then, alone and helpless, behold the form of the Son of Man! It is God himself come to meet the climbing youth, to take him by the hand, and lead him up his own stair, the only stair by which ascent can be made. He shows him the first step of it through the mist. His feet are heavy; they have golden shoes. To go up that stair he must throw aside his shoes. He must walk bare-footed into life eternal. Rather than so, rather than stride free-limbed up the everlasting stair to the bosom of the Father, he will keep his precious shoes! It is better to drag them about on the earth, than part with them for a world where they are useless!

But how miserable his precious things, his golden vessels, his embroidered garments, his stately house, must have seemed when he went back to them from the face of the Lord! Surely it cannot have been long before in shame and misery he cast all from him, even as Judas cast from him the thirty pieces of silver, in the agony of every one who wakes to the

fact that he has preferred money to the Master! For, although never can man be saved without being freed from his possessions, it is yet only hard, not impossible, for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

THE HARDNESS OF THE WAY.

'Children, how hard is it!'—St. Mark x. 24.

I suspect there is scarcely a young man rich and thoughtful who is not ready to feel our Lord's treatment of this young man hard. He is apt to ask, 'Why should it be difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven?' He is ready to look upon the natural fact as an arbitrary decree, arising, shall I say? from some prejudice in the divine mind, or at least from some objection to the joys of well-being, as regarded from the creatures' side. Why should the rich fare differently from other people in respect of the world to come? They do not perceive that the law is they shall fare like other people, whereas they want to fare as rich people. A condition of things in which it would be easy for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven is to me inconceivable. There is no kingdom of this world into which a rich man may not easily enter—in which, if he be but rich enough, he may not be the first: a kingdom into which it would be easy for a rich man to enter could be no kingdom of heaven. The rich man does not by any necessity of things belong to the kingdom of Satan, but into that kingdom he is especially welcome, whereas into the kingdom of heaven he will be just as welcome as another man.

I suspect also that many a rich man turns from the record of this incident with the resentful feeling that there lies in it a claim upon his whole having; while there are many, and those by no means only of the rich, who cannot believe the Lord really meant to take the poor fellow's money from him. To the man born to riches they seem not merely a natural, but an essential condition of well-being; and the man who has made his money, feels it his by the labour of his soul, the travail of the day, and the care of the night. Each feels a right to have and to hold the things he possesses; and if there is a necessity for his entering into the kingdom of heaven, it is hard indeed that right and necessity should confront each other, and constitute all but a bare impossibility! Why should he not 'make the best of both worlds'? He would compromise, if he might; he would serve Mammon a little, and God much. He would not have such a 'best of both worlds' as comes of putting the lower in utter subservience to the higher—of casting away the treasure of this world and taking the treasure of heaven instead. He would gain as little as may be of heaven—but something, with the loss of as little as possible of the world. That which he desires of heaven is not its best; that which he would not yield of the world is its most worthless.

I can well imagine an honest youth, educated in Christian forms, thus reasoning with himself:—'Is the story of general relation? Is this demand made upon me? If I make up my mind to be a Christian, shall I be required to part with all I possess? It must have been comparatively easy in those times to give up the kind of things they had! If I had been he, I am sure I should have done it—at the demand of the Saviour in person. Things are very different now! Wealth did not then imply the same social relations as now! I should be giving up so much more! Neither do I love money as he was in danger of doing: in all times the

Jews have been Mammon-worshippers! I try to do good with my money! Besides, am I not a Christian already? Why should the same thing be required of me as of a young Jew? If every one who, like me, has a conscience about money, and cares to use it well, had to give up all, the power would at once be in the hands of the irreligious; they would have no opposition, and the world would go to the devil! We read often in the Bible of rich men, but never of any other who was desired to part with all that he had! When Ananias was struck dead, it was not because he did not give up all his money, but because he pretended to have done so. St. Peter expressly says, "While it remained was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" How would the Lord have been buried but for the rich Joseph? Besides, the Lord said, "If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell that thou hast." I cannot be perfect; it is hopeless; and he does not expect it.'—It would be more honest if he said, 'I do not want to be perfect; I am content to be saved.' Such as he do not care for being perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect, but for being what they call saved. They little think that without perfection there is no salvation—that perfection is salvation: they are one.—'And again,' he adds, in conclusion triumphant, 'the text says, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" I do not trust in my riches. I know that they can do nothing to save me!'

I will suppose myself in immediate communication with such a youth. I should care little to set forth anything called truth, except in siege for surrender to the law of liberty. If I cannot persuade, I would be silent. Nor would I labour to instruct the keenest intellect; I would rather learn for myself. To persuade the heart, the will, the action, is alone worth the full energy of a man. His strength is first for his own, then for his neighbour's manhood. He must first pluck out the beam out of his own eye, then the mote out of his brother's—if indeed the mote in his brother's be more than the projection of the beam in his own. To make a man happy as a lark, might be to do him grievous wrong: to make a man wake, rise, look up, turn, is worth the life and death of the Son of the Eternal.

I say then to the youth:—

'Have you kept—have you been keeping the commandments?'

'I will not dare to say that,' I suppose him to answer. 'I ought to know better than that youth how much is implied in the keeping of the commandments!'

'But,' I ask insisting, 'does your answer imply that, counting the Lord a hard master, you have taken the less pains to do as he would have you? or that, bending your energies to the absolute perfection he requires, you have the more perceived the impossibility of fulfilling the law? Can you have failed to note that it is the youth who has been for years observing the commandments on whom the further, and to you startling, command is laid, to part with all that he has? Surely not! Are you then one on whom, because of correspondent condition, the same command could be laid? Have you, in any sense like that in which the youth answered the question, kept the commandments? Have you, unsatisfied with the

result of what keeping you have given them, and filled with desire to be perfect, gone kneeling to the Master to learn more of the way to eternal life? or are you so well satisfied with what you are, that you have never sought eternal life, never hungered and thirsted after the righteousness of God, the perfection of your being? If this latter be your condition, then be comforted; the Master does not require of you to sell what you have and give to the poor. You follow him! You go with him to preach good tidings!—you who care not for righteousness! You are not one whose company is desirable to the Master. Be comforted, I say: he does not want you; he will not ask you to open your purse for him; you may give or withhold; it is nothing to him. What! is he to be obliged to one outside his kingdom—to the untrue, the ignoble, for money? Bring him a true heart, an obedient hand: he has given his life-blood for that; but your money—he neither needs it nor cares for it.'

'Pray, do not deal harshly with me. I confess I have not been what I ought, but I want to repent, and would fain enter into life. Do not think, because I am not prepared, without the certainty that it is required of me, to cast from me all I have that I have no regard for higher things.'

'Once more, then, go and keep the commandments. It is not come to your money yet. The commandments are enough for you. You are not yet a child in the kingdom. You do not care for the arms of your father; you value only the shelter of his roof. As to your money, let the commandments direct you how to use it. It is in you but pitiable presumption to wonder whether it is required of you to sell all that you have. When in keeping the commandments you have found the great reward of loving righteousness—the further reward of discovering that, with all the energy you can put forth, you are but an unprofitable servant; when you have come to know that the law can be kept only by such as need no law; when you have come to feel that you would rather pass out of being than live on such a poor, miserable, selfish life as alone you can call yours; when you are aware of a something beyond all that your mind can think, yet not beyond what your heart can desire—a something that is not yours, seems as if it never could be yours, which yet your life is worthless without; when you have come therefore to the Master with the cry, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" it may be he will then say to you, "Sell all that you have and give to the poor, and come follow me." If he do, then will you be of men most honourable if you obey—of men most pitiable if you refuse. Till then you would be no comfort to him, no pleasure to his friends. For the young man to have sold all and followed him would have been to accept God's patent of peerage: to you it is not offered. Were one of the disobedient, in the hope of the honour, to part with every straw he possessed, he would but be sent back to keep the commandments in the new and easier circumstances of his poverty.

'Does this comfort you? Then alas for you! A thousand times alas! Your relief is to know that the Lord has no need of you—does not require you to part with your money, does not offer you himself instead! You do not indeed sell him for thirty pieces of silver, but you are

glad not to buy him with all that you have! Wherein do you differ from the youth of the story? In this, that he was invited to do more, to do everything, to partake of the divine nature; you have not had it in your power to refuse; you are not fit to be invited. Such as you can never enter the kingdom. You would not even know you were in heaven if you were in it; you would not see it around you if you sat on the very footstool of the throne.'

'But I do not trust in my riches; I trust in the merits of my Lord and Saviour. I trust in his finished work. I trust in the sacrifice he has offered.'

'Yes; yes!—you will trust in anything but the Man himself who tells you it is hard to be saved! Not all the merits of God and his Christ can give you eternal life; only God and his Christ can; and they cannot, would not if they could, without your keeping the commandments. The knowledge of the living God is eternal life. What have you to do with his merits? You have to know his being, himself. And as to trusting in your riches—who ever imagined he could have eternal life by his riches? No man with half a conscience, half a head, and no heart at all, could suppose that any man trusting in his riches to get him in, could enter the kingdom. That would be too absurd. The money-confident Jew might hope that, as his riches were a sign of the favour of God, that favour would not fail him at the last; or their possession might so enlarge his self-satisfaction that he could not entertain the idea of being lost; but trust in his riches!—no. It is the last refuge of the riches-lover, the riches-worshipper, the man to whom their possession is essential for his peace, to say he does not trust in them to take him into life. Doubtless the man who thinks of nothing so much, trusts in them in a very fearful sense; but hundreds who do so will yet say, "I do not trust in my riches; I trust in—" this or that stock-phrase.'

'You forget yourself; you are criticizing the Lord's own words: he said, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven!"'

'I do not forget myself; to this I have been leading you:—our Lord, I believe, never said those words. The reading of both the Sinaitic and the Vatican manuscript, the oldest two we have, that preferred, I am glad to see, by both Westcott and Tischendorf, though not by Tregelles or the Revisers, is, "Children, how hard is it to enter into the kingdom of God!" These words I take to be those of the Lord. Some copyist, with the mind at least of a rich man, dissatisfied with the Lord's way of regarding money, and like yourself anxious to compromize, must forsooth affix his marginal gloss—to the effect that it is not the possessing of riches, but the trusting in them, that makes it difficult to enter into the kingdom! Difficult? Why, it is eternally impossible for the man who trusts in his riches to enter into the kingdom! it is for the man who has riches it is difficult. Is the Lord supposed to teach that for a man who trusts in his riches it is possible to enter the kingdom? that, though impossible with men, this is possible with God? God take the Mammon-worshipper into his glory! No! the Lord never said it. The annotation of Mr. Facingbothways crept into the text, and stands in the English version. Our Lord was not in the habit of explaining away his hard words. He

let them stand in all the glory of the burning fire wherewith they would purge us. Where their simplicity finds corresponding simplicity, they are understood. The twofold heart must mistake. It is hard for a rich man, just because he is a rich man, to enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

Some, no doubt, comfort themselves with the thought that, if it be so hard, the fact will be taken into account: it is but another shape of the fancy that the rich man must be differently treated from his fellows; that as he has had his good things here, so he must have them there too. Certain as life they will have absolute justice, that is, fairness, but what will that avail, if they enter not into the kingdom? It is life they must have; there is no enduring of existence without life. They think they can do without eternal life, if only they may live for ever! Those who know what eternal life means count it the one terror to have to live on without it.

Take then the Lord's words thus: 'Children, how hard is it to enter into the kingdom of God!' It is quite like his way of putting things. Calling them first to reflect on the original difficulty for every man of entering into the kingdom of God, he reasserts in yet stronger phrase the difficulty of the rich man: 'It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' It always was, always will be, hard to enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is hard even to believe that one must be born from above—must pass into a new and unknown consciousness. The law-faithful Jew, the ceremonial Christian, shrinks from the self-annihilation, the life of grace and truth, the upper air of heavenly delight, the all-embracing love that fills the law full and sets it aside. They cannot accept a condition of being as in itself eternal life. And hard to believe in, this life, this kingdom of God, this simplicity of absolute existence, is hard to enter. How hard? As hard as the Master of salvation could find words to express the hardness: 'If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not . . . . his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' And the rich man must find it harder than another to hate his own life. There is so much associated with it to swell out the self of his consciousness, that the difficulty of casting it from him as the mere ugly shadow of the self God made, is vastly increased.

None can know how difficult it is to enter into the kingdom of heaven, but those who have tried—tried hard, and have not ceased to try. I care not to be told that one may pass at once into all possible sweetness of assurance; it is not assurance I desire, but the thing itself; not the certainty of eternal life, but eternal life. I care not what other preachers may say, while I know that in St. Paul the spirit and the flesh were in frequent strife. They only, I repeat, know how hard it is to enter into life, who are in conflict every day, are growing to have this conflict every hour—nay, begin to see that no moment is life, without the presence that maketh strong. Let any tell me of peace and content, yea, joy unspeakable as the instant result of the new birth; I deny no such statement, refuse no such testimony; all I care to say is, that, if by salvation they mean less than absolute oneness with God, I count it no salvation,

neither would be content with it if it included every joy in the heaven of their best imagining. If they are not righteous even as he is righteous, they are not saved, whatever be their gladness or their content; they are but on the way to be saved. If they do not love their neighbour—not as themselves: that is a phrase ill to understand, and not of Christ, but—as Christ loves him, I cannot count them entered into life, though life may have begun to enter into them. Those whose idea of life is simply an eternal one, best know how hard it is to enter into life. The Lord said, 'Children how hard is it to enter into the kingdom!' the disciples little knew what was required of them!

Demands unknown before are continually being made upon the Christian: it is the ever fresh rousing and calling, asking and sending of the Spirit that worketh in the children of obedience. When he thinks he has attained, then is he in danger; when he finds the mountain he has so long been climbing show suddenly a distant peak, radiant in eternal whiteness, and all but lost in heavenly places, a peak whose glory-crowned apex it seems as if no human foot could ever reach—then is there hope for him; proof there is then that he has been climbing, for he beholds the yet unclimbed; he sees what he could not see before; if he knows little of what he is, he knows something of what he is not. He learns ever afresh that he is not in the world as Jesus was in the world; but the very wind that breathes courage as he climbs is the hope that one day he shall be like him, seeing him as he is.

Possessions are Things, and Things in general, save as affording matter of conquest and means of spiritual annexation, are very ready to prove inimical to the better life. The man who for consciousness of well-being depends upon anything but life, the life essential, is a slave; he hangs on what is less than himself. He is not perfect who, deprived of every thing, would not sit down calmly content, aware of a well-being untouched; for none the less would he be possessor of all things, the child of the Eternal. Things are given us, this body first of things, that through them we may be trained both to independence and true possession of them. We must possess them; they must not possess us. Their use is to mediate—as shapes and manifestations in lower kind of the things that are unseen, that is, in themselves unseeable, the things that belong, not to the world of speech, but the world of silence, not to the world of showing, but the world of being, the world that cannot be shaken, and must remain. These things unseen take form in the things of time and space—not that they may exist, for they exist in and from eternal Godhead, but that their being may be known to those in training for the eternal; these things unseen the sons and daughters of God must possess. But instead of reaching out after them, they grasp at their forms, reward the things seen as the things to be possessed, fall in love with the bodies instead of the souls of them. There are good people who can hardly believe that, if the young man had consented to give up his wealth, the Lord would not then have told him to keep it; they too seem to think the treasure in heaven insufficient as a substitute. They cannot believe he would have been better off without his wealth. 'Is not wealth power?' they ask. It is indeed power, and so is a wolf hid

in the robe; it is power, but as of a brute machine, of which the owner ill knows the handles and cranks, valves and governor. The multitude of those who read the tale are of the same mind as the youth himself—in his worst moment, as he turned and went—with one vast difference, that they are not sorrowful.

Things can never be really possessed by the man who cannot do without them—who would not be absolutely, divinely content in the consciousness that the cause of his being is within it—and with him. I would not be misunderstood: no man can have the consciousness of God with him and not be content; I mean that no man who has not the Father so as to be eternally content in him alone, can possess a sunset or a field of grass or a mine of gold or the love of a fellow-creature according to its nature—as God would have him possess it—in the eternal way of inheriting, having, and holding. He who has God, has all things, after the fashion in which he who made them has them. To man, woman, and child, I say—if you are not content, it is because God is not with you as you need him, not with you as he would be with you, as you must have him; for you need him as your body never needed food or air, need him as your soul never hungered after joy, or peace, or pleasure.

It is imperative on us to get rid of the tyranny of things. See how imperative: let the young man cling with every fibre to his wealth, what God can do he will do; his child shall not be left in the hell of possession! Comes the angel of death!—and where are the things that haunted the poor soul with such manifold hindrance and obstruction! The world, and all that is in the world, drops and slips, from his feet, from his hands, carrying with it his body, his eyes, his ears, every pouch, every coffer, that could delude him with the fancy of possession.

'Is the man so freed from the dominion of things? does Death so serve him—so ransom him? Why then hasten the hour? Shall not the youth abide the stroke of Time's clock—await the Inevitable on its path to free him?'

Not so!—for then first, I presume, does the man of things become aware of their tyranny. When a man begins to abstain, then first he recognizes the strength of his passion; it may be, when a man has not a thing left, he will begin to know what a necessity he had made of things; and if then he begin to contend with them, to cast out of his soul what Death has torn from his hands, then first will he know the full passion of possession, the slavery of prizing the worthless part of the precious.

'Wherein then lies the service of Death? He takes the sting, but leaves the poison!'

In this: it is not the fetters that gall, but the fetters that soothe, which eat into the soul. When the fetters of gold are gone, on which the man delighted to gaze, though they held him fast to his dungeon-wall, buried from air and sunshine, then first will he feel them in the soreness of their lack, in the weary indifference with which he looks on earth and sea, on space and stars. When the truth begins to dawn upon him that those fetters were a horror and a disgrace, then will the good of saving death appear, and the man begin to understand

that having never was, never could be well-being; that it is not by possessing we live, but by life we possess. In this way is the loss of the things he thought he had, a motioning, hardly towards, yet in favour of deliverance. It may seem to the man the first of his slavery when it is in truth the beginning of his freedom. Never soul was set free without being made to feel its slavery; nothing but itself can enslave a soul, nothing without itself free it.

When the drunkard, free of his body, but retaining his desire unable to indulge it, has time at length to think, in the lack of the means of destroying thought, surely there dawns for him then at last a fearful hope!—not until, by the power of God and his own obedient effort, he is raised into such a condition that, be the temptation what it might, he would not yield for an immortality of unrequited drunkenness—all its delights and not one of its penalties—is he saved.

Thus death may give a new opportunity—with some hope for the multitude counting themselves Christians, who are possessed by things as by a legion of devils; who stand well in their church; whose lives are regarded as stainless; who are kind, friendly, give largely, believe in the redemption of Jesus, talk of the world and the church; yet whose care all the time is to heap up, to make much into more, to add house to house and field to field, burying themselves deeper and deeper in the ash-heap of Things.

But it is not the rich man only who is under the dominion of things; they too are slaves who, having no money, are unhappy from the lack of it. The man who is ever digging his grave is little better than he who already lies mouldering in it. The money the one has, the money the other would have, is in each the cause of an eternal stupidity. To the one as to the other comes the word, 'How is it that ye do not understand?'

THE CAUSE OF SPIRITUAL STUPIDITY.

'How is it that ye do not understand?'—St. Mark viii. 21.

After feeding the four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fishes, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus, having crossed the lake, was met on the other side by certain Pharisees, whose attitude towards him was such that he betook himself again to the boat, and recrossed the lake. On the way the disciples bethought them that they had in the boat but a single loaf: probably while the Lord was occupied with the Pharisees, one of them had gone and bought it, little thinking they were about to start again so soon. Jesus, still occupied with the antagonism of the leaders of the people, and desirous of destroying their influence on his disciples, began to warn them against them. In so doing he made use of a figure they had heard him use before—that of leaven as representing a hidden but potent and pervading energy: the kingdom of heaven, he had told them, was like leaven hid in meal, gradually leavening the whole of it. He now tells them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. The disciples, whose minds were occupied with their lack of provisions, the moment they heard the word leaven, thought of bread, concluded it must be because of its absence that he spoke of leaven, and imagined perhaps a warning against some danger of defilement from Pharisaical cookery: 'It is because we have taken no bread!' A leaven like that of the Pharisees was even then at work in their hearts; for the sign the Pharisees sought in the mockery of unbelief, they had had a few hours before, and had already, in respect of all that made it of value, forgotten.

It is to the man who is trying to live, to the man who is obedient to the word of the Master, that the word of the Master unfolds itself. When we understand the outside of things, we think we have them: the Lord puts his things in subdefined, suggestive shapes, yielding no satisfactory meaning to the mere intellect, but unfolding themselves to the conscience and heart, to the man himself, in the process of life-effort. According as the new creation, that of reality, advances in him, the man becomes able to understand the words, the symbols, the parables of the Lord. For life, that is, action, is alone the human condition into which the light of the Living can penetrate; life alone can assimilate life, can change food into growth. See how the disciples here fooled themselves!

See how the Lord calls them to their senses. He does not tell them in so many words where they are wrong; he attacks instead the cause in themselves which led to their mistake—a matter always of infinitely more consequence than any mistake itself: the one is a live mistake, an untruth in the soul, the other a mere dead blunder born of it. The word—connection therefore between their blunder and our Lord's exhortation, is not to be found; the logic of what the Lord said, is not on the surface. Often he speaks not to the words but to the thought; here he speaks not even to the thought, but to the whole mode of thinking, to the thought—matrix, the inward condition of the men.

He addresses himself to rouse in them a sense of their lack of confidence in God, which was the cause of their blunder as to his meaning. He reminds them of the two miracles with the loaves, and the quantity of fragments left beyond the need. From one of these miracles they had just come; it was not a day behind them; yet here they were doubting already! He makes them go over the particulars of the miracles—hardly to refresh their memories—they were tenacious enough of the marvel, but to make their hearts dwell on them; for they had already forgotten or had failed to see their central revelation—the eternal fact of God's love and care and compassion. They knew the number of the men each time, the number of the loaves each time, the number of the baskets of fragments they had each time taken up, but they forgot the Love that had so broken the bread that its remnants twenty times outweighed its loaves.

Having thus questioned them like children, and listened as to the answers of children, he turns the light of their thoughts upon themselves, and, with an argument to the man which overleaps all the links of its own absolute logic, demands, 'How is it that ye do not understand?' Then they did understand, and knew that he did not speak to them of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. He who trusts can understand; he whose mind is set at ease can discover a reason.

How otherwise than by rebuking and quelling their anxiety, could those words have made them see what then they saw? What connection was there between 'How many baskets took ye up?' and 'How is it that ye do not understand?' What had the miracles to do with their discovering that when he spoke of leaven, it was not of the leaven of bread? If not of the leaven of bread, how did the reference to those miracles of bread make them recognize the fact?

The lesson he would have had them learn from the miracle, the natural lesson, the only lesson worthy of the miracle, was, that God cared for his children, and could, did, and would provide for their necessities. This lesson they had not learned. No doubt the power of the miracle was some proof of his mission, but the love of it proved it better, for it made it worth proving: it was a throb of the Father's heart. The ground of the Master's upbraiding is not that they did not understand him, but that they did not trust God; that, after all they had seen, they yet troubled themselves about bread. Because we easily imagine ourselves in want, we imagine God ready to forsake us. The miracles of Jesus were the ordinary works of his Father, wrought small and swift that we might take them in. The lesson of them was that help is always within God's reach when his children want it—their design, to show what God is—not that Jesus was God, but that his Father was God—that is, was what he was, for no other kind of God could be, or be worth believing in, no other notion of God be worth having. The mission undertaken by the Son, was not to show himself as having all power in heaven and earth, but to reveal his Father, to show him to men such as he is, that men may know him, and knowing, trust him. It were a small boon indeed that God should forgive

men, and not give himself. It would be but to give them back themselves; and less than God just as he is will not comfort men for the essential sorrow of their existence. Only God the gift can turn that sorrow into essential joy: Jesus came to give them God, who is eternal life.

Those miracles of feeding gave the same lesson to their eyes, their hands, their mouths, that his words gave to their ears when he said, 'seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind; for your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things;' 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' So little had they learned it yet, that they remembered the loaves but forgot the Father—as men in their theology forget the very Qeou logoV. Thus forgetting, they were troubled about provision for the day, and the moment leaven was mentioned, thought of bread. What else could he mean? The connection was plain! The Lord reminds them of the miracle, which had they believed after its true value, they would not have been so occupied as to miss what he meant. It had set forth to them the truth of God's heart towards them; revealed the loving care without which he would not be God. Had they learned this lesson, they would not have needed the reminder; for their hearts would not have been so filled with discomfort as to cause them mistake his word. Had they but said with themselves that, though they had but one loaf, they had him who makes all the loaves, they would never have made the foolish blunder they did.

The answer then to the Lord's reproach, 'How is it that ye do not understand?' is plainly this: their minds were so full of care about the day's bread, that they could not think with simplicity about anything else; the mere mention of leaven threw them floundering afresh in the bog of their unbelief. When the Lord reminded them of what their eyes had seen, so of what he was and what God was, and of the foolishness of their care—the moment their fear was taught to look up, that moment they began to see what the former words of the Lord must have meant: their minds grew clear enough to receive and reflect in a measure their intent.

The care of the disciples was care for the day, not for the morrow; the word morrow must stand for any and every point of the future. The next hour, the next moment, is as much beyond our grasp and as much in God's care, as that a hundred years away. Care for the next minute is just as foolish as care for the morrow, or for a day in the next thousand years—in neither can we do anything, in both God is doing everything. Those claims only of the morrow which have to be prepared to-day are of the duty of to-day; the moment which coincides with work to be done, is the moment to be minded; the next is nowhere till God has made it.

Their lack of bread seems to have come from no neglect, but from the immediacy of the Lord's re-embarkation; at the same time had there been a want of foresight, that was not the kind of thing the Lord cared to reprove; it was not this and that fault he had come to set right, but the primary evil of life without God, the root of all evils, from hatred to

discourtesy. Certain minor virtues also, prudence amongst the rest, would thus at length be almost, if not altogether, superseded. If a man forget a thing, God will see to that: man is not lord of his memory or his intellect. But man is lord of his will, his action; and is then verily to blame when, remembering a duty, he does not do it, but puts it off, and so forgets it. If a man lay himself out to do the immediate duty of the moment, wonderfully little forethought, I suspect, will be found needful. That forethought only is right which has to determine duty, and pass into action. To the foundation of yesterday's work well done, the work of the morrow will be sure to fit. Work done is of more consequence for the future than the foresight of an archangel.

With the disciples as with the rich youth, it was Things that prevented the Lord from being understood. Because of possession the young man had not a suspicion of the grandeur of the call with which Jesus honoured him. He thought he was hardly dealt with to be offered a patent of Heaven's nobility—he was so very rich! Things filled his heart; things blocked up his windows; things barricaded his door, so that the very God could not enter. His soul was not empty, swept, and garnished, but crowded with meanest idols, among which his spirit crept about upon its knees, wasting on them the gazes that belonged to his fellows and his Master. The disciples were a little further on than he; they had left all and followed the Lord; but neither had they yet got rid of Things. The paltry solitariness of a loaf was enough to hide the Lord from them, to make them unable to understand him. Why, having forgotten, could they not trust? Surely if he had told them that for his sake they must go all day without food, they would not have minded! But they lost sight of God, and were as if either he did not see, or did not care for them.

In the former case it was the possession of wealth, in the latter the not having more than a loaf, that rendered incapable of receiving the word of the Lord: the evil principle was precisely the same. If it be Things that slay you, what matter whether things you have, or things you have not? The youth, not trusting in God, the source of his riches, cannot brook the word of his Son, offering him better riches, more direct from the heart of the Father. The disciples, forgetting who is lord of the harvests of the earth, cannot understand his word, because filled with the fear of a day's hunger. He did not trust in God as having given; they did not trust in God as ready to give. We are like them when, in any trouble, we do not trust him. It is hard on God, when his children will not let him give; when they carry themselves so that he must withhold his hand, lest he harm them. To take no care that they acknowledge whence their help comes, would be to leave them worshippers of idols, trusters in that which is not.

Distrust is atheism, and the barrier to all growth. Lord, we do not understand thee, because we do not trust thy Father—whole-hearted to us, as never yet was mother to her first-born! Full of care, as if he had none, we think this and that escapes his notice, for this and that he does not think! While we who are evil would die to give our children bread to eat,

we are not certain the only Good will give us anything of what we desire! The things of thy world so crowd our hearts, that there is no room in them for the things of thy heart, which would raise ours above all fear, and make us merry children in our Father's house! Surely many a whisper of the watching Spirit we let slip through brooding over a need not yet come to us! To-morrow makes to-day's whole head sick, its whole heart faint. When we should be still, sleeping or dreaming, we are fretting about an hour that lies a half sun's—journey away! Not so doest thou, Lord! thou doest the work of thy Father! Wert thou such as we, then should we have good cause to be troubled! But thou knowest it is difficult, things pressing upon every sense, to believe that the informing power of them is in the unseen; that out of it they come; that, where we can descry no hand directing, a will, nearer than any hand, is moving them from within, causing them to fulfil his word! Help us to obey, to resist, to trust.

The care that is filling your mind at this moment, or but waiting till you lay the book aside to leap upon you—that need which is no need, is a demon sucking at the spring of your life.

'No; mine is a reasonable care—an unavoidable care, indeed!'

'Is it something you have to do this very moment?'

'No.'

'Then you are allowing it to usurp the place of something that is required of you this moment!'

'There is nothing required of me at this moment.'

'Nay, but there is—the greatest thing that can be required of man.'

'Pray, what is it?'

'Trust in the living God. His will is your life.'

'He may not will I should have what I need!'

'Then you only think you need it. Is it a good thing?'

'Yes, it is a good thing.'

'Then why doubt you shall have it?'

'Because God may choose to have me go without it.'

'Why should he?'

'I cannot tell.'

'Must it not be in order to give you something instead?'

'I want nothing instead.'

'I thought I was talking to a Christian!'

'I can consent to be called nothing else.'

'Do you not, then, know that, when God denies anything a child of his values, it is to give him something he values?'

'But if I do not want it?'

'You are none the less miserable just because you do not have it. Instead of his great possessions the young man was to have the company of Jesus, and treasure in heaven. When God refused to deliver a certain man from a sore evil, concerning which he three times besought him, unaccustomed to be denied, he gave him instead his own graciousness, consoled him in person for his pain.'

'Ah, but that was St. Paul!'

'True; what of that?'

'He was one by himself!'

'God deals with all his children after his own father-nature. No scripture is of private interpretation even for a St. Paul. It sets forth God's way with man. If thou art not willing that God should have his way with thee, then, in the name of God, be miserable—till thy misery drive thee to the arms of the Father.'

'I do trust him in spiritual matters.'

'Everything is an affair of the spirit. If God has a way, then that is the only way. Every little thing in which you would have your own way, has a mission for your redemption; and he will treat you as a naughty child until you take your Father's way for yours.'

There will be this difference, however, between the rich that loves his riches and the poor that hates his poverty—that, when they die, the heart of the one will be still crowded with things and their pleasures, while the heart of the other will be relieved of their lack; the one has had his good things, the other his evil things. But the rich man who held his things lightly, nor let them nestle in his heart; who was a channel and no cistern; who was ever and always forsaking his money—starts, in the new world, side by side with the man who accepted, not hated, his poverty. Each will say, 'I am free!'

For the only air of the soul, in which it can breathe and live, is the present God and the spirits of the just: that is our heaven, our home, our all-right place. Cleansed of greed, jealousy, vanity, pride, possession, all the thousand forms of the evil self, we shall be God's children on the hills and in the fields of that heaven, not one desiring to be before another, any more than to cast that other out; for ambition and hatred will then be seen to be one and the same spirit.—'What thou hast, I have; what thou desirest, I will; I give to myself ten times in giving once to thee. My want that thou mightst have, would be rich possession.'

But let me be practical; for thou art ready to be miserable over trifles, and dost not believe God good enough to care for thy care: I would reason with thee to help thee rid of thy troubles, for they hide from thee the thoughts of thy God.

The things readiest to be done, those which lie not at the door but on the very table of a man's mind, are not merely in general the most neglected, but even by the thoughtful man, the oftenest let alone, the oftenest postponed. The Lord of life demanding high virtue of us, can it be that he does not care for the first principles of justice? May a man become strong in righteousness without learning to speak the truth to his neighbour? Shall a man climb

the last flight of the stair who has never set foot on the lowest step? Truth is one, and he who does the truth in the small thing is of the truth; he who will do it only in a great thing, who postpones the small thing near him to the great thing farther from him, is not of the truth. Let me suggest some possible parallels between ourselves and the disciples maundering over their one loaf—with the Bread of Life at their side in the boat. We too dull our understandings with trifles, fill the heavenly spaces with phantoms, waste the heavenly time with hurry. To those who possess their souls in patience come the heavenly visions. When I trouble myself over a trifle, even a trifle confessed—the loss of some little article, say—spurring my memory, and hunting the house, not from immediate need, but from dislike of loss; when a book has been borrowed of me and not returned, and I have forgotten the borrower, and fret over the missing volume, while there are thousands on my shelves from which the moments thus lost might gather treasure holding relation with neither moth, nor rust, nor thief; am I not like the disciples? Am I not a fool whenever loss troubles me more than recovery would gladden? God would have me wise, and smile at the trifle. Is it not time I lost a few things when I care for them so unreasonably? This losing of things is of the mercy of God; it comes to teach us to let them go. Or have I forgotten a thought that came to me, which seemed of the truth, and a revealment to my heart? I wanted to keep it, to have it, to use it by and by, and it is gone! I keep trying and trying to call it back, feeling a poor man till that thought be recovered—to be far more lost, perhaps, in a note-book, into which I shall never look again to find it! I forget that it is live things God cares about—live truths, not things set down in a book, or in a memory, or embalmed in the joy of knowledge, but things lifting up the heart, things active in an active will. True, my lost thought might have so worked; but had I faith in God, the maker of thought and memory, I should know that, if the thought was a truth, and so alone worth anything, it must come again; for it is in God—so, like the dead, not beyond my reach: kept for me, I shall have it again.

'These are foolish illustrations—not worth writing!'

If such things are not, then the mention of them is foolish. If they are, then he is foolish who would treat them as if they were not. I choose them for their smallness, and appeal especially to all who keep house concerning the size of trouble that suffices to hide word and face of God.

With every haunting trouble then, great or small, the loss of thousands or the lack of a shilling, go to God, and appeal to him, the God of your life, to deliver you, his child, from that which is unlike him, therefore does not belong to you, but is antagonistic to your nature. If your trouble is such that you cannot appeal to him, the more need you should appeal to him! Where one cannot go to God, there is something specially wrong. If you let thought for the morrow, or the next year, or the next month, distress you; if you let the chatter of what is called the public, peering purblind into the sanctuary of motive, annoy you; if you

seek or greatly heed the judgment of men, capable or incapable, you set open your windows to the mosquitoes of care, to drown with their buzzing the voice of the Eternal!

If you tell me that but for care, the needful work of the world would be ill done—'What work,' I ask, 'can that be, which will be better done by the greedy or anxious than by the free, fearless soul? Can care be a better inspirer of labour than the sending of God? If the work is not his work, then, indeed, care may well help it, for its success is loss. But is he worthy the name of man who, for the fear of starvation, will do better work than for the joy that his labour is not in vain in the Lord? I know as well as you that you are not likely to get rich that way; but neither will you block up the gate of the kingdom of heaven against yourself.

Ambition in every shape has to do with Things, with outward advantages for the satisfaction of self-worship; it is that form of pride, foul shadow of Satan, which usurps the place of aspiration. The sole ambition that is of God is the ambition to rise above oneself; all other is of the devil. Yet is it nursed and cherished in many a soul that thinks itself devout, filling it with petty cares and disappointments, that swarm like bats in its air, and shut out the glory of God. The love of the praise of men, the desire of fame, the pride that takes offence, the puffing-up of knowledge, these and every other form of Protean self-worship—we must get rid of them all. We must be free. The man whom another enslaves may be free as God; to him who is a slave in himself, God will not enter in; he will not sup with him, for he cannot be his friend. He will sit by the humblest hearth where the daily food is prepared; he will not eat in a lumber-room, let the lumber be thrones and crowns. Will not, did I say? Cannot, I say. Men full of things would not once partake with God, were he by them all the day.

Nor will God force any door to enter in. He may send a tempest about the house; the wind of his admonishment may burst doors and windows, yea, shake the house to its foundations; but not then, not so, will he enter. The door must be opened by the willing hand, ere the foot of Love will cross the threshold. He watches to see the door move from within. Every tempest is but an assault in the siege of love. The terror of God is but the other side of his love; it is love outside the house, that would be inside—love that knows the house is no house, only a place, until it enter—no home, but a tent, until the Eternal dwell there. Things must be cast out to make room for their souls—the eternal truths which in things find shape and show.

But who is sufficient to cast them out? If a man take courage and encounter the army of bats and demon-snakes that infests the place of the Holy, it is but to find the task too great for him; that the temple of God will not be cleansed by him; that the very dust he raises in sweeping is full of corruptive forces. Let such as would do what they must yet cannot, be what they must yet cannot, remember, with hope and courage, that he who knows all about our being, once spake a parable to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint.

THE WORD OF JESUS ON PRAYER.

'They ought always to pray.'—St. Luke xviii. 1.

The impossibility of doing what we would as we would, drives us to look for help. And this brings us to a new point of departure. Everything difficult indicates something more than our theory of life yet embraces, checks some tendency to abandon the strait path, leaving open only the way ahead. But there is a reality of being in which all things are easy and plain—oneness, that is, with the Lord of Life; to pray for this is the first thing; and to the point of this prayer every difficulty hedges and directs us. But if I try to set forth something of the reasonableness of all prayer, I beg my readers to remember that it is for the sake of action and not speculation; if prayer be anything at all, it is a thing to be done: what matter whether you agree with me or not, if you do not pray? I would not spend my labour for that; I desire it to serve for help to pray, not to understand how a man might pray and yet be a reasonable soul.

First, a few words about the parable itself.

It is an instance, by no means solitary, of the Lord's use of a tale about a very common or bad person, to persuade, reasoning a fortiori, of the way of the All-righteous. Note the points: 'Did the unrighteous judge, to save himself from annoyance, punish one with whom he was not offended, for the sake of a woman he cared nothing about? and shall not the living Justice avenge his praying friends over whose injuries he has to exercise a long-suffering patience towards their enemies?'—for so I would interpret the phrase, as correctly translated in the Revision, 'and he is long-suffering over them.'—'I say unto you, that he will avenge them speedily. Howbeit when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?'

Here then is a word of the Lord about prayer: it is a comfort that he recognizes difficulty in the matter—sees that we need encouragement to go on praying, that it looks as if we were not heard, that it is no wonder we should be ready to faint and leave off. He tells a parable in which the suppliant has to go often and often to the man who can help her, gaining her end only at the long last. Actual delay on the part of God, we know from what follows, he does not allow; the more plain is it that he recognizes how the thing must look to those whom he would have go on praying. Here as elsewhere he teaches us that we must not go by the look of things, but by the reality behind the look. A truth, a necessity of God's own willed nature, is enough to set up against a whole army of appearances. It looks as if he did not hear you: never mind; he does; it must be that he does; go on as the woman did; you too will be heard. She is heard at last, and in virtue of her much going; God hears at once, and will avenge speedily. The unrighteous judge cared nothing for the woman; those who cry to God are his own chosen—plain in the fact that they cry to him. He has made and appointed them to cry: they do cry: will he not hear them? They exist that they may pray; he has chosen them that they may choose him; he has called them that they may call him—that there may be such communion, such interchange as belongs to their being and the being of their

Father. The gulf of indifference lay between the poor woman and the unjust judge; God and those who seek his help, are closer than two hands clasped hard in love: he will avenge them speedily. It is a bold assertion in the face of what seems great delay—an appearance acknowledged in the very groundwork of the parable. Having made it, why does he seem to check himself with a sigh, adding, 'Howbeit when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' After all he had said, and had yet to say, after all he had done, and was going on to do, when he came again, after time given for the holy leaven to work, would he find men trusting the Father? Would he find them, even then, beyond the tyranny of appearances, believing in spite of them? Would they be children enough towards God to know he was hearing them and working for them, though they could not hear him or see him work?—to believe the ways of God so wide, that even on the breadth of his track was room for their understanding to lose its way—what they saw, so small a part of what he was doing, that it could give them but little clue to his end? that it was because the goal God had in view for them was so high and afar, that they could detect no movement of approach thereto? The sigh, the exclamation, never meant that God might be doing something more than he was doing, but that the Father would have a dreary time to wait ere his children would know, that is, trust in him. The utterance recognizes the part of man, his slowly yielded part in faith, and his blame in troubling God by not trusting in him. If men would but make haste, and stir themselves up to take hold on God! They were so slow of heart to believe! They could but would not help it and do better!

He seems here to refer to his second coming—concerning the time of which, he refused information; concerning the mode of which, he said it would be unexpected; but concerning the duty of which, he insisted it was to be ready: we must be faithful, and at our work. Do those who say, lo here or lo there are the signs of his coming, think to be too keen for him, and spy his approach? When he tells them to watch lest he find them neglecting their work, they stare this way and that, and watch lest he should succeed in coming like a thief! So throughout: if, instead of speculation, we gave ourselves to obedience, what a difference would soon be seen in the world! Oh, the multitude of so-called religious questions which the Lord would answer with, 'strive to enter in at the strait gate'! Many eat and drink and talk and teach in his presence; few do the things he says to them! Obedience is the one key of life.

I would meet difficulties, not answer objections; I would remove stumbling-blocks from the path of him who would pray; I would help him to pray. If, seeing we live not by our own will, we live by another will, then is there reason, and then only can there be reason in prayer. To him who refuses that other will, I have nothing to say. The hour may come when he will wish there were some one to pray to; now he is not of those whom I can help.

If there be a God, and I am his creature, there may be, there should be, there must be some communication open between him and me. If any one allow a God, but one scarce

good enough to care about his creatures, I will yield him that it were foolish to pray to such a God; but the notion that, with all the good impulses in us, we are the offspring of a cold-hearted devil, is so horrible in its inconsistency, that I would ask that man what hideous and cold-hearted disregard to the truth makes him capable of the supposition! To such a one God's terrors, or, if not his terrors, then God's sorrows yet will speak; the divine something in him will love, and the love be left moaning.

If I find my position, my consciousness, that of one from home, nay, that of one in some sort of prison; if I find that I can neither rule the world in which I live nor my own thoughts or desires; that I cannot quiet my passions, order my likings, determine my ends, will my growth, forget when I would, or recall what I forget; that I cannot love where I would, or hate where I would; that I am no king over myself; that I cannot supply my own needs, do not even always know which of my seeming needs are to be supplied, and which treated as impostors; if, in a word, my own being is everyway too much for me; if I can neither understand it, be satisfied with it, nor better it—may it not well give me pause—the pause that ends in prayer? When my own scale seems too large for my management; when I reflect that I cannot account for my existence, have had no poorest hand in it, neither, should I not like it, can do anything towards causing it to cease; when I think that I can do nothing to make up to those I love, any more than to those I hate, for evils I have done them and sorrows I have caused them; that in my worst moments I disbelieve in my best, in my best loathe my worst; that there is in me no wholeness, no unity; that life is not a good to me, for I scorn myself—when I think all or any such things, can it be strange if I think also that surely there ought to be somewhere a being to account for me, one to account for himself, and make the round of my existence just; one whose very being accounts and is necessary to account for mine; whose presence in my being is imperative, not merely to supplement it, but to make to myself my existence a good? For if not rounded in itself, but dependent on that which it knows not and cannot know, it cannot be to itself a good known as a good—a thing of reason and well-being: it will be a life longing for a logos to be the interpretative soul of its cosmos—a logos it cannot have. To know God present, to have the consciousness of God where he is the essential life, must be absolutely necessary to that life! He that is made in the image of God must know him or be desolate: the child must have the Father! Witness the dissatisfaction, yea desolation of my soul-wretched, alone, unfinished, without him! It cannot act from itself, save in God; acting from what seems itself without God, is no action at all, it is a mere yielding to impulse. All within is disorder and spasm. There is a cry behind me, and a voice before; instincts of betterment tell me I must rise above my present self—perhaps even above all my possible self: I see not how to obey, how to carry them out! I am shut up in a world of consciousness, an unknown I in an unknown world: surely this world of my unwilled, unchosen, compelled existence, cannot be shut out from him, cannot be unknown to him, cannot be impenetrable, impermeable, unpresent to him from whom

I am! nay, is it not his thinking in which I think? is it not by his consciousness that I am conscious? Whatever passes in me must be as naturally known to him as to me, and more thoroughly, even to infinite degrees. My thought must lie open to him: if he makes me think, how can I elude him in thinking? 'If I should spread my wings toward the dawn, and sojourn at the last of the sea, even there thy hand would lead me, and thy right hand would hold me!' If he has determined the being, how shall any mode of that being be hidden from him? If I speak to him, if I utter words ever so low; if I but think words to him; nay, if I only think to him, surely he, my original, in whose life and will and no otherwise I now think concerning him, hears, and knows, and acknowledges! Then shall I not think to him? Shall I not tell him my troubles—how he, even he, has troubled me by making me?—how unfit I am to be that which I am?—that my being is not to me a good thing yet?—that I need a law that shall account to me for it in righteousness—reveal to me how I am to make it a good—how I am to be a good, and not an evil? Shall I not tell him that I need him to comfort me? his breath to move upon the face of the waters of the Chaos he has made? Shall I not cry to him to be in me rest and strength? to quiet this uneasy motion called life, and make me live indeed? to deliver me from my sins, and make me clean and glad? Such a cry is of the child to the Father: if there be a Father, verily he will hear, and let the child know that he hears! Every need of God, lifting up the heart, is a seeking of God, is a begging for himself, is profoundest prayer, and the root and inspirer of all other prayer.

If it be reasonable for me to cry thus, if I cannot but cry, it is reasonable that God should hear, he cannot but hear. A being that could not hear or would not answer prayer, could not be God.

'But, I ask, all this admitted—is what you call a necessary truth an existent fact? You say, "It must be so;" I say, "What if there is no God!" Convince me that prayer is heard, and I shall know. Why should the question admit of doubt? Why should it require to be reasoned about? We know that the wind blows: why should we not know that God answers prayer?'

I reply, What if God does not care to have you know it at second hand? What if there would be no good in that? There is some testimony on record, and perhaps there might be much were it not that, having to do with things so immediately personal, and generally so delicate, answers to prayer would naturally not often be talked about; but no testimony concerning the thing can well be conclusive; for, like a reported miracle, there is always some way to daff it; and besides, the conviction to be got that way is of little value; it avails nothing to know the thing by the best of evidence.

As to the evidence itself, adduction of proof is scarce possible in respect of inward experience, and to this class belongs the better part of the evidence: the testimony may be truthful, yet the testifier utterly self-deceived! How am I to know the thing as he says he knows it? How am I to judge of it? There is king David:—Poetry!—old poetry!—and in the most indefinite language in the world! Doubtless he is little versed in the utterance of the

human soul, who does not recognize in many of the psalms a cry as true as ever came from depth of pain or height of deliverance; but it may all have been but now the jarring and now the rhythmical movement of the waves of the psychical æther!—I lay nothing upon testimony for my purpose now, knowing the things that can be said, and also not valuing the bare assent of the intellect. The sole assurance worth a man's having, even if the most incontestable evidence were open to him from a thousand other quarters, is that to be gained only from personal experience—that assurance in himself which he can least readily receive from another, and which is least capable of being transmuted into evidence for another. The evidence of Jesus Christ could not take the place of that. A truth is of enormous import in relation to the life—that is the heart, and conscience, and will; it is of little consequence merely as a fact having relation to the understanding. God may hear all prayers that ever were offered to him, and a man may believe that he does, nor be one whit the better for it, so long as God has no prayers of his to hear, he no answers to receive from God. Nothing in this quarter will ever be gained by investigation. Reader, if you are in any trouble, try whether God will not help you; if you are in no need, why should you ask questions about prayer? True, he knows little of himself who does not know that he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; but until he begins at least to suspect a need, how can he pray? And for one who does not want to pray, I would not lift a straw to defeat such a one in the argument whether God hears or does not hear prayer: for me, let him think what he will! it matters nothing in heaven or in earth: whether in hell I do not know.

As to the so-called scientific challenge to prove the efficacy of prayer by the result of simultaneous petition, I am almost ashamed to allude to it. There should be light enough in science itself to show the proposal absurd. A God capable of being so moved in one direction or another, is a God not worth believing in—could not be the God believed in by Jesus Christ—and he said he knew. A God that should fail to hear, receive, attend to one single prayer, the feeblest or worst, I cannot believe in; but a God that would grant every request of every man or every company of men, would be an evil God—that is no God, but a demon. That God should hang in the thought—atmosphere like a windmill, waiting till men enough should combine and send out prayer in sufficient force to turn his outspread arms, is an idea too absurd. God waits to be gracious not to be tempted. A man capable of proposing such a test, could have in his mind no worthy representative idea of a God, and might well disbelieve in any: it is better to disbelieve than believe in a God unworthy.

'But I want to believe in God. I want to know that there is a God that answers prayer, that I may believe in him. There was a time when I believed in him. I prayed to him in great and sore trouble of heart and mind, and he did not hear me. I have not prayed since.'

How do you know that he did not hear you?

'He did not give me what I asked, though the weal of my soul hung on it.'

In your judgment. Perhaps he knew better.

'I am the worse for his refusal. I would have believed in him if he had heard me.'

Till the next desire came which he would not grant, and then you would have turned your God away. A desirable believer you would have made! A worthy brother to him who thought nothing fit to give the Father less than his all! You would accept of him no decision against your desire! That ungranted, there was no God, or not a good one! I think I will not argue with you more. This only I will say: God has not to consider his children only at the moment of their prayer. Should he be willing to give a man the thing he knows he would afterwards wish he had not given him? If a man be not fit to be refused, if he be not ready to be treated with love's severity, what he wishes may perhaps be given him in order that he may wish it had not been given him; but barely to give a man what he wants because he wants it, and without farther purpose of his good, would be to let a poor ignorant child take his fate into his own hands—the cruelty of a devil. Yet is every prayer heard; and the real soul of the prayer may require, for its real answer, that it should not be granted in the form in which it is requested.

'To have a thing in another shape, might be equivalent to not having it at all.'

If you knew God, you would leave that to him. He is not mocked, and he will not mock. But he knows you better than you know yourself, and would keep you from fooling yourself. He will not deal with you as the child of a day, but as the child of eternal ages. You shall be satisfied, if you will but let him have his way with the creature he has made. The question is between your will and the will of God. He is not one of those who give readiest what they prize least. He does not care to give anything but his best, or that which will prepare for it. Not many years may pass before you confess, 'Thou art a God who hears prayer, and gives a better answer.' You may come to see that the desire of your deepest heart would have been frustrated by having what seemed its embodiment then. That God should as a loving father listen, hear, consider, and deal with the request after the perfect tenderness of his heart, is to me enough; it is little that I should go without what I pray for. If it be granted that any answer which did not come of love, and was not for the final satisfaction of him who prayed, would be unworthy of God; that it is the part of love and knowledge to watch over the wayward, ignorant child; then the trouble of seemingly unanswered prayers begins to abate, and a lovely hope and comfort takes its place in the child-like soul. To hear is not necessarily to grant—God forbid! but to hear is necessarily to attend to—sometimes as necessarily to refuse.

'Concerning this thing,' says St. Paul, 'I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; power is made perfect in weakness.' God had a better thing for Paul than granting his prayer and removing his complaint: he would make him strong; the power of Christ should descend and remain upon him; he would make him stronger than his suffering, make him a sharer in the energy of God. Verily, if we have God, we can do without the answer to any prayer.

'But if God is so good as you represent him, and if he knows all that we need, and better far than we do ourselves, why should it be necessary to ask him for anything?'

I answer, What if he knows prayer to be the thing we need first and most? What if the main object in God's idea of prayer be the supplying of our great, our endless need—the need of himself? What if the good of all our smaller and lower needs lies in this, that they help to drive us to God? Hunger may drive the runaway child home, and he may or may not be fed at once, but he needs his mother more than his dinner. Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond all other need; prayer is the beginning of that communion, and some need is the motive of that prayer. Our wants are for the sake of our coming into communion with God, our eternal need. If gratitude and love immediately followed the supply of our needs, if God our Saviour was the one thought of our hearts, then it might be unnecessary that we should ask for anything we need. But seeing we take our supplies as a matter of course, feeling as if they came out of nothing, or from the earth, or our own thoughts, instead of out of a heart of love and a will which alone is force, it is needful that we should be made feel some at least of our wants, that we may seek him who alone supplies all of them, and find his every gift a window to his heart of truth. So begins a communion, a talking with God, a coming-to-one with him, which is the sole end of prayer, yea, of existence itself in its infinite phases. We must ask that we may receive; but that we should receive what we ask in respect of our lower needs, is not God's end in making us pray, for he could give us everything without that: to bring his child to his knee, God withholds that man may ask.

In regard, however, to the high necessities of our nature, it is in order that he may be able to give that God requires us to ask—requires by driving us to it—by shutting us up to prayer. For how can he give into the soul of a man what it needs, while that soul cannot receive it? The ripeness for receiving is the asking. The blossom-cup of the soul, to be filled with the heavenly dews, is its prayer. When the soul is hungry for the light, for the truth—when its hunger has waked its higher energies, thoroughly roused the will, and brought the soul into its highest condition, that of action, its only fitness for receiving the things of God, that action is prayer. Then God can give; then he can be as he would towards the man; for the glory of God is to give himself.—We thank thee, Lord Christ, for by thy pain alone do we rise towards the knowledge of this glory of thy Father and our Father.

And even in regard to lower things—what it may be altogether unfit to do for a man who does not recognize the source of his life, it may be in the highest sense fit to grant him when he comes to that source to ask for it. Even in the case of some individual desire of one who in the main recognizes the Father, it may be well to give him asking whom, not asking, it would not benefit. For the real good of every gift it is essential, first, that the giver be in the gift—as God always is, for he is love—and next, that the receiver know and receive the giver in the gift. Every gift of God is but a harbinger of his greatest and only sufficing

gift—that of himself. No gift unrecognized as coming from God is at its own best; therefore many things that God would gladly give us, things even that we need because we are, must wait until we ask for them, that we may know whence they come: when in all gifts we find him, then in him we shall find all things.

Sometimes to one praying will come the feeling rather than question: 'Were it not better to abstain? If this thing be good, will he not give it me? Would he not be better pleased if I left it altogether to him?' It comes, I think, of a lack of faith and childlikeness—taking form, perhaps, in a fear lest, asking for what was not good, the prayer should be granted. Such a thought has no place with St. Paul; he says, 'Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you;' 'In everything making your request known unto him.' It may even come of ambition after spiritual distinction. In every request, heart and soul and mind ought to supply the low accompaniment, 'Thy will be done;' but the making of any request brings us near to him, into communion with our Life. Does it not also help us to think of him in all our affairs, and learn in everything to give thanks? Anything large enough for a wish to light upon, is large enough to hang a prayer upon: the thought of him to whom that prayer goes will purify and correct the desire. To say, 'Father, I should like this or that,' would be enough at once, if the wish were bad, to make us know it and turn from it. Such prayer about things must of necessity help to bring the mind into true and simple relation with him; to make us remember his will even when we do not see what that will is. Surely it is better and more trusting to tell him all without fear or anxiety. Was it not thus the Lord carried himself towards his Father when he said, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me'? But there was something he cared for more than his own fear—his Father's will: 'Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.' There is no apprehension that God might be displeased with him for saying what he would like, and not leaving it all to his Father. Neither did he regard his Father's plans as necessarily so fixed that they could not be altered to his prayer. The true son-faith is that which comes with boldness, fearless of the Father doing anything but what is right fatherly, patient, and full of loving-kindness. We must not think to please him by any asceticism even of the spirit; we must speak straight out to him. The true child will not fear, but lay bare his wishes to the perfect Father. The Father may will otherwise, but his grace will be enough for the child.

There could be no riches but for need. God himself is made rich by man's necessity. By that he is rich to give; through that we are rich by receiving.

As to any notion of prevailing by entreaty over an unwilling God, that is heathenish, and belongs to such as think him a hard master, or one like the unjust judge. What so quenching to prayer as the notion of unwillingness in the ear that hears! And when prayer is dull, what makes it flow like the thought that God is waiting to give, wants to give us everything! 'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' We shall be refused our prayer if that be better; but

what is good our Father will give us with divine good will. The Lord spoke his parable 'to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint.'

MAN'S DIFFICULTY CONCERNING PRAYER.

'—and not to faint.'—St. Luke xviii. 1.

'How should any design of the All-wise be altered in response to prayer of ours!' How are we to believe such a thing?

By reflecting that he is the All-wise, who sees before him, and will not block his path. Such objection springs from poorest idea of God in relation to us. It supposes him to have cares and plans and intentions concerning our part of creation, irrespective of us. What is the whole system of things for, but our education? Does God care for suns and planets and satellites, for divine mathematics and ordered harmonies, more than for his children? I venture to say he cares more for oxen than for those. He lays no plans irrespective of his children; and, his design being that they shall be free, active, live things, he sees that space be kept for them: they need room to struggle out of their chrysalis, to undergo the change that comes with the waking will, and to enter upon the divine sports and labours of children in the house and domain of their Father. Surely he may keep his plans in a measure unfixed, waiting the free desire of the individual soul! Is not the design of the first course of his children's education just to bring them to the point where they shall pray? and shall his system appointed to that end be then found hard and fast, tooth-fitted and inelastic, as if informed of no live causing soul, but an unself-knowing force—so that he cannot answer the prayer because of the system which has its existence for the sake of the prayer? True, in many cases, the prayer, far more than the opportunity of answering it, is God's end; but how will the further end of the prayer be reached, which is oneness between the heart of the child and of the Father? how will the child go on to pray if he knows the Father cannot answer him? Will not may be for love, but how with a self-imposed cannot? How could he be Father, who creating, would not make provision, would not keep room for the babbled prayers of his children? Is his perfection a mechanical one? Has he himself no room for choice—therefore can give none? There must be a Godlike region of choice as there is a human, however little we may be able to conceive it. It were a glory in such system that its suns themselves wavered and throbbed at the pulse of a new child-life.

What perfection in a dwelling would it be that its furniture and the paths between were fitted as the trays and pigeon-holes of a cabinet? What stupidity of perfection would that be which left no margin about God's work, no room for change of plan upon change of fact—yea, even the mighty change that, behold now at length, his child is praying! See the freedom of God in his sunsets—never a second like one of the foregone!—in his moons and skies—in the ever—changing solid earth!—all moving by no dead law, but in the harmony of the vital law of liberty, God's creative perfection—all ordered from within. A divine perfection that were indeed, where was no liberty! where there could be but one way of a thing! I may move my arm as I please: shall God be unable so to move his? If but for himself, God might well desire no change, but he is God for the sake of his growing creatures; all his

making and doing is for them, and change is the necessity of their very existence. They need a mighty law of liberty, into which shall never intrude one atom of chance. Is the one idea of creation the begetting of a free, grand, divine will in us? and shall that will, praying with the will of the Father, find itself cramped, fettered, manacled by foregone laws? Will it not rather be a new-born law itself, working new things? No man is so tied by divine law that he can nowise modify his work: shall God not modify his? Law is but mode of life-action. Is it of his perfection that he should have no scope, no freedom? Is he but the prisoned steam in the engine, pushing, escaping, stopped—his way ordered by valve and piston? or is he an indwelling, willing, ordering power? Law is the slave of Life. Is not a man's soul, as it dwells in his body, a dim-shadowing type of God in and throughout his universe? If you say, he has made things to go, set them going, and left them—then I say, If his machine interfered with his answering the prayer of a single child, he would sweep it from him—not to bring back chaos, but to make room for his child. But order is divine, and cannot be obstructive to its own higher ends; it must subserve them. Order, free order, neither chaos, nor law unpossessed and senseless, is the home of Thought. If you say There can be but one perfect way, I answer, Yet the perfect way to bring a thing so far, to a certain crisis, can ill be the perfect way to carry it on after that crisis: the plan will have to change then. And as this crisis depends on a will, all cannot be in exact, though in live preparation for it. We must remember that God is not occupied with a grand toy of worlds and suns and planets, of attractions and repulsions, of agglomerations and crystallizations, of forces and waves; that these but constitute a portion of his workshops and tools for the bringing out of righteous men and women to fill his house of love withal. Would he have let his Son die for a law of nature, as we call it? These doubtless are the outcome of willed laws of his own being; but they take their relations in matter only for the sake of the birth of sons and daughters, that they may yet again be born from above, and into the higher region whence these things issue; and many a modification of the ideal, rendering it less than complete, must be given to those whose very doom being to grow or perish implies their utter inability to lay hold of the perfect. The best means cannot be the ideal Best. The embodiment of uplifting truth for the low, cannot be equal to that for the higher, else it will fail, and prove for its object not good; but, as the low ascend, their revelation will ascend also.

That God cannot interfere to modify his plans, interfere without the change of a single law of his world, is to me absurd. If we can change, God can change, else is he less free than we—his plans, I say, not principles, not ends: God himself forbid!—change them after divine fashion, above our fashions as the heavens are higher than the earth. And as in all his miracles Jesus did only in miniature what his Father does ever in the great—in far wider, more elaborate, and beautiful ways, I will adduce from them an instance of answer to prayer that has in it a point bearing, it seems to me, most importantly on the thing I am now trying to set forth.

Poor, indeed, was the making of the wine in the earthen pots of stone, compared with its making in the lovely growth of the vine with its clusters of swelling grapes—the live roots gathering from the earth the water that had to be borne in pitchers and poured into the great vases; but it is precious as the interpreter of the same, even in its being the outcome of our Lord's sympathy with ordinary human rejoicing. There is however an element in its origin that makes it yet more precious to me—the regard of our Lord to a wish of his mother. Alas, how differently is the tale often received! how misunderstood!

His mother had suggested to him that here was an opportunity for appearing in his own greatness, the potent purveyor of wine for the failing feast. It was not in his plan, as we gather from his words; for the Lord never pretended anything, whether to his enemy or his mother; he is The True. He lets her know that he and she have different outlooks, different notions of his work: 'What to me and thee, woman?' he said: 'my hour is not yet come;' but there was that in his look and tone whence she knew that her desire, scarce half-fashioned into request, was granted. What am I thence to conclude, worthy of the Son of God, and the Son of Mary, but that, at the prayer of his mother, he made room in his plans for the thing she desired? It was not his wish then to work a miracle, but if his mother wished it, he would! He did for his mother what for his own part he would rather have let alone. Not always did he do as his mother would have him; but this was a case in which he could do so, for it would interfere nowise with the will of his Father. Was the perfect son, for, being perfect, he must be perfect every way, to be the only son of man who needed do nothing to please his mother—nothing but what fell in with his plan for the hour? Not so could he be the root, the living heart of the great response of the children to the Father of all! not so could the idea of the grand family ever be made a reality! Alas for the son who would not willingly for his mother do something which in itself he would rather not do! If it would have hurt his mother, if it had been in any way turning from the will of his Father in heaven, he would not have done it: that would have been to answer her prayer against her. His yielding makes the story doubly precious to my heart. The Son then could change his intent, and spoil nothing: so, I say, can the Father; for the Son does nothing but what he sees the Father do.

Finding it possible to understand, however, that God may answer prayers to those who pray for themselves, what are we to think concerning prayer for others? One may well say, It would surely be very selfish to pray only for ourselves! but the question is of the use, not of the character of the action: if there be any good in it, let us pray for all for whom we feel we can pray; but is there to be found in regard to prayer for others any such satisfaction as in regard to prayer for ourselves? The ground is changed—if the fitness of answering prayer lies in the praying of him who prays: the attitude necessary to reception does not belong to those for whom prayer is made, but to him by whom it is made. What fitness then can there be in praying for others? Will God give to another for our asking what he would not give

without it? Would he not, if it could be done without the person's self, do it without a second person? If God were a tyrant, one whose heart might be softened by the sight of anxious love; or if he were one who might be informed, enlightened, reasoned with; or one in whom a setting forth of character, need, or claim might awake interest; then would there be plain reason in prayer for another—which yet, however disinterested and loving, must be degrading, as offered to one unworthy of prayer. But if we believe that God is the one unselfish, the one good being in the universe, and that his one design with his children is to make them perfect as he is perfect; if we believe that he not only would once give, but is always giving himself to us for our life; if we believe—which once I heard a bishop decline to acknowledge—that God does his best for every man; if also we believe that God knows every man's needs, and will, for love's sake, not spare one pang that may serve to purify the soul of one of his children; if we believe all this, how can we think he will in any sort alter his way with one because another prays for him? The prayer would arise from nothing in the person prayed for; why should it initiate a change in God's dealing with him?

The argument I know not how to answer. I can only, in the face of it, and feeling all the difficulty, say, and say again, 'Yet I believe I may pray for my friend—for my enemy—for anybody! Yet and yet, there is, there must be some genuine, essential good and power in the prayer of one man for another to the maker of both—and that just because their maker is perfect, not less than very God.' I shall not bring authority to bear, for authority can at best but make us believe reason there, it cannot make us see it. The difficulty remains the same even when we hear the Lord himself pray to his Father for those the Father loves because they have received his Son—loves therefore with a special love, as the foremost in faith, the elect of the world—loves not merely because they must die if he did not love them, but loves from the deeps of divine approval. Those who believe in Jesus will be satisfied, in the face of the incomprehensible, that in what he does reason and right must lie; but not therefore do we understand. At the same time, though I cannot explain, I can show some ground upon which, even had he not been taught to do so, but left alone with his heart, a man might yet, I think, pray for another.

If God has made us to love like himself, and like himself long to help; if there are for whom we, like him, would give our lives to lift them from the evil gulf of their ungodliness; if the love in us would, for the very easing of the love he kindled, gift another—like himself who chooses and cherishes even the love that pains him; if, in the midst of a sore need to bless, to give, to help, we are aware of an utter impotence; if the fire burns and cannot out; and if all our hope for ourselves lies in God—what is there for us, what can we think of, what do, but go to God?—what but go to him with this our own difficulty and need? And where is the natural refuge, there must be the help. There can be no need for which he has no supply. The best argument that he has help, is that we have need. If I can be helped through my friend, I think God will take the thing up, and do what I cannot do—help my

friend that I may be helped—perhaps help me to help him. You see, in praying for another we pray for ourselves—for the relief of the needs of our love; it is not prayer for another alone, and thus it comes under the former kind. Would God give us love, the root of power, in us, and leave that love, whereby he himself creates, altogether helpless in us? May he not at least expedite something for our prayers? Where he could not alter, he could perhaps expedite, in view of some help we might then be able to give. If he desires that we should work with him, that work surely helps him!

There are some things for which the very possibility of supposing them are an argument; but I think I can go a little farther here, and imagine at least the where if not the how, the divine conditions in which the help for another in answer to prayer is born, the divine region in which its possibility must dwell.

God is ever seeking to lift us up into the sharing of his divine nature; God's kings, such men, namely, as with Jesus have borne witness to the truth, share his glory even on the throne of the Father. See the grandeur of the creative love of the Holy! nothing less will serve it than to have his children, through his and their suffering, share the throne of his glory! If such be the perfection of the Infinite, should that perfection bring him under bonds and difficulties, and not rather set him freer to do the thing he would in the midst of opposing forces? If his glory be in giving himself, and we must share therein, giving ourselves, why should we not begin here and now? If he would have his children fellow—workers with him; if he has desired and willed that not only by the help of his eternal Son, but by the help also of the children who through him have been born from above, other and still other children shall be brought to his knee, to his fireside, to the plenty of his house, why should he not have kept some margin of room wherein their prayers may work for those whom they have to help, who are of the same life as they? I cannot tell how, but may not those prayers in some way increase God's opportunity for working his best and highest will? Dealing with his children, the good ones may add to his power with the not yet good—add to his means of helping them. One way is clear: the prayer will react upon the mind that prays, its light will grow, will shine the brighter, and draw and enlighten the more. But there must be more in the thing. Prayer in its perfect idea being a rising up into the will of the Eternal, may not the help of the Father become one with the prayer of the child, and for the prayer of him he holds in his arms, go forth for him who wills not yet to be lifted to his embrace? To his bosom God himself cannot bring his children at once, and not at all except through his own suffering and theirs. But will not any good parent find some way of granting the prayer of the child who comes to him, saying, 'Papa, this is my brother's birthday: I have nothing to give him, and I do love him so! could you give me something to give him, or give him something for me?'

'Still, could not God have given the gift without the prayer? And why should the good of any one depend on the prayer of another?'

I can only answer with the return question, 'Why should my love be powerless to help another?' But we must not tie God to our measures of time, or think he has forgotten that prayer even which, apparently unanswered, we have forgotten. Death is not an impervious wall; through it, beyond it, go the prayers. It is possible we may have some to help in the next world because we have prayed for them in this: will it not be a boon to them to have an old friend to their service? I but speculate and suggest. What I see and venture to say is this: If in God we live and move and have our being; if the very possibility of loving lies in this, that we exist in and by the live air of love, namely God himself, we must in this very fact be nearer to each other than by any bodily proximity or interchange of help; and if prayer is like a pulse that sets this atmosphere in motion, we must then by prayer come closer to each other than are the parts of our body by their complex nerve—telegraphy. Surely, in the Eternal, hearts are never parted! surely, through the Eternal, a heart that loves and seeks the good of another, must hold that other within reach! Surely the system of things would not be complete in relation to the best thing in it—love itself, if love had no help in prayer. If I love and cannot help, does not my heart move me to ask him to help who loves and can?—him without whom life would be to me nothing, without whom I should neither love nor care to pray!—will he answer, 'Child, do not trouble me; I am already doing all I can'? If such answer came, who that loved would not be content to be nowhere in the matter? But how if the eternal, limitless Love, the unspeakable, self-forgetting God-devotion, which, demanding all, gives all, should say, 'Child, I have been doing all I could; but now you are come, I shall be able to do more! here is a corner for you, my little one: push at this thing to get it out of the way'! How if he should answer, 'Pray on, my child; I am hearing you; it goes through me in help to him. We are of one mind about it; I help and you help. I shall have you all safe home with me by and by! There is no fear, only we must work, and not lose heart. Go, and let your light so shine before men that they may see your good things, and glorify me by knowing that I am light and no darkness'!—what then? Oh that lovely picture by Michelangelo, with the young ones and the little ones come to help God to make Adam!

But it may be that the answer to prayer will come in a shape that seems a refusal. It may come even in an increase of that from which we seek deliverance. I know of one who prayed to love better: a sore division came between—out of which at length rose a dawn of tenderness.

Our vision is so circumscribed, our theories are so small—the garment of them not large enough to wrap us in; our faith so continually fashions itself to the fit of our dwarf intellect, that there is endless room for rebellion against ourselves: we must not let our poor knowledge limit our not so poor intellect, our intellect limit our faith, our faith limit our divine hope; reason must humbly watch over all—reason, the candle of the Lord.

There are some who would argue for prayer, not on the ground of any possible answer to be looked for, but because of the good to be gained in the spiritual attitude of the mind in praying. There are those even who, not believing in any ear to hear, any heart to answer, will yet pray. They say it does them good; they pray to nothing at all, but they get spiritual benefit.

I will not contradict their testimony. So needful is prayer to the soul that the mere attitude of it may encourage a good mood. Verily to pray to that which is not, is in logic a folly; yet the good that, they say, comes of it, may rebuke the worse folly of their unbelief, for it indicates that prayer is natural, and how could it be natural if inconsistent with the very mode of our being? Theirs is a better way than that of those who, believing there is a God, but not believing that he will give any answer to their prayers, yet pray to him; that is more foolish and more immoral than praying to the No-god. Whatever the God be to whom they pray, their prayer is a mockery of him, of themselves, of the truth.

On the other hand, let God give no assent to the individual prayer, let the prayer even be for something nowise good enough to be a gift of God, yet the soul that prays will get good of its prayer, if only in being thereby brought a little nearer to the Father, and making way for coming again. Prayer does react in good upon the praying soul, irrespective of answer. But to pray for the sake of the prayer, and without regard to there being no one to hear, would to me indicate a nature not merely illogical but morally false, did I not suspect a vague undetected apprehension of a Something diffused through the All of existence, and some sort of shadowiest communion therewith.

There are moods of such satisfaction in God that a man may feel as if nothing were left to pray for, as if he had but to wait with patience for what the Lord would work; there are moods of such hungering desire, that petition is crushed into an inarticulate crying; and there is a communion with God that asks for nothing, yet asks for everything. This last is the very essence of prayer, though not petition. It is possible for a man, not indeed to believe in God, but to believe that there is a God, and yet not desire to enter into communion with him; but he that prays and does not faint will come to recognize that to talk with God is more than to have all prayers granted—that it is the end of all prayer, granted or refused. And he who seeks the Father more than anything he can give, is likely to have what he asks, for he is not likely to ask amiss.

Even such as ask amiss may sometimes have their prayers answered. The Father will never give the child a stone that asks for bread; but I am not sure that he will never give the child a stone that asks for a stone. If the Father say, 'My child, that is a stone; it is no bread;' and the child answer, 'I am sure it is bread; I want it;' may it not be well he should try his bread?

But now for another point in the parable, where I think I can give some help—I mean the Lord's apparent recognition of delay in the answering of prayer: in the very structure of

the parable he seems to take delay for granted, and says notwithstanding, 'He will avenge them speedily!'

The reconciling conclusion is, that God loses no time, though the answer may not be immediate.

He may delay because it would not be safe to give us at once what we ask: we are not ready for it. To give ere we could truly receive, would be to destroy the very heart and hope of prayer, to cease to be our Father. The delay itself may work to bring us nearer to our help, to increase the desire, perfect the prayer, and ripen the receptive condition.

Again, not from any straitening in God, but either from our own condition and capacity, or those of the friend for whom we pray, time may be necessary to the working out of the answer. God is limited by regard for our best; our best implies education; in this we must ourselves have a large share; this share, being human, involves time. And perhaps, indeed, the better the gift we pray for, the more time is necessary to its arrival. To give us the spiritual gift we desire, God may have to begin far back in our spirit, in regions unknown to us, and do much work that we can be aware of only in the results; for our consciousness is to the extent of our being but as the flame of the volcano to the world-gulf whence it issues: in the gulf of our unknown being God works behind our consciousness. With his holy influence, with his own presence, the one thing for which most earnestly we cry, he may be approaching our consciousness from behind, coming forward through regions of our darkness into our light, long before we begin to be aware that he is answering our request—has answered it, and is visiting his child. To avenge speedily must mean to make no delay beyond what is absolutely necessary, to begin the moment it is possible to begin. Because the Son of Man did not appear for thousands of years after men began to cry out for a Saviour, shall we imagine he did not come the first moment it was well he should come? Can we doubt that to come a moment sooner would have been to delay, not to expedite, his kingdom? For anything that needs a process, to begin to act at once is to be speedy. God does not put off like the unrighteous judge; he does not delay until irritated by the prayers of the needy; he will hear while they are yet speaking; yea, before they call he will answer.

The Lord uses words without anxiety as to the misuse of them by such as do not search after his will in them; and the word avenge may be simply retained from the parable without its special meaning therein; yet it suggests a remark or two.

Of course, no prayer for any revenge that would gratify the selfishness of our nature, a thing to be burned out of us by the fire of God, needs think to be heard. Be sure, when the Lord prayed his Father to forgive those who crucified him, he uttered his own wish and his Father's will at once: God will never punish according to the abstract abomination of sin, as if men knew what they were doing. 'Vengeance is mine,' he says: with a right understanding of it, we might as well pray for God's vengeance as for his forgiveness; that vengeance is, to destroy the sin—to make the sinner abjure and hate it; nor is there any satisfaction in a

vengeance that seeks or effects less. The man himself must turn against himself, and so be for himself. If nothing else will do, then hell-fire; if less will do, whatever brings repentance and self-repudiation, is God's repayment.

Friends, if any prayers are offered against us; if the vengeance of God be cried out for, because of some wrong you or I have done, God grant us his vengeance! Let us not think that we shall get off!

But perhaps the Lord was here thinking, not of persecution, or any form of human wrong, but of the troubles that most trouble his true disciple; and the suggestion is comforting to those whose foes are within them, for, if so, then he recognizes the evils of self, against which we fight, not as parts of ourselves, but as our foes, on which he will avenge the true self that is at strife with them. And certainly no evil is, or ever could be, of the essential being and nature of the creature God made! The thing that is not good, however associated with our being, is against that being, not of it—is its enemy, on which we need to be avenged. When we fight, he will avenge. Till we fight, evil shall have dominion over us, a dominion to make us miserable; other than miserable can no one be, under the yoke of a nature contrary to his own. Comfort thyself then, who findest thine own heart and soul, or rather the things that move therein, too much for thee: God will avenge his own elect. He is not delaying; he is at work for thee. Only thou must pray, and not faint. Ask, ask; it shall be given you. Seek most the best things; to ask for the best things is to have them; the seed of them is in you, or you could not ask for them.

But from whatever quarter come our troubles, whether from the world outside or the world inside, still let us pray. In his own right way, the only way that could satisfy us, for we are of his kind, will God answer our prayers with help. He will avenge us of our adversaries, and that speedily. Only let us take heed that we be adversaries to no man, but fountains of love and forgiving tenderness to all. And from no adversary, either on the way with us, or haunting the secret chamber of our hearts, let us hope to be delivered till we have paid the last farthing.

THE LAST FARTHING.

'Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou have paid the last farthing.'—St. Matthew v. 26.

There is a thing wonderful and admirable in the parables, not readily grasped, but specially indicated by the Lord himself—their unintelligibility to the mere intellect. They are addressed to the conscience and not to the intellect, to the will and not to the imagination. They are strong and direct but not definite. They are not meant to explain anything, but to rouse a man to the feeling, 'I am not what I ought to be, I do not the thing I ought to do!' Many maundering interpretations may be given by the wise, with plentiful loss of labour, while the child who uses them for the necessity of walking in the one path will constantly receive light from them. The greatest obscuration of the words of the Lord, as of all true teachers, comes from those who give themselves to interpret rather than do them. Theologians have done more to hide the gospel of Christ than any of its adversaries. It was not for our understandings, but our will, that Christ came. He who does that which he sees, shall understand; he who is set upon understanding rather than doing, shall go on stumbling and mistaking and speaking foolishness. He has not that in him which can understand that kind. The gospel itself, and in it the parables of the Truth, are to be understood only by those who walk by what they find. It is he that runneth that shall read, and no other. It is not intended by the speaker of the parables that any other should know intellectually what, known but intellectually, would be for his injury—what knowing intellectually he would imagine he had grasped, perhaps even appropriated. When the pilgrim of the truth comes on his journey to the region of the parable, he finds its interpretation. It is not a fruit or a jewel to be stored, but a well springing by the wayside.

Let us try to understand what the Lord himself said about his parables. It will be better to take the reading of St. Matthew xiii. 14, 15, as it is plainer, and the quotation from Isaiah (vi. 9, 10) is given in full—after the Septuagint, and much clearer than in our version from the Hebrew:—in its light should be read the corresponding passages in the other Gospels: in St. Mark's it is so compressed as to be capable of quite a different and false meaning: in St. John's reference, the blinding of the heart seems attributed directly to the devil:—the purport is, that those who by insincerity and falsehood close their deeper eyes, shall not be capable of using in the matter the more superficial eyes of their understanding. Whether this follows as a psychical or metaphysical necessity, or be regarded as a special punishment, it is equally the will of God, and comes from him who is the live Truth. They shall not see what is not for such as they. It is the punishment of the true Love, and is continually illustrated and fulfilled: if I know anything of the truth of God, then the objectors to Christianity, so far as I am acquainted with them, do not; their arguments, not in themselves false, have nothing to do with the matter; they see the thing they are talking against, but they do not see the thing they think they are talking against.

This will help to remove the difficulty that the parables are plainly for the teaching of the truth, and yet the Lord speaks of them as for the concealing of it. They are for the understanding of that man only who is practical—who does the thing he knows, who seeks to understand vitally. They reveal to the live conscience, otherwise not to the keenest intellect—though at the same time they may help to rouse the conscience with glimpses of the truth, where the man is on the borders of waking. Ignorance may be at once a punishment and a kindness: all punishment is kindness, and the best of which the man at the time is capable: 'Because you will not do, you shall not see; but it would be worse for you if you did see, not being of the disposition to do.' Such are punished in having the way closed before them; they punish themselves; their own doing results as it cannot but result on them. To say to them certain things so that they could understand them, would but harden them more, because they would not do them; they should have but parables—lanterns of the truth, clear to those who will walk in their light, dark to those who will not. The former are content to have the light cast upon their way; the latter will have it in their eyes, and cannot: if they had, it would but blind them. For them to know more would be their worse condemnation. They are not fit to know more; more shall not be given them yet; it is their punishment that they are in the wrong, and shall keep in the wrong until they come out of it. 'You choose the dark; you shall stay in the dark till the terrors that dwell in the dark affray you, and cause you to cry out.' God puts a seal upon the will of man; that seal is either his great punishment, or his mighty favour: 'Ye love the darkness, abide in the darkness:' 'O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt!'

What special meaning may be read in the different parts of magistrate, judge, and officer, beyond the general suggestion, perhaps, of the tentative approach of the final, I do not know; but I think I do know what is meant by 'agree on the way,' and 'the uttermost farthing.' The parable is an appeal to the common sense of those that hear it, in regard to every affair of righteousness. Arrange what claim lies against you; compulsion waits behind it. Do at once what you must do one day. As there is no escape from payment, escape at least the prison that will enforce it. Do not drive Justice to extremities. Duty is imperative; it must be done. It is useless to think to escape the eternal law of things; yield of yourself, nor compel God to compel you.

To the honest man, to the man who would fain be honest, the word is of right gracious import. To the untrue, it is a terrible threat; to him who is of the truth, it is sweet as most loving promise. He who is of God's mind in things, rejoices to hear the word of the changeless Truth; the voice of the Right fills the heavens and the earth, and makes his soul glad; it is his salvation. If God were not inexorably just, there would be no stay for the soul of the feeblest lover of right: 'thou art true, O Lord: one day I also shall be true!' 'Thou shalt render the right, cost you what it may,' is a dread sound in the ears of those whose life is a falsehood: what but the last farthing would those who love righteousness more than life

pay? It is a joy profound as peace to know that God is determined upon such payment, is determined to have his children clean, clear, pure as very snow; is determined that not only shall they with his help make up for whatever wrong they have done, but at length be incapable, by eternal choice of good, under any temptation, of doing the thing that is not divine, the thing God would not do.

There has been much cherishing of the evil fancy, often without its taking formal shape, that there is some way of getting out of the region of strict justice, some mode of managing to escape doing all that is required of us; but there is no such escape. A way to avoid any demand of righteousness would be an infinitely worse way than the road to the everlasting fire, for its end would be eternal death. No, there is no escape. There is no heaven with a little of hell in it—no plan to retain this or that of the devil in our hearts or our pockets. Out Satan must go, every hair and feather! Neither shalt thou think to be delivered from the necessity of being good by being made good. God is the God of the animals in a far lovelier way, I suspect, than many of us dare to think, but he will not be the God of a man by making a good beast of him. Thou must be good; neither death nor any admittance into good company will make thee good; though, doubtless, if thou be willing and try, these and all other best helps will be given thee. There is no clothing in a robe of imputed righteousness, that poorest of legal cobwebs spun by spiritual spiders. To me it seems like an invention of well-meaning dulness to soothe insanity; and indeed it has proved a door of escape out of worse imaginations. It is apparently an old 'doctrine;' for St. John seems to point at it where he says, 'Little children, let no man lead you astray; he that doeth righteousness is righteous even as he is righteous.' Christ is our righteousness, not that we should escape punishment, still less escape being righteous, but as the live potent creator of righteousness in us, so that we, with our wills receiving his spirit, shall like him resist unto blood, striving against sin; shall know in ourselves, as he knows, what a lovely thing is righteousness, what a mean, ugly, unnatural thing is unrighteousness. He is our righteousness, and that righteousness is no fiction, no pretence, no imputation.

One thing that tends to keep men from seeing righteousness and unrighteousness as they are, is, that they have been told many things are righteous and unrighteous, which are neither the one nor the other. Righteousness is just fairness—from God to man, from man to God and to man; it is giving every one his due—his large mighty due. He is righteous, and no one else, who does this. And any system which tends to persuade men that there is any salvation but that of becoming righteous even as Jesus is righteous; that a man can be made good, as a good dog is good, without his own willed share in the making; that a man is saved by having his sins hidden under a robe of imputed righteousness—that system, so far as this tendency, is of the devil and not of God. Thank God, not even error shall injure the true of heart; it is not wickedness. They grow in the truth, and as love casts out fear, so truth casts out falsehood.

I read, then, in this parable, that a man had better make up his mind to be righteous, to be fair, to do what he can to pay what he owes, in any and all the relations of life—all the matters, in a word, wherein one man may demand of another, or complain that he has not received fair play. Arrange your matters with those who have anything against you, while you are yet together and things have not gone too far to be arranged; you will have to do it, and that under less easy circumstances than now. Putting off is of no use. You must. The thing has to be done; there are means of compelling you.

'In this affair, however, I am in the right.'

'If so, very well—for this affair. But I have reason to doubt whether you are capable of judging righteously in your own cause:—do you hate the man?'

'No, I don't hate him.'

'Do you dislike him?'

'I can't say I like him.'

'Do you love him as yourself?'

'Oh, come! come! no one does that!'

'Then no one is to be trusted when he thinks, however firmly, that he is all right, and his neighbour all wrong, in any matter between them.'

'But I don't say I am all right, and he is all wrong; there may be something to urge on his side: what I say is, that I am more in the right than he.'

'This is not fundamentally a question of things: it is a question of condition, of spiritual relation and action, towards your neighbour. If in yourself you were all right towards him, you could do him no wrong. Let it be with the individual dispute as it may, you owe him something that you do not pay him, as certainly as you think he owes you something he will not pay you.'

'He would take immediate advantage of me if I owned that.'

'So much the worse for him. Until you are fair to him, it does not matter to you whether he is unfair to you or not.'

'I beg your pardon—it is just what does matter! I want nothing but my rights. What can matter to me more than my rights?'

'Your duties—your debts. You are all wrong about the thing. It is a very small matter to you whether the man give you your rights or not; it is life or death to you whether or not you give him his. Whether he pay you what you count his debt or no, you will be compelled to pay him all you owe him. If you owe him a pound and he you a million, you must pay him the pound whether he pay you the million or not; there is no business-parallel here. If, owing you love, he gives you hate, you, owing him love, have yet to pay it. A love unpaid you, a justice undone you, a praise withheld from you, a judgment passed on you without judgment, will not absolve you of the debt of a love unpaid, a justice not done, a praise withheld, a false judgment passed: these uttermost farthings—not to speak of such debts as

the world itself counts grievous wrongs—you must pay him, whether he pay you or not. We have a good while given us to pay, but a crisis will come—come soon after all—comes always sooner than those expect it who are not ready for it—a crisis when the demand unyielded will be followed by prison.

The same holds with every demand of God: by refusing to pay, the man makes an adversary who will compel him—and that for the man's own sake. If you or your life say, 'I will not,' then he will see to it. There is a prison, and the one thing we know about that prison is, that its doors do not open until entire satisfaction is rendered, the last farthing paid.

The main debts whose payment God demands are those which lie at the root of all right, those we owe in mind, and soul, and being. Whatever in us can be or make an adversary, whatever could prevent us from doing the will of God, or from agreeing with our fellow—all must be yielded. Our every relation, both to God and our fellow, must be acknowledged heartily, met as a reality. Smaller debts, if any debt can be small, follow as a matter of course.

If the man acknowledge, and would pay if he could but cannot, the universe will be taxed to help him rather than he should continue unable. If the man accepts the will of God, he is the child of the Father, the whole power and wealth of the Father is for him, and the uttermost farthing will easily be paid. If the man denies the debt, or acknowledging does nothing towards paying it, then—at last—the prison! God in the dark can make a man thirst for the light, who never in the light sought but the dark. The cells of the prison may differ in degree of darkness; but they are all alike in this, that not a door opens but to payment. There is no day but the will of God, and he who is of the night cannot be for ever allowed to roam the day; unfelt, unprized, the light must be taken from him, that he may know what the darkness is. When the darkness is perfect, when he is totally without the light he has spent the light in slaying, then will he know darkness.

I think I have seen from afar something of the final prison of all, the innermost cell of the debtor of the universe; I will endeavour to convey what I think it may be.

It is the vast outside; the ghastly dark beyond the gates of the city of which God is the light—where the evil dogs go ranging, silent as the dark, for there is no sound any more than sight. The time of signs is over. Every sense has its signs, and they were all misused: there is no sense, no sign more—nothing now by means of which to believe. The man wakes from the final struggle of death, in absolute loneliness—such a loneliness as in the most miserable moment of deserted childhood he never knew. Not a hint, not a shadow of anything outside his consciousness reaches him. All is dark, dark and dumb; no motion—not the breath of a wind! never a dream of change! not a scent from far-off field! nothing to suggest being or thing besides the man himself, no sign of God anywhere. God has so far withdrawn from the man, that he is conscious only of that from which he has withdrawn. In the midst of the live world he cared for nothing but himself; now in the dead world he is in God's

prison, his own separated self. He would not believe in God because he never saw God; now he doubts if there be such a thing as the face of a man—doubts if he ever really saw one, ever anything more than dreamed of such a thing:—he never came near enough to human being, to know what human being really was—so may well doubt if human beings ever were, if ever he was one of them.

Next after doubt comes reasoning on the doubt: 'The only one must be God! I know no one but myself: I must myself be God—none else!' Poor helpless dumb devil!—his own glorious lord god! Yea, he will imagine himself that same resistless force which, without his will, without his knowledge, is the law by which the sun burns, and the stars keep their courses, the strength that drives all the engines of the world. His fancy will give birth to a thousand fancies, which will run riot like the mice in a house but just deserted: he will call it creation, and his. Having no reality to set them beside, nothing to correct them by; the measured order, harmonious relations, and sweet graces of God's world nowhere for him; what he thinks, will be, for lack of what God thinks, the man's realities: what others can he have! Soon, misery will beget on imagination a thousand shapes of woe, which he will not be able to rule, direct, or even distinguish from real presences—a whole world of miserable contradictions and cold-fever-dreams.

But no liveliest human imagination could supply adequate representation of what it would be to be left without a shadow of the presence of God. If God gave it, man could not understand it: he knows neither God nor himself in the way of the understanding. For not he who cares least about God was in this world ever left as God could leave him. I doubt if any man could continue following his wickedness from whom God had withdrawn.

The most frightful idea of what could, to his own consciousness, befall a man, is that he should have to lead an existence with which God had nothing to do. The thing could not be; for being that is caused, the causation ceasing, must of necessity cease. It is always in, and never out of God, that we can live and do. But I suppose the man so left that he seems to himself utterly alone, yet, alas! with himself—smallest interchange of thought, feeblest contact of existence, dullest reflection from other being, impossible: in such evil case I believe the man would be glad to come in contact with the worst-loathed insect: it would be a shape of life, something beyond and besides his own huge, void, formless being! I imagine some such feeling in the prayer of the devils for leave to go into the swine. His worst enemy, could he but be aware of him, he would be ready to worship. For the misery would be not merely the absence of all being other than his own self, but the fearful, endless, unavoidable presence of that self. Without the correction, the reflection, the support of other presences, being is not merely unsafe, it is a horror—for anyone but God, who is his own being. For him whose idea is God's, and the image of God, his own being is far too fragmentary and imperfect to be anything like good company. It is the lovely creatures God has made all around us, in them giving us himself, that, until we know him, save us from the frenzy of aloneness—for

that aloneness is Self, Self, Self. The man who minds only himself must at last go mad if God did not interfere.

Can there be any way out of the misery? Will the soul that could not believe in God, with all his lovely world around testifying of him, believe when shut in the prison of its own lonely, weary all-and-nothing? It would for a time try to believe that it was indeed nothing, a mere glow of the setting sun on a cloud of dust, a paltry dream that dreamed itself—then, ah, if only the dream might dream that it was no more! that would be the one thing to hope for. Self-loathing, and that for no sin, from no repentance, from no vision of better, would begin and grow and grow; and to what it might not come no soul can tell—of essential, original misery, uncompromising self-disgust! Only, then, if a being be capable of self-disgust, is there not some room for hope—as much as a pinch of earth in the cleft of a rock might yield for the growth of a pine? Nay, there must be hope while there is existence; for where there is existence there must be God; and God is for ever good, nor can be other than good. But alas, the distance from the light! Such a soul is at the farthest verge of life's negation!—no, not the farthest! a man is nearer heaven when in deepest hell than just ere he begins to reap the reward of his doings—for he is in a condition to receive the smallest show of the life that is, as a boon unspeakable. All his years in the world he received the endless gifts of sun and air, earth and sea and human face divine, as things that came to him because that was their way, and there was no one to prevent them; now the poorest thinning of the darkness he would hail as men of old the glow of a descending angel; it would be as a messenger from God. Not that he would think of God! it takes long to think of God; but hope, not yet seeming hope, would begin to dawn in his bosom, and the thinner darkness would be as a cave of light, a refuge from the horrid self of which he used to be so proud.

A man may well imagine it impossible ever to think so unpleasantly of himself! But he has only to let things go, and he will make it the real, right, natural way to think of himself. True, all I have been saying is imaginary; but our imagination is made to mirror truth; all the things that appear in it are more or less after the model of things that are; I suspect it is the region whence issues prophecy; and when we are true it will mirror nothing but truth. I deal here with the same light and darkness the Lord dealt with, the same St. Paul and St. John and St. Peter and St. Jude dealt with. Ask yourself whether the faintest dawn of even physical light would not be welcome to such a soul as some refuge from the dark of the justly hated self.

And the light would grow and grow across the awful gulf between the soul and its haven—its repentance—for repentance is the first pressure of the bosom of God; and in the twilight, struggling and faint, the man would feel, faint as the twilight, another thought beside his, another thinking Something nigh his dreary self—perhaps the man he had most wronged, most hated, most despised—and would be glad that some one, whoever, was near him: the

man he had most injured, and was most ashamed to meet, would be a refuge from himself—oh, how welcome!

So might I imagine a thousand steps up from the darkness, each a little less dark, a little nearer the light—but, ah, the weary way! He cannot come out until he have paid the uttermost farthing! Repentance once begun, however, may grow more and more rapid! If God once get a willing hold, if with but one finger he touch the man's self, swift as possibility will he draw him from the darkness into the light. For that for which the forlorn, self-ruined wretch was made, was to be a child of God, a partaker of the divine nature, an heir of God and joint heir with Christ. Out of the abyss into which he cast himself, refusing to be the heir of God, he must rise and be raised. To the heart of God, the one and only goal of the human race—the refuge and home of all and each, he must set out and go, or the last glimmer of humanity will die from him. Whoever will live must cease to be a slave and become a child of God. There is no half-way house of rest, where ungodliness may be dallied with, nor prove quite fatal. Be they few or many cast into such prison as I have endeavoured to imagine, there can be no deliverance for human soul, whether in that prison or out of it, but in paying the last farthing, in becoming lowly, penitent, self-refusing—so receiving the sonship, and learning to cry, Father!

ABBA, FATHER!

'—the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.'—Romans viii. 15.

The hardest, gladdest thing in the world is, to cry Father! from a full heart. I would help whom I may to call thus upon the Father.

There are things in all forms of the systematic teaching of Christianity to check this outgoing of the heart—with some to render it simply impossible. The more delicate the affections, the less easy to satisfy, the readier are they to be damped and discouraged, yea quite blown aside; even the suspicion of a cold reception is enough to paralyze them. Such a cold wind blowing at the very gate of heaven—thank God, outside the gate!—is the so-called doctrine of Adoption. When a heart hears—and believes, or half believes—that it is not the child of God by origin, from the first of its being, but may possibly be adopted into his family, its love sinks at once in a cold faint: where is its own father, and who is this that would adopt it? To myself, in the morning of childhood, the evil doctrine was a mist through which the light came struggling, a cloud-phantom of repellent mien-requiring maturer thought and truer knowledge to dissipate it. But it requires neither much knowledge nor much insight to stand up against its hideousness; it needs but love that will not be denied, and courage to question the phantom.

A devout and honest scepticism on God's side, not to be put down by anything called authority, is absolutely necessary to him who would know the liberty wherewith Christ maketh free. Whatever any company of good men thinks or believes, is to be approached with respect; but nothing claimed or taught, be the claimers or the teachers who they may, must come between the soul and the spirit of the father, who is himself the teacher of his children. Nay, to accept authority may be to refuse the very thing the 'authority' would teach; it may remain altogether misunderstood just for lack of that natural process of doubt and inquiry, which we were intended to go through by him who would have us understand.

As no scripture is of private interpretation, so is there no feeling in human heart which exists in that heart alone, which is not, in some form or degree, in every heart; and thence I conclude that many must have groaned like myself under the supposed authority of this doctrine. The refusal to look up to God as our Father is the one central wrong in the whole human affair; the inability, the one central misery: whatever serves to clear any difficulty from the way of the recognition of the Father, will more or less undermine every difficulty in life.

'Is God then not my Father,' cries the heart of the child, 'that I need to be adopted by him? Adoption! that can never satisfy me. Who is my father? Am I not his to begin with? Is God not my very own Father? Is he my Father only in a sort or fashion—by a legal contrivance? Truly, much love may lie in adoption, but if I accept it from any one, I allow myself the child of another! The adoption of God would indeed be a blessed thing if another than

he had given me being! but if he gave me being, then it means no reception, but a repudiation.—"O Father, am I not your child?"'

'No; but he will adopt you. He will not acknowledge you his child, but he will call you his child, and be a father to you.'

'Alas!' cries the child, 'if he be not my father, he cannot become my father. A father is a father from the beginning. A primary relation cannot be superinduced. The consequence might be small where earthly fatherhood was concerned, but the very origin of my being—alas, if he be only a maker and not a father! Then am I only a machine, and not a child—not a man! It is false to say I was created in his image!

'It avails nothing to answer that we lost our birthright by the fall. I do not care to argue that I did not fall when Adam fell; for I have fallen many a time, and there is a shadow on my soul which I or another may call a curse; I cannot get rid of a something that always intrudes between my heart and the blue of every sky. But it avails nothing, either for my heart or their argument, to say I have fallen and been cast out: can any repudiation, even that of God, undo the facts of an existent origin? Nor is it merely that he made me: by whose power do I go on living? When he cast me out, as you say, did I then begin to draw my being from myself—or from the devil? In whom do I live and move and have my being? It cannot be that I am not the creature of God.'

'But creation is not fatherhood.'

'Creation in the image of God, is. And if I am not in the image of God, how can the word of God be of any meaning to me? "He called them gods to whom the word of God came," says the Master himself. To be fit to receive his word implies being of his kind. No matter how his image may have been defaced in me: the thing defaced is his image, remains his defaced image—an image yet that can hear his word. What makes me evil and miserable is, that the thing spoiled in me is the image of the Perfect. Nothing can be evil but in virtue of a good hypostasis. No, no! nothing can make it that I am not the child of God. If one say, "Look at the animals: God made them: you do not call them the children of God!" I answer: "But I am to blame; they are not to blame! I cling fast to my blame: it is the seal of my childhood." I have nothing to argue from in the animals, for I do not understand them. Two things only I am sure of: that God is to them "a faithful creator;" and that the sooner I put in force my claim to be a child of God, the better for them; for they too are fallen, though without blame.'

'But you are evil: how can you be a child of the Good?'

'Just as many an evil son is the child of a good parent.'

'But in him you call a good parent, there yet lay evil, and that accounts for the child being evil.'

'I cannot explain. God let me be born through evil channels. But in whatever manner I may have become an unworthy child, I cannot thereby have ceased to be a child of God—his

child in the way that a child must ever be the child of the man of whom he comes. Is it not proof—this complaint of my heart at the word Adoption? Is it not the spirit of the child, crying out, "Abba, Father"?'

'Yes; but that is the spirit of adoption; the text says so.'

'Away with your adoption! I could not even be adopted if I were not such as the adoption could reach—that is, of the nature of God. Much as he may love him, can a man adopt a dog? I must be of a nature for the word of God to come to—yea, so far, of the divine nature, of the image of God! Heartily do I grant that, had I been left to myself, had God dropped me, held no communication with me, I could never have thus cried, never have cared when they told me I was not a child of God. But he has never repudiated me, and does not now desire to adopt me. Pray, why should it grieve me to be told I am not a child of God, if I be not a child of God? If you say—Because you have learned to love him, I answer—Adoption would satisfy the love of one who was not but would be a child; for me, I cannot do without a father, nor can any adoption give me one.'

'But what is the good of all you say, if the child is such that the father cannot take him to his heart?'

'Ah, indeed, I grant you, nothing!—so long as the child does not desire to be taken to the father's heart; but the moment he does, then it is everything to the child's heart that he should be indeed the child of him after whom his soul is thirsting. However bad I may be, I am the child of God, and therein lies my blame. Ah, I would not lose my blame! in my blame lies my hope. It is the pledge of what I am, and what I am not; the pledge of what I am meant to be, what I shall one day be, the child of God in spirit and in truth.'

'Then you dare to say the apostle is wrong in what he so plainly teaches?'

'By no means; what I do say is, that our English presentation of his teaching is in this point very misleading. It is not for me to judge the learned and good men who have revised the translation of the New Testament—with so much gain to every one whose love of truth is greater than his loving prejudice for accustomed form;—I can only say, I wonder what may have been their reasons for retaining this word adoption. In the New Testament the word is used only by the apostle Paul. Liddell and Scott give the meaning—"Adoption as a son," which is a mere submission to popular theology: they give no reference except to the New Testament. The relation of the word nioqesia to the form qetoV, which means "taken," or rather, "placed as one's child," is, I presume, the sole ground for the so translating of it: usage plentiful and invariable could not justify that translation here, in the face of what St. Paul elsewhere shows he means by the word. The Greek word might be variously meant—though I can find no use of it earlier than St. Paul; the English can mean but one thing, and that is not what St. Paul means. "The spirit of adoption" Luther translates "the spirit of a child;" adoption he translates kindschaft, or childship.'

Of two things I am sure—first, that by nioqesia St. Paul did not intend adoption; and second, that if the Revisers had gone through what I have gone through because of the word, if they had felt it come between God and their hearts as I have felt it, they could not have allowed it to remain in their version.

Once more I say, the word used by St Paul does not imply that God adopts children that are not his own, but rather that a second time he fathers his own; that a second time they are born—this time from above; that he will make himself tenfold, yea, infinitely their father: he will have them back into the very bosom whence they issued, issued that they might learn they could live nowhere else; he will have them one with himself. It was for the sake of this that, in his Son, he died for them.

Let us look at the passage where he reveals his use of the word. It is in another of his epistles—that to the Galatians: iv. 1-7.

'But I say that so long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bondservant, though he is lord of all; but is under guardians and stewards until the term appointed of the father. So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world: but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that thou art no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.'

How could the Revisers choose this last reading, 'an heir through God,' and keep the word adoption? From the passage it is as plain as St. Paul could make it, that, by the word translated adoption, he means the raising of a father's own child from the condition of tutelage and subjection to others, a state which, he says, is no better than that of a slave, to the position and rights of a son. None but a child could become a son; the idea is—a spiritual coming of age; only when the child is a man is he really and fully a son. The thing holds in the earthly relation. How many children of good parents—good children in the main too—never know those parents, never feel towards them as children might, until, grown up, they have left the house—until, perhaps, they are parents themselves, or are parted from them by death! To be a child is not necessarily to be a son or daughter. The childship is the lower condition of the upward process towards the sonship, the soil out of which the true sonship shall grow, the former without which the latter were impossible. God can no more than an earthly parent be content to have only children: he must have sons and daughters—children of his soul, of his spirit, of his love—not merely in the sense that he loves them, or even that they love him, but in the sense that they love like him, love as he loves. For this he does not adopt them; he dies to give them himself, thereby to raise his own to his heart; he gives them a birth from above; they are born again out of himself and into himself—for he is the one and the all. His children are not his real, true sons and daughters

until they think like him, feel with him, judge as he judges, are at home with him, and without fear before him because he and they mean the same thing, love the same things, seek the same ends. For this are we created; it is the one end of our being, and includes all other ends whatever. It can come only of unbelief and not faith, to make men believe that God has cast them off, repudiated them, said they are not, yea never were, his children—and he all the time spending himself to make us the children he designed, foreordained—children who would take him for their Father! He is our father all the time, for he is true; but until we respond with the truth of children, he cannot let all the father out to us; there is no place for the dove of his tenderness to alight. He is our father, but we are not his children. Because we are his children, we must become his sons and daughters. Nothing will satisfy him, or do for us, but that we be one with our father! What else could serve! How else should life ever be a good! Because we are the sons of God, we must become the sons of God.

There may be among my readers—alas for such!—to whom the word Father brings no cheer, no dawn, in whose heart it rouses no tremble of even a vanished emotion. It is hardly likely to be their fault. For though as children we seldom love up to the mark of reason; though we often offend; and although the conduct of some children is inexplicable to the parent who loves them; yet, if the parent has been but ordinarily kind, even the son who has grown up a worthless man, will now and then feel, in his better moments, some dim reflex of childship, some faintly pleasant, some slightly sorrowful remembrance of the father around whose neck his arms had sometimes clung. In my own childhood and boyhood my father was the refuge from all the ills of life, even sharp pain itself. Therefore I say to son or daughter who has no pleasure in the name Father, 'You must interpret the word by all that you have missed in life. Every time a man might have been to you a refuge from the wind, a covert from the tempest, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, that was a time when a father might have been a father indeed. Happy you are yet, if you have found man or woman such a refuge; so far have you known a shadow of the perfect, seen the back of the only man, the perfect Son of the perfect Father. All that human tenderness can give or desire in the nearness and readiness of love, all and infinitely more must be true of the perfect Father—of the maker of fatherhood, the Father of all the fathers of the earth, specially the Father of those who have specially shown a father-heart.'

This Father would make to himself sons and daughters indeed—that is, such sons and daughters as shall be his sons and daughters not merely by having come from his heart, but by having returned thither—children in virtue of being such as whence they came, such as choose to be what he is. He will have them share in his being and nature—strong wherein he cares for strength; tender and gracious as he is tender and gracious; angry where and as he is angry. Even in the small matter of power, he will have them able to do whatever his Son Jesus could on the earth, whose was the life of the perfect man, whose works were those of perfected humanity. Everything must at length be subject to man, as it was to The Man.

When God can do what he will with a man, the man may do what he will with the world; he may walk on the sea like his Lord; the deadliest thing will not he able to hurt him:—'He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater than these shall he do.'

God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, an handbreath off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live.

He has made us, but we have to be. All things were made through the Word, but that which was made in the Word was life, and that life is the light of men: they who live by this light, that is, live as Jesus lived—by obedience, namely, to the Father, have a share in their own making; the light becomes life in them; they are, in their lower way, alive with the life that was first born in Jesus, and through him has been born in them—by obedience they become one with the godhead: 'As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.' He does not make them the sons of God, but he gives them power to become the sons of God: in choosing and obeying the truth, man becomes the true son of the Father of lights.

It is enough to read with understanding the passage I have quoted from his epistle to the Galatians, to see that the word adoption does not in the least fit St. Paul's idea, or suit the things he says. While we but obey the law God has laid upon us, without knowing the heart of the Father whence comes the law, we are but slaves—not necessarily ignoble slaves, yet slaves; but when we come to think with him, when the mind of the son is as the mind of the Father, the action of the son the same as that of the Father, then is the son of the Father, then are we the sons of God. And in both passages—this, and that which, from his epistle to the Romans, I have placed at the head of this sermon—we find the same phrase, Abba, Father, showing, if proof were needful, that he uses the word nioqesia in the same sense in both: nothing can well be plainer, that needs consideration at all, than what that sense is. Let us glance at the other passages in which he uses the same word: as he alone of the writers of the New Testament does use it, so, for aught I know, he may have made it for himsef. One of them is in the same eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans; this I will keep to the last. Another is in the following chapter, the fourth verse; in it he speaks of the nioqesia, literally the son-placing (that is, the placing of sons in the true place of sons), as belonging to the Jews. On this I have but to remark that 'whose is the nioqesia' cannot mean either that they had already received it, or that it belonged to the Jews more than to the Gentiles; it can only mean that, as the elder-brother-nation, they had a foremost claim to it, and would naturally first receive it; that, in their best men, they had always been nearest to it. It must be wrought out first in such as had received the preparation necessary; those were the Jews; of the Jews was the Son, bringing the nioqesia, the sonship, to all. Therefore

theirs was the nioqesia, just as theirs was the gospel. It was to the Jew first, then to the Gentile—though many a Gentile would have it before many a Jew. Those and only those who out of a true heart cry 'Abba, Father,' be they of what paltry little so-called church, other than the body of Christ, they may, or of no other at all, are the sons and daughters of God.

St. Paul uses the word also in his epistle to the Ephesians, the first chapter, the fifth verse. 'Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself,' says the authorized version; 'Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself,' says the revised—and I see little to choose between them: neither gives the meaning of St. Paul. If there is anything gained by the addition of the words 'of children' in the one case, and 'as sons' in the other, to translate the word for which 'adoption' alone is made to serve in the other passages, the advantage is only to the minus-side, to that of the wrong interpretation.

Children we were; true sons we could never be, save through The Son. He brothers us. He takes us to the knees of the Father, beholding whose face we grow sons indeed. Never could we have known the heart of the Father, never felt it possible to love him as sons, but for him who cast himself into the gulf that yawned between us. In and through him we were foreordained to the sonship: sonship, even had we never sinned, never could we reach without him. We should have been little children loving the Father indeed, but children far from the sonhood that understands and adores. 'For as many as are led by the spirit of God, these are sons of God;' 'If any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his;' yea, if we have not each other's spirits, we do not belong to each other. There is no unity but having the same spirit. There is but one spirit, that of truth.

It remains to note yet another passage.

That never in anything he wrote was it St. Paul's intention to contribute towards a system of theology, it were easy to show: one sign of the fact is, that he does not hesitate to use this word he has perhaps himself made, in different, and apparently opposing, though by no means contradictory senses: his meanings always vivify each other. His ideas are so large that they tax his utterance and make him strain the use of words, but there is no danger to the honest heart, which alone he regards, of misunderstanding them, though 'the ignorant and unsteadfast wrest them' yet. At one time he speaks of the sonship as being the possession of the Israelite, at another as his who has learned to cry Abba, Father; and here, in the passage I have now last to consider, that from the 18th to the 25th verse of this same eighth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, he speaks of the nioqesia as yet to come—and as if it had to do, not with our spiritual, but our bodily condition. This use of the word, however, though not the same use as we find anywhere else, is nevertheless entirely consistent with his other uses of it.

The 23rd verse says, 'And not only so, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body.'

It is nowise difficult to discern that the ideas in this and the main use are necessarily associated and more than consistent. The putting of a son in his true, his foreordained place, has outward relations as well as inward reality; the outward depends on the inward, arises from it, and reveals it. When the child whose condition under tutors had passed away, took his position as a son, he would naturally change his dress and modes of life: when God's children cease to be slaves doing right from law and duty, and become his sons doing right from the essential love of God and their neighbour, they too must change the garments of their slavery for the robes of liberty, lay aside the body of this death, and appear in bodies like that of Christ, with whom they inherit of the Father. But many children who have learned to cry Abba, Father, are yet far from the liberty of the sons of God. Sons they are and no longer children, yet they groan as being still in bondage!—Plainly the apostle has no thought of working out an idea; with burning heart he is writing a letter: he gives, nevertheless, lines plentifully sufficient for us to work out his idea, and this is how it takes clear shape:—

We are the sons of God the moment we lift up our hearts, seeking to be sons—the moment we begin to cry Father. But as the world must be redeemed in a few men to begin with, so the soul is redeemed in a few of its thoughts and wants and ways, to begin with: it takes a long time to finish the new creation of this redemption. Shall it have taken millions of years to bring the world up to the point where a few of its inhabitants shall desire God, and shall the creature of this new birth be perfected in a day? The divine process may indeed now go on with tenfold rapidity, for the new factor of man's fellow-working, for the sake of which the whole previous array of means and forces existed, is now developed; but its end is yet far below the horizon of man's vision:—

The apostle speaks at one time of the thing as to come, at another time as done—when it is but commenced: our ways of thought are such. A man's heart may leap for joy the moment when, amidst the sea-waves, a strong hand has laid hold of the hair of his head; he may cry aloud, 'I am saved;'—and he may be safe, but he is not saved; this is far from a salvation to suffice. So are we sons when we begin to cry Father, but we are far from perfected sons. So long as there is in us the least taint of distrust, the least lingering of hate or fear, we have not received the sonship; we have not such life in us as raised the body of Jesus; we have not attained to the resurrection of the dead—by which word, in his epistle to the Philippians (iii. 2), St. Paul means, I think, the same thing as here he means by the sonship which he puts in apposition with the redemption of the body:—

Until our outward condition is that of sons royal, sons divine; so long as the garments of our souls, these mortal bodies, are mean—torn and dragged and stained; so long as we

groan under sickness and weakness and weariness, old age, forgetfulness, and all heavy things; so long we have not yet received the sonship in full—we are but getting ready one day to creep from our chrysalids, and spread the great heaven-storming wings of the psyches of God. We groan being burdened; we groan, waiting for the sonship—to wit, the redemption of the body—the uplifting of the body to be a fit house and revelation of the indwelling spirit—nay, like that of Christ, a fit temple and revelation of the deeper indwelling God. For we shall always need bodies to manifest and reveal us to each other—bodies, then, that fit the soul with absolute truth of presentment and revelation. Hence the revealing of the sons of God, spoken of in the 19th verse, is the same thing as the redemption of the body; the body is redeemed when it is made fit for the sons of God; then it is a revelation of them—the thing it was meant for, and always, more or less imperfectly, was. Such it shall be, when truth is strong enough in the sons of God to make it such—for it is the soul that makes the body. When we are the sons of God in heart and soul, then shall we be the sons of God in body too: 'we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'

I care little to speculate on the kind of this body; two things only I will say, as needful to be believed, concerning it: first, that it will be a body to show the same self as before—but, second, a body to show the being truly—without the defects, that is, and imperfections of the former bodily revelation. Even through their corporeal presence shall we then know our own infinitely better, and find in them endlessly more delight, than before. These things we must believe, or distrust the Father of our spirits. Till this redemption of the body arrives, the nioqesia is not wrought out, is only upon the way. Nor can it come but by our working out the salvation he is working in us.

This redemption of the body—its deliverance from all that is amiss, awry, unfinished, weak, worn out, all that prevents the revelation of the sons of God, is called by the apostle, not certainly the adoption, but the nioqesia, the sonship in full manifestation. It is the slave yet left in the sons and daughters of God that has betrayed them into even permitting the word adoption to mislead them!

To see how the whole utterance hangs together, read from the 18th verse to the 25th, especially noticing the 19th: 'For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing' (the outshining) 'of the sons of God.' When the sons of God show as they are, taking, with the character, the appearance and the place that belong to their sonship; when the sons of God sit with the Son of God on the throne of their Father; then shall they be in potency of fact the lords of the lower creation, the bestowers of liberty and peace upon it; then shall the creation, subjected to vanity for their sakes, find its freedom in their freedom, its gladness in their sonship. The animals will glory to serve them, will joy to come to them for help. Let the heartless scoff, the unjust despise! the heart that cries Abba, Father, cries to the God of the sparrow and the oxen; nor can hope go too far in hoping what that God will do for the

creation that now groaneth and travaileth in pain because our higher birth is delayed. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Shall my heart be more compassionate than his?

If to any reader my interpretation be unsatisfactory, I pray him not to spend his strength in disputing my faith, but in making sure his own progress on the way to freedom and sonship. Only to the child of God is true judgment possible. Were it otherwise, what would it avail to prove this one or that right or wrong? Right opinion on questions the most momentous will deliver no man. Cure for any ill in me or about me there is none, but to become the son of God I was born to be. Until such I am, until Christ is born in me, until I am revealed a son of God, pain and trouble will endure—and God grant they may! Call this presumption, and I can only widen my assertion: until you yourself are the son of God you were born to be, you will never find life a good thing. If I presume for myself, I presume for you also. But I do not presume. Thus have both Jesus Christ and his love-slave Paul represented God—as a Father perfect in love, grand in self-forgetfulness, supreme in righteousness, devoted to the lives he has uttered. I will not believe less of the Father than I can conceive of glory after the lines he has given me, after the radiation of his glory in the face of his Son. He is the express image of the Father, by which we, his imperfect images, are to read and understand him: imperfect, we have yet perfection enough to spell towards the perfect.

It comes to this then, after the grand theory of the apostle:—The world exists for our education; it is the nursery of God's children, served by troubled slaves, troubled because the children are themselves slaves—children, but not good children. Beyond its own will or knowledge, the whole creation works for the development of the children of God into the sons of God. When at last the children have arisen and gone to their Father; when they are clothed in the best robe, with a ring on their hands and shoes on their feet, shining out at length in their natural, their predestined sonship; then shall the mountains and the hills break forth before them into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid and the calf, and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. Then shall the fables of a golden age, which faith invented, and unbelief threw into the past, unfold their essential reality, and the tale of paradise prove itself a truth by becoming a fact. Then shall every ideal show itself a necessity, aspiration although satisfied put forth yet longer wings, and the hunger after righteousness know itself blessed. Then first shall we know what was in the Shepherd's mind when he said, 'I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.'

LIFE.

'I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.'—St. John x. 10.

In a word, He came to supply all our lack—from the root outward; for what is it we need but more life? What does the infant need but more life? What does the bosom of his mother give him but life in abundance? What does the old man need, whose limbs are weak and whose pulse is low, but more of the life which seems ebbing from him? Weary with feebleness, he calls upon death, but in reality it is life he wants. It is but the encroaching death in him that desires death. He longs for rest, but death cannot rest; death would be as much an end to rest as to weariness: even weakness cannot rest; it takes strength as well as weariness to rest. How different is the weariness of the strong man after labour unduly prolonged, from the weariness of the sick man who in the morning cries out, 'Would God it were evening!' and in the evening, 'Would God it were morning!' Low-sunk life imagines itself weary of life, but it is death, not life, it is weary of. Never a cry went out after the opposite of life from any soul that knew what life is. Why does the poor, worn, out-worn suicide seek death? Is it not in reality to escape from death?—from the death of homelessness and hunger and cold; the death of failure, disappointment, and distraction; the death of the exhaustion of passion; the death of madness—of a household he cannot rule; the death of crime and fear of discovery? He seeks the darkness because it seems a refuge from the death which possesses him. He is a creature possessed by death; what he calls his life is but a dream full of horrible phantasms.

'More life!' is the unconscious prayer of all creation, groaning and travailing for the redemption of its lord, the son who is not yet a son. Is not the dumb cry to be read in the faces of some of the animals, in the look of some of the flowers, and in many an aspect of what we call Nature?

All things are possible with God, but all things are not easy. It is easy for him to be, for there he has to do with his own perfect will: it is not easy for him to create—that is, after the grand fashion which alone will satisfy his glorious heart and will, the fashion in which he is now creating us. In the very nature of being—that is, God—it must be hard—and divine history shows how hard—to create that which shall be not himself, yet like himself. The problem is, so far to separate from himself that which must yet on him be ever and always and utterly dependent, that it shall have the existence of an individual, and be able to turn and regard him—choose him, and say, 'I will arise and go to my Father,' and so develop in itself the highest Divine of which it is capable—the will for the good against the evil—the will to be one with the life whence it has come, and in which it still is—the will to close the round of its procession in its return, so working the perfection of reunion—to shape in its own life the ring of eternity—to live immediately, consciously, and active—willingly from its source, from its own very life—to restore to the beginning the end that comes of that

beginning—to be the thing the maker thought of when he willed, ere he began to work its being.

I imagine the difficulty of doing this thing, of effecting this creation, this separation from himself such that will in the creature shall be possible—I imagine, I say, the difficulty of such creation so great, that for it God must begin inconceivably far back in the infinitesimal regions of beginnings—not to say before anything in the least resembling man, but eternal miles beyond the last farthest-pushed discovery in protoplasm—to set in motion that division from himself which in its grand result should be individuality, consciousness, choice, and conscious choice—choice at last pure, being the choice of the right, the true, the divinely harmonious. Hence the final end of the separation is not individuality; that is but a means to it; the final end is oneness—an impossibility without it. For there can be no unity, no delight of love, no harmony, no good in being, where there is but one. Two at least are needed for oneness; and the greater the number of individuals, the greater, the lovelier, the richer, the diviner is the possible unity.

God is life, and the will-source of life. In the outflowing of that life, I know him; and when I am told that he is love, I see that if he were not love he would not, could not create. I know nothing deeper in him than love, nor believe there is in him anything deeper than love—nay, that there can be anything deeper than love. The being of God is love, therefore creation. I imagine that from all eternity he has been creating. As he saw it was not good for man to be alone, so has he never been alone himself;—from all eternity the Father has had the Son, and the never-begun existence of that Son I imagine an easy outgoing of the Father's nature; while to make other beings—beings like us, I imagine the labour of a God, an eternal labour. Speaking after our poor human fashions of thought—the only fashions possible to us—I imagine that God has never been contented to be alone even with the Son of his love, the prime and perfect idea of humanity, but that he has from the first willed and laboured to give existence to other creatures who should be blessed with his blessedness—creatures whom he is now and always has been developing into likeness with that Son—a likeness for long to be distant and small, but a likeness to be for ever growing: perhaps never one of them yet, though unspeakably blessed, has had even an approximate idea of the blessedness in store for him.

Let no soul think that to say God undertook a hard labour in willing that many sons and daughters should be sharers of the divine nature, is to abate his glory! The greater the difficulty, the greater is the glory of him who does the thing he has undertaken—without shadow of compromise, with no half-success, but with a triumph of absolute satisfaction to innumerable radiant souls! He knew what it would cost!—not energy of will alone, or merely that utterance and separation from himself which is but the first of creation, though that may well itself be pain—but sore suffering such as we cannot imagine, and could only be God's, in the bringing out, call it birth or development, of the God—life in the individual

soul—a suffering still renewed, a labour thwarted ever by that soul itself, compelling him to take, still at the cost of suffering, the not absolutely best, only the best possible means left him by the resistance of his creature. Man finds it hard to get what he wants, because he does not want the best; God finds it hard to give, because he would give the best, and man will not take it. What Jesus did, was what the Father is always doing; the suffering he endured was that of the Father from the foundation of the world, reaching its climax in the person of his Son. God provides the sacrifice; the sacrifice is himself. He is always, and has ever been, sacrificing himself to and for his creatures. It lies in the very essence of his creation of them. The worst heresy, next to that of dividing religion and righteousness, is to divide the Father from the Son—in thought or feeling or action or intent; to represent the Son as doing that which the Father does not himself do. Jesus did nothing but what the Father did and does. If Jesus suffered for men, it was because his Father suffers for men; only he came close to men through his body and their senses, that he might bring their spirits close to his Father and their Father, so giving them life, and losing what could be lost of his own. He is God our Saviour: it is because God is our Saviour that Jesus is our Saviour. The God and Father of Jesus Christ could never possibly be satisfied with less than giving himself to his own! The unbeliever may easily imagine a better God than the common theology of the country offers him; but not the lovingest heart that ever beat can even reflect the length and breadth and depth and height of that love of God which shows itself in his Son—one, and of one mind, with himself. The whole history is a divine agony to give divine life to creatures. The outcome of that agony, the victory of that creative and again creative energy, will be radiant life, whereof joy unspeakable is the flower. Every child will look in the eyes of the Father, and the eyes of the Father will receive the child with an infinite embrace.

The life the Lord came to give us is a life exceeding that of the highest undivine man, by far more than the life of that man exceeds the life of the animal the least human. More and more of it is for each who will receive it, and to eternity. The Father has given to the Son to have life in himself; that life is our light. We know life only as light; it is the life in us that makes us see. All the growth of the Christian is the more and more life he is receiving. At first his religion may hardly be distinguishable from the mere prudent desire to save his soul; but at last he loses that very soul in the glory of love, and so saves it; self becomes but the cloud on which the white light of God divides into harmonies unspeakable.

'In the midst of life we are in death,' said one; it is more true that in the midst of death we are in life. Life is the only reality; what men call death is but a shadow—a word for that which cannot be—a negation, owing the very idea of itself to that which it would deny. But for life there could be no death. If God were not, there would not even be nothing. Not even nothingness preceded life. Nothingness owes its very idea to existence.

One form of the question between matter and spirit is, which was first, and caused the other—things or thoughts; whether things without thought caused thought, or thought

without things caused things. To those who cannot doubt that thought was first, causally preceding the earliest material show, it is easily plain that death can be the cure for nothing, that the cure for everything must be life—that the ills which come with existence, are from its imperfection, not of itself—that what we need is more of it. We who are, have nothing to do with death; our relations are alone with life. The thing that can mourn can mourn only from lack; it cannot mourn because of being, but because of not enough being. We are vessels of life, not yet full of the wine of life; where the wine does not reach, there the clay cracks, and aches, and is distressed. Who would therefore pour out the wine that is there, instead of filling to the brim with more wine! All the being must partake of essential being; life must be assisted, upheld, comforted, every part, with life. Life is the law, the food, the necessity of life. Life is everything. Many doubtless mistake the joy of life for life itself; and, longing after the joy, languish with a thirst at once poor and inextinguishable; but even that thirst points to the one spring. These love self, not life, and self is but the shadow of life. When it is taken for life itself, and set as the man's centre, it becomes a live death in the man, a devil he worships as his god; the worm of the death eternal he clasps to his bosom as his one joy!

The soul compact of harmonies has more life, a larger being, than the soul consumed of cares; the sage is a larger life than the clown; the poet is more alive than the man whose life flows out that money may come in; the man who loves his fellow is infinitely more alive than he whose endeavour is to exalt himself above him; the man who strives to be better, than he who longs for the praise of the many; but the man to whom God is all in all, who feels his life-roots hid with Christ in God, who knows himself the inheritor of all wealth and worlds and ages, yea, of power essential and in itself, that man has begun to be alive indeed.

Let us in all the troubles of life remember—that our one lack is life—that what we need is more life—more of the life-making presence in us making us more, and more largely, alive. When most oppressed, when most weary of life, as our unbelief would phrase it, let us bethink ourselves that it is in truth the inroad and presence of death we are weary of. When most inclined to sleep, let us rouse ourselves to live. Of all things let us avoid the false refuge of a weary collapse, a hopeless yielding to things as they are. It is the life in us that is discontented; we need more of what is discontented, not more of the cause of its discontent. Discontent, I repeat, is the life in us that has not enough of itself, is not enough to itself, so calls for more. He has the victory who, in the midst of pain and weakness, cries out, not for death, not for the repose of forgetfulness, but for strength to fight; for more power, more consciousness of being, more God in him; who, when sorest wounded, says with Sir Andrew Barton in the old ballad:—

Fight on my men, says Sir Andrew Barton,
I am hurt, but I am not slain;
I'll lay me down and bleed awhile,

And then I'll rise and fight again;

—and that with no silly notion of playing the hero—what have creatures like us to do with heroism who are not yet barely honest!—but because so to fight is the truth, and the only way.

If, in the extreme of our exhaustion, there should come to us, as to Elijah when he slept in the desert, an angel to rouse us, and show us the waiting bread and water, how would we carry ourselves? Would we, in faint unwillingness to rise and eat, answer, 'Lo I am weary unto death! The battle is gone from me! It is lost, or unworth gaining! The world is too much for me! Its forces will not heed me! They have worn me out! I have wrought no salvation even for my own, and never should work any, were I to live for ever! It is enough; let me now return whence I came; let me be gathered to my fathers and be at rest!'? I should be loth to think that, if the enemy, in recognizable shape, came roaring upon us, we would not, like the red-cross knight, stagger, heavy sword in nerveless arm, to meet him; but, in the feebleness of foiled effort, it wants yet more faith to rise and partake of the food that shall bring back more effort, more travail, more weariness. The true man trusts in a strength which is not his, and which he does not feel, does not even always desire; believes in a power that seems far from him, which is yet at the root of his fatigue itself and his need of rest—rest as far from death as is labour. To trust in the strength of God in our weakness; to say, 'I am weak: so let me be: God is strong;' to seek from him who is our life, as the natural, simple cure of all that is amiss with us, power to do, and be, and live, even when we are weary,—this is the victory that overcometh the world. To believe in God our strength in the face of all seeming denial, to believe in him out of the heart of weakness and unbelief, in spite of numbness and weariness and lethargy; to believe in the wide-awake real, through all the stupefying, enervating, distorting dream; to will to wake, when the very being seems athirst for a godless repose;—these are the broken steps up to the high fields where repose is but a form of strength, strength but a form of joy, joy but a form of love. 'I am weak,' says the true soul, 'but not so weak that I would not be strong; not so sleepy that I would not see the sun rise; not so lame but that I would walk! Thanks be to him who perfects strength in weakness, and gives to his beloved while they sleep!'

If we will but let our God and Father work his will with us, there can be no limit to his enlargement of our existence, to the flood of life with which he will overflow our consciousness. We have no conception of what life might be, of how vast the consciousness of which we could be made capable. Many can recall some moment in which life seemed richer and fuller than ever before; to some, such moments arrive mostly in dreams: shall soul, awake or asleep, infold a bliss greater than its Life, the living God, can seal, perpetuate, enlarge? Can the human twilight of a dream be capable of generating or holding a fuller life than the morning of divine activity? Surely God could at any moment give to a soul, by a word to that soul, by breathing afresh into the secret caves of its being, a sense of life before which

the most exultant ecstasy of earthly triumph would pale to ashes! If ever sunlit, sail-crowded sea, under blue heaven flecked with wind-chased white, filled your soul as with a new gift of life, think what sense of existence must be yours, if he whose thought has but fringed its garment with the outburst of such a show, take his abode with you, and while thinking the gladness of a God inside your being, let you know and feel that he is carrying you as a father in his bosom!

I have been speaking as if life and the consciousness of it were one; but the consciousness of life is not life; it is only the outcome of life. The real life is that which is of and by itself—is life because it wills itself—which is, in the active, not the passive sense: this can only be God. But in us there ought to be a life correspondent to the life that is God's; in us also must be the life that wills itself—a life in so far resembling the self-existent life and partaking of its image, that it has a share in its own being. There is an original act possible to the man, which must initiate the reality of his existence. He must live in and by willing to live. A tree lives; I hardly doubt it has some vague consciousness, known by but not to itself, only to the God who made it; I trust that life in its lowest forms is on the way to thought and blessedness, is in the process of that separation, so to speak, from God, in which consists the creation of living souls; but the life of these lower forms is not life in the high sense—in the sense in which the word is used in the Bible: true life knows and rules itself; the eternal life is life come awake. The life of the most exalted of the animals is not such whatever it may become, and however I may refuse to believe their fate and being fixed as we see them. But as little as any man or woman would be inclined to call the existence of the dog, looking strange lack out of his wistful eyes, an existence to be satisfied with—his life an end sufficient in itself, as little could I, looking on the human pleasure, the human refinement, the common human endeavour around me, consent to regard them as worthy the name of life. What in them is true dwells amidst an unchallenged corruption, demanding repentance and labour and prayer for its destruction. The condition of most men and women seems to me a life in death, an abode in unwhited sepulchres, a possession of withering forms by spirits that slumber, and babble in their dreams. That they do not feel it so, is nothing. The sow wallowing in the mire may rightly assert it her way of being clean, but theirs is not the life of the God-born. The day must come when they will hide their faces with such shame as the good man yet feels at the memory of the time when he lived like them. There is nothing for man worthy to be called life, but the life eternal—God's life, that is, after his degree shared by the man made to be eternal also. For he is in the image of God, intended to partake of the life of the most high, to be alive as he is alive. Of this life the outcome and the light is righteousness, love, grace, truth; but the life itself is a thing that will not be defined, even as God will not be defined: it is a power, the formless cause of form. It has no limits whereby to be defined. It shows itself to the soul that is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, but that soul cannot show it to another, save in the shining of its own light. The ignorant soul understands

by this life eternal only an endless elongation of consciousness; what God means by it is a being like his own, a being beyond the attack of decay or death, a being so essential that it has no relation whatever to nothingness; a something which is, and can never go to that which is not, for with that it never had to do, but came out of the heart of Life, the heart of God, the fountain of being; an existence partaking of the divine nature, and having nothing in common, any more than the Eternal himself, with what can pass or cease: God owes his being to no one, and his child has no lord but his Father.

This life, this eternal life, consists for man in absolute oneness with God and all divine modes of being, oneness with every phase of right and harmony. It consists in a love as deep as it is universal, as conscious as it is unspeakable; a love that can no more be reasoned about than life itself—a love whose presence is its all-sufficing proof and justification, whose absence is an annihilating defect: he who has it not cannot believe in it: how should death believe in life, though all the birds of God are singing jubilant over the empty tomb! The delight of such a being, the splendour of a consciousness rushing from the wide open doors of the fountain of existence, the ecstasy of the spiritual sense into which the surge of life essential, immortal, increate, flows in silent fulness from the heart of hearts—what may it, what must it not be, in the great day of God and the individual soul!

What then is our practical relation to the life original? What have we to do towards the attaining to the resurrection from the dead? If we did not make, could not have made ourselves, how can we, now we are made, do anything at the unknown roots of our being? What relation of conscious unity can be betwixt the self-existent God, and beings who live at the will of another, beings who could not refuse to be—cannot even cease to be, but must, at the will of that other, go on living, weary of what is not life, able to assert their relation to life only by refusing to be content with what is not life?

The self-existent God is that other by whose will we live; so the links of the unity must already exist, and can but require to be brought together. For the link in our being wherewith to close the circle of immortal oneness with the Father, we must of course search the deepest of man's nature: there only, in all assurance, can it be found. And there we do find it. For the will is the deepest, the strongest, the divinest thing in man; so, I presume, is it in God, for such we find it in Jesus Christ. Here, and here only, in the relation of the two wills, God's and his own, can a man come into vital contact—on the eternal idea, in no one-sided unity of completest dependence, but in willed harmony of dual oneness—with the All-in-all. When a man can and does entirely say, 'Not my will, but thine be done'—when he so wills the will of God as to do it, then is he one with God—one, as a true son with a true father. When a man wills that his being be conformed to the being of his origin, which is the life in his life, causing and bearing his life, therefore absolutely and only of its kind, one with it more and deeper than words or figures can say—to the life which is itself, only more of itself, and more than itself, causing itself—when the man thus accepts his own causing life, and

sets himself to live the will of that causing life, humbly eager after the privileges of his origin,—thus receiving God, he becomes, in the act, a partaker of the divine nature, a true son of the living God, and an heir of all he possesses: by the obedience of a son, he receives into himself the very life of the Father. Obedience is the joining of the links of the eternal round. Obedience is but the other side of the creative will. Will is God's will, obedience is man's will; the two make one. The root-life, knowing well the thousand troubles it would bring upon him, has created, and goes on creating other lives, that, though incapable of self-being, they may, by willed obedience, share in the bliss of his essential self-ordained being. If we do the will of God, eternal life is ours—no mere continuity of existence, for that in itself is worthless as hell, but a being that is one with the essential Life, and so within his reach to fill with the abundant and endless out-goings of his love. Our souls shall be vessels ever growing, and ever as they grow, filled with the more and more life proceeding from the Father and the Son, from God the ordaining, and God the obedient. What the delight of the being, what the abundance of the life he came that we might have, we can never know until we have it. But even now to the holy fancy it may sometimes seem too glorious to support—as if we must die of very life—of more being than we could bear—to awake to a yet higher life, and be filled with a wine which our souls were heretofore too weak to hold! To be for one moment aware of such pure simple love towards but one of my fellows as I trust I shall one day have towards each, must of itself bring a sense of life such as the utmost effort of my imagination can but feebly shadow now—a mighty glory of consciousness!—not to be always present, indeed, for my love, and not my glory in that love, is my life. There would be, even in that one love, in the simple purity of a single affection such as we were created to generate, and intended to cherish, towards all, an expansion of life inexpressible, unutterable. For we are made for love, not for self. Our neighbour is our refuge; self is our demon-foe. Every man is the image of God to every man, and in proportion as we love him, we shall know the sacred fact. The precious thing to human soul is, and one day shall be known to be, every human soul. And if it be so between man and man, how will it not be betwixt the man and his maker, between the child and his eternal Father, between the created and the creating Life? Must not the glory of existence be endlessly redoubled in the infinite love of the creature—for all love is infinite—to the infinite God, the great one life, than whom is no other—only shadows, lovely shadows of him!

Reader to whom my words seem those of inflation and foolish excitement, it can be nothing to thee to be told that I seem to myself to speak only the words of truth and soberness; but what if the cause why they seem other to thy mind be—not merely that thou art not whole, but that thy being nowise thirsts after harmony, that thou art not of the truth, that thou hast not yet begun to live? How should the reveller, issuing worn and wasted from the haunts where the violent seize joy by force to find her perish in their arms—how should such reveller, I say, break forth and sing with the sons of the morning, when the ocean of

light bursts from the fountain of the east? As little canst thou, with thy mind full of petty cares, or still more petty ambitions, understand the groaning and travailing of the creation. It may indeed be that thou art honestly desirous of saving thy own wretched soul, but as yet thou canst know but little of thy need of him who is the first and the last and the living one.

THE FEAR OF GOD.

'And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last and the Living one.'—Rev. i. 17, 18.

It is not alone the first beginnings of religion that are full of fear. So long as love is imperfect, there is room for torment. That love only which fills the heart—and nothing but love can fill any heart—is able to cast out fear, leaving no room for its presence. What we find in the beginnings of religion, will hold in varying degree, until the religion, that is the love, be perfected.

The thing that is unknown, yet known to be, will always be more or less formidable. When it is known as immeasurably greater than we, and as having claims and making demands upon us, the more vaguely these are apprehended, the more room is there for anxiety; and when the conscience is not clear, this anxiety may well mount to terror. According to the nature of the mind which occupies itself with the idea of the Supreme, whether regarded as maker or ruler, will be the kind and degree of the terror. To this terror need belong no exalted ideas of God; those fear him most who most imagine him like their own evil selves, only beyond them in power, easily able to work his arbitrary will with them. That they hold him but a little higher than themselves, tends nowise to unity with him: who so far apart as those on the same level of hate and distrust? Power without love, dependence where is no righteousness, wake a worship without devotion, a loathliness of servile flattery. Neither, where the notion of God is better, but the conscience is troubled, will his goodness do much to exclude apprehension. The same consciousness of evil and of offence which gave rise to the bloody sacrifice, is still at work in the minds of most who call themselves Christians. Naturally the first emotion of man towards the being he calls God, but of whom he knows so little, is fear.

Where it is possible that fear should exist, it is well it should exist, cause continual uneasiness, and be cast out by nothing less than love. In him who does not know God, and must be anything but satisfied with himself, fear towards God is as reasonable as it is natural, and serves powerfully towards the development of his true humanity. Neither the savage, nor the self-sufficient sage, is rightly human. It matters nothing whether we regard the one or the other as degenerate or as undeveloped—neither I say is human; the humanity is there, but has to be born in each, and for this birth everything natural must do its part; fear is natural, and has a part to perform nothing but itself could perform in the birth of the true humanity. Until love, which is the truth towards God, is able to cast out fear, it is well that fear should hold; it is a bond, however poor, between that which is and that which creates—a bond that must be broken, but a bond that can be broken only by the tightening of an infinitely closer bond. Verily, God must be terrible to those that are far from him; for they fear he will do, yea, he is doing with them what they do not, cannot desire, and can ill endure. Such as many men are, such as all without God would become, they must prefer a devil,

because of his supreme selfishness, to a God who will die for his creatures, and insists upon giving himself to them, insists upon their being unselfish and blessed like himself. That which is the power and worth of life they must be, or die; and the vague consciousness of this makes them afraid. They love their poor existence as it is; God loves it as it must be—and they fear him.

The false notions of men of low, undeveloped nature both with regard to what is good and what the Power requires of them, are such that they cannot but fear, and devotion is lost in the sacrifices of ingratiation: God takes them where they are, accepts whatever they honestly offer, and so helps them to outgrow themselves, preparing them to offer the true offering, and to know him whom they ignorantly worship. He will not abolish their fear except with the truth of his own being. Till they apprehend that, and in order that they may come to apprehend it, he receives their sacrifices of blood, the invention of their sore need, only influencing for the time the modes of them. He will destroy the lie that is not all a lie only by the truth which is all true. Although he loves them utterly, he does not tell them there is nothing in him to make them afraid. That would be to drive them from him for ever. While they are such as they are, there is much in him that cannot but affright them; they ought, they do well to fear him. It is, while they remain what they are, the only true relation between them. To remove that fear from their hearts, save by letting them know his love with its purifying fire, a love which for ages, it may be, they cannot know, would be to give them up utterly to the power of evil. Persuade men that fear is a vile thing, that it is an insult to God, that he will none of it—while yet they are in love with their own will, and slaves to every movement of passionate impulse, and what will the consequence be? That they will insult God as a discarded idol, a superstition, a falsehood, as a thing under whose evil influence they have too long groaned, a thing to be cast out and spit upon. After that how much will they learn of him? Nor would it be long ere the old fear would return—with this difference, perhaps, that instead of trembling before a live energy, they would tremble before powers which formerly they regarded as inanimate, and have now endowed with souls after the imagination of their fears. Then would spiritual chaos with all its monsters be come again. God being what he is, a God who loves righteousness; a God who, rather than do an unfair thing, would lay down his Godhead, and assert himself in ceasing to be; a God who, that his creature might not die of ignorance, died as much as a God could die, and that is divinely more than man can die, to give him himself; such a God, I say, may well look fearful from afar to the creature who recognizes in himself no imperative good; who fears only suffering, and has no aspiration—only wretched ambition! But in proportion as such a creature comes nearer, grows towards him in and for whose likeness he was begun; in proportion, that is, as the eternal right begins to disclose itself to him; in proportion as he becomes capable of the idea that his kind belongs to him as he could never belong to himself; approaches the capacity of seeing and understanding that his individuality can be

perfected only in the love of his neighbour, and that his being can find its end only in oneness with the source from which it came; in proportion, I do not say as he sees these things, but as he nears the possibility of seeing them, will his terror at the God of his life abate; though far indeed from surmising the bliss that awaits him, he is drawing more nigh to the goal of his nature, the central secret joy of sonship to a God who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, does nothing he would not permit in his creature, demands nothing of his creature he would not do himself.

The fire of God, which is his essential being, his love, his creative power, is a fire unlike its earthly symbol in this, that it is only at a distance it burns—that the farther from him, it burns the worse, and that when we turn and begin to approach him, the burning begins to change to comfort, which comfort will grow to such bliss that the heart at length cries out with a gladness no other gladness can reach, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee!' The glory of being, the essence of life and its joy, shining upon the corrupt and deathly, must needs, like the sun, consume the dead, and send corruption down to the dust; that which it burns in the soul is not of the soul, yea, is at utter variance with it; yet so close to the soul is the foul fungous growth sprung from and subsisting upon it, that the burning of it is felt through every spiritual nerve: when the evil parasites are consumed away, that is when the man yields his self and all that self's low world, and returns to his lord and God, then that which, before, he was aware of only as burning, he will feel as love, comfort, strength—an eternal, ever-growing life in him. For now he lives, and life cannot hurt life; it can only hurt death, which needs and ought to be destroyed. God is life essential, eternal, and death cannot live in his sight; for death is corruption, and has no existence in itself, living only in the decay of the things of life. If then any child of the father finds that he is afraid before him, that the thought of God is a discomfort to him, or even a terror, let him make haste—let him not linger to put on any garment, but rush at once in his nakedness, a true child, for shelter from his own evil and God's terror, into the salvation of the Father's arms, the home whence he was sent that he might learn that it was home. What father being evil would it not win to see the child with whom he was vexed running to his embrace? how much more will not the Father of our spirits, who seeks nothing but his children themselves, receive him with open arms!

Self, accepted as the law of self, is the one demon-enemy of life; God is the only Saviour from it, and from all that is not God, for God is life, and all that is not God is death. Life is the destruction of death, of all that kills, of all that is of death's kind.

When John saw the glory of the Son of Man, he fell at his feet as one dead. In what way John saw him, whether in what we vaguely call a vision, or in as human a way as when he leaned back on his bosom and looked up in his face, I do not now care to ask: it would take all glorious shapes of humanity to reveal Jesus, and he knew the right way to show himself to John. It seems to me that such words as were spoken can have come from the mouth of

no mere vision, can have been allowed to enter no merely tranced ear, that the mouth of the very Lord himself spoke them, and that none but the living present Jesus could have spoken or may be supposed to speak them; while plainly John received and felt them as a message he had to give again. There are also, strangely as the whole may affect us, various points in his description of the Lord's appearance which commend themselves even to our ignorance by their grandeur and fitness. Why then was John overcome with terror? We recall the fact that something akin to terror overwhelmed the minds of the three disciples who saw his glory on the mount; but since then John had leaned on the bosom of his Lord, had followed him to the judgment seat and had not denied his name, had borne witness to his resurrection and suffered for his sake—and was now 'in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus:' why, I say, was he, why should he be afraid? No glory even of God should breed terror; when a child of God is afraid, it is a sign that the word Father is not yet freely fashioned by the child's spiritual mouth. The glory can breed terror only in him who is capable of being terrified by it; while he is such it is well the terror should be bred and maintained, until the man seek refuge from it in the only place where it is not—in the bosom of the glory.

There is one point not distinguishable in the Greek: whether is meant, 'one like unto the Son of Man,' or, 'one like unto a son of Man:' the authorized version has the former, the revised prefers the latter. I incline to the former, and think that John saw him like the man he had known so well, and that it was the too much glory, dimming his vision, that made him unsure, not any perceived unlikeness mingling with the likeness. Nothing blinds so much as light, and their very glory might well render him unable to distinguish plainly the familiar features of The Son of Man.

But the appearance of The Son of Man was not intended to breed terror in the son of man to whom he came. Why then was John afraid? why did the servant of the Lord fall at his feet as one dead? Joy to us that he did, for the words that follow—surely no phantasmic outcome of uncertain vision or blinding terror! They bear best sign of their source: however given to his ears, they must be from the heart of our great Brother, the one Man, Christ Jesus, divinely human!

It was still and only the imperfection of the disciple, unfinished in faith, so unfinished in everything a man needs, that was the cause of his terror. This is surely implied in the words the Lord said to him when he fell! The thing that made John afraid, he speaks of as the thing that ought to have taken from him all fear. For the glory that he saw, the head and hair pouring from it such a radiance of light that they were white as white wool—snow-white, as his garments on mount Hermon; in the midst of the radiance his eyes like a flame of fire, and his countenance as the sun shineth in his strength; the darker glow of the feet, yet as of fine brass burning in a furnace—as if they, in memory of the twilight of his humiliation, touching the earth took a humbler glory than his head high in the empyrean of un-

disturbed perfection; the girdle under his breast, golden between the snow and the brass;—what were they all but the effulgence of his glory who was himself the effulgence of the Father's, the poor expression of the unutterable verity which was itself the reason why John ought not to be afraid?—'He laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one.'

Endless must be our terror, until we come heart to heart with the fire-core of the universe, the first and the last and the living one!

But oh, the joy to be told, by Power himself, the first and the last, the living one—told what we can indeed then see must be true, but which we are so slow to believe—that the cure for trembling is the presence of Power; that fear cannot stand before Strength; that the visible God is the destruction of death; that the one and only safety in the universe, is the perfect nearness of the Living One! God is being; death is nowhere! What a thing to be taught by the very mouth of him who knows! He told his servant Paul that strength is made perfect in weakness; here he instructs his servant John that the thing to be afraid of is weakness, not strength. All appearances of strength, such as might rightly move terror, are but false appearances; the true Strong is the One, even as the true Good is the One. The Living One has the power of life; the Evil One but the power of death—whose very nature is a self-necessity for being destroyed.

But the glory of the mildest show of the Living One is such, that even the dearest of his apostles, the best of the children of men, is cowed at the sight. He has not yet learned that glory itself is a part of his inheritance, yea is of the natural condition of his being; that there is nothing in the man made in the image of God alien from the most glorious of heavenly shows: he has not learned this yet, and falls as dead before it—when lo, the voice of him that was and is and is for evermore, telling him not to be afraid—for the very reason, the one only reason, that he is the first and the last, the living one! For what shall be the joy, the peace, the completion of him that lives, but closest contact with his Life?—a contact close as ere he issued from that Life, only in infinitely higher kind, inasmuch as it is now willed on both sides. He who has had a beginning, needs the indwelling power of that beginning to make his being complete—not merely complete to his consciousness, but complete in itself—justified, rounded, ended where it began—with an 'endless ending.' Then is it complete even as God's is complete, for it is one with the self-existent, blossoming in the air of that world wherein it is rooted, wherein it lives and grows. Far indeed from trembling because he on whose bosom he had leaned when the light of his love was all but shut in now stands with the glory of that love streaming forth, John Boanerges ought to have felt the more joyful and safe as the strength of the living one was more manifested. It was never because Jesus was clothed in the weakness of the flesh that he was fit to be trusted, but because he was strong with a strength able to take the weakness of the flesh for the garment wherein it could best work its work: that strength was now shining out with its own light, so lately pent

within the revealing veil. Had John been as close in spirit to the Son of Man as he had been in bodily presence, he would have indeed fallen at his feet, but not as one dead—as one too full of joy to stand before the life that was feeding his; he would have fallen, but not to lie there senseless with awe the most holy; he would have fallen to embrace and kiss the feet of him who had now a second time, as with a resurrection from above, arisen before him, in yet heavenlier plenitude of glory.

It is the man of evil, the man of self-seeking design, not he who would fain do right, not he who, even in his worst time, would at once submit to the word of the Master, who is reasonably afraid of power. When God is no longer the ruler of the world, and there is a stronger than he; when there is might inherent in evil, and making-energy in that whose nature is destruction; then will be the time to stand in dread of power. But even then the bad man would have no security against the chance of crossing some scheme of the lawless moment, where disintegration is the sole unity of plan, and being ground up and destroyed for some no-idea of the Power of darkness. And then would be the time for the good—no, not to tremble, but to resolve with the Lord of light to endure all, to let every billow of evil dash and break upon him, nor do the smallest ill, tell the whitest lie for God—knowing that any territory so gained could belong to no kingdom of heaven, could be but a province of the kingdom of darkness. If there were two powers, the one of evil, the other of good, as men have not unnaturally in ignorance imagined, his sense of duty would reveal the being born of the good power, while he born of the evil could have no choice but be evil. But Good only can create; and if Evil were ever so much the stronger, the duty of men would remain the same—to hold by the Living One, and defy Power to its worst—like Prometheus on his rock, defying Jove, and for ever dying—thus for ever foiling the Evil. For Evil can destroy only itself and its own; it could destroy no enemy—could at worst but cause a succession of deaths, from each of which the defiant soul would rise to loftier defiance, to more victorious endurance—until at length it laughed Evil in the face, and the demon-god shrunk withered before it. In those then who believe that good is the one power, and that evil exists only because for a time it subserves, cannot help subserving the good, what place can there be for fear? The strong and the good are one; and if our hope coincides with that of God, if it is rooted in his will, what should we do but rejoice in the effulgent glory of the First and the Last?

The First and the Last is the inclosing defence of the castle of our being; the Master is before and behind; he began, he will see that it be endless. He garrisons the place; he is the living, the live-making one.

The reason then for not fearing before God is, that he is all-glorious, all-perfect. Our being needs the all-glorious, all-perfect God. The children can do with nothing less than the Father; they need the infinite one. Beyond all wherein the poor intellect can descry order; beyond all that the rich imagination can devise; beyond all that hungriest heart could long,

fullest heart thank for—beyond all these, as the heavens are higher than the earth, rise the thought, the creation, the love of the God who is in Christ, his God and our God, his Father and our Father.

Ages before the birth of Jesus, while, or at least where yet even Moses and his law were unknown, the suffering heart of humanity saw and was persuaded that nowhere else lay its peace than with the first, the last, the living one:—

O that thou woudest hide me in the grave, ... and remember me! . . .

Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.

THE VOICE OF JOB.

'O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.'—Job xiv. 13-15.

The book of Job seems to me the most daring of poems: from a position of the most vantageless realism, it assaults the very citadel of the ideal! Its hero is a man seated among the ashes, covered with loathsome boils from head to foot, scraping himself with a potsherd. Sore in body, sore in mind, sore in heart, sore in spirit, he is the instance—type of humanity in the depths of its misery—all the waves and billows of a world of adverse circumstance rolling free over its head. I would not be supposed to use the word humanity either in the abstract, or of the mass concrete; I mean the humanity of the individual endlessly repeated: Job, I say, is the human being—a centre to the sickening assaults of pain, the ghastly invasions of fear: these, one time or another, I presume, threaten to overwhelm every man, reveal him to himself as enslaved to the external, and stir him up to find some way out into the infinite, where alone he can rejoice in the liberty that belongs to his nature. Seated in the heart of a leaden despair, Job cries aloud to the Might unseen, scarce known, which yet he regards as the God of his life. But no more that of a slave is his cry, than the defiance of Prometheus hurled at Jupiter from his rock. He is more overwhelmed than the Titan, for he is in infinite perplexity as well as pain; but no more than in that of Prometheus is there a trace of the cowardly in his cry. Before the Judge he asserts his innocence, and will not grovel—knowing indeed that to bear himself so would be to insult the holy. He feels he has not deserved such suffering, and will neither tell nor listen to lies for God.

Prometheus is more stonily patient than Job. Job is nothing of a Stoic, but bemoans himself like a child—a brave child who seems to himself to suffer wrong, and recoils with horror-struck bewilderment from the unreason of the thing. Prometheus has to do with a tyrant whom he despises, before whom therefore he endures with unbewailing unsubmission, upheld by the consciousness that he is fighting the battle of humanity against an all but all-powerful Selfishness: endurance is the only availing weapon against him, and he will endure to the ever-delayed end! Job, on the other hand, is the more troubled because it is He who is at the head and the heart, who is the beginning and the end of things, that has laid his hand upon him with such a heavy torture that he takes his flesh in his teeth for pain. He cannot, will not believe him a tyrant; but, while he pleads against his dealing with himself, loves him, and looks to him as the source of life, the power and gladness of being. He dares not think God unjust, but not therefore can he allow that he has done anything to merit the treatment he is receiving at his hands. Hence is he of necessity in profoundest perplexity, for how can the two things be reconciled? The thought has not yet come to him that that

which it would be unfair to lay upon him as punishment, may yet be laid upon him as favour—by a love supreme which would give him blessing beyond all possible prayer—blessing he would not dare to ask if he saw the means necessary to its giving, but blessing for which, once known and understood, he would be willing to endure yet again all that he had undergone. Therefore is he so sorely divided in himself. While he must not think of God as having mistaken him, the discrepancy that looks like mistake forces itself upon him through every channel of thought and feeling. He had nowise relaxed his endeavour after a godly life, yet is the hand of the God he had acknowledged in all his ways uplifted against him, as rarely against any transgressor!—nor against him alone, for his sons and daughters have been swept away like a generation of vipers! The possessions, which made him the greatest of all the men of the east, have been taken from him by fire and wind and the hand of the enemy! He is poor as the poorest, diseased as the vilest, bereft of the children which were his pride and his strength! The worst of all with which fear could have dismayed him is come upon him; and worse now than all, death is denied him! His prayer that, as he came naked from the womb, so he may return naked and sore to the bosom of the earth, is not heard; he is left to linger in self-loathing, to encounter at every turn of agonized thought the awful suggestion that God has cast him off! He does not deny that there is evil in him; for—'Dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one,' he pleads, 'and bringest me into judgment with thee?' but he does deny that he has been a wicked man, a doer of the thing he knew to be evil: he does deny that there is any guile in him. And who, because he knows and laments the guile in himself, will dare deny that there was once a Nathanael in the world? Had Job been Calvinist or Lutheran, the book of Job would have been very different. His perplexity would then have been—how God being just, could require of a man more than he could do, and punish him as if his sin were that of a perfect being who chose to do the evil of which he knew all the enormity. For me, I will call no one Master but Christ—and from him I learn that his quarrel with us is that we will not do what we know, will not come to him that we may have life. How endlessly more powerful with men would be expostulation grounded, not on what they have done, but on what they will not do!

Job's child-like judgment of God had never been vitiated and perverted, to the dishonouring of the great Father, by any taint of such low theories as, alas! we must call the popular: explanations of God's ways by such as did not understand Him, they are acceptable to such as do not care to know him, such as are content to stand afar off and stare at the cloud whence issue the thunders and the voices; but a burden threatening to sink them to Tophet, a burden grievous to be borne, to such as would arise and go to the Father. The contradiction between Job's idea of the justice of God and the things which had befallen him, is constantly haunting him; it has a sting in it far worse than all the other misery with which he is tormented; but it is not fixed in the hopelessness of hell by an accepted explanation more frightful than itself. Let the world-sphinx put as many riddles as she will, she can devour no man

while he waits an answer from the world-redeemer. Job refused the explanation of his friends because he knew it false; to have accepted such as would by many in the present day be given him, would have been to be devoured at once of the monster. He simply holds on to the skirt of God's garment—besieges his door—keeps putting his question again and again, ever haunting the one source of true answer and reconciliation. No answer will do for him but the answer that God only can give; for who but God can justify God's ways to his creature?

From a soul whose very consciousness is contradiction, we must not look for logic; misery is rarely logical; it is itself a discord; yet is it nothing less than natural that, feeling as if God wronged him, Job should yet be ever yearning after a sight of God, straining into his presence, longing to stand face to face with him. He would confront the One. He is convinced, or at least cherishes as his one hope the idea, that, if he could but get God to listen to him, if he might but lay his case clear before him, God would not fail to see how the thing was, and would explain the matter to him—would certainly give him peace; the man in the ashes would know that the foundations of the world yet stand sure; that God has not closed his eyes, or—horror of all horrors—ceased to be just! Therefore would he order his words before him, and hear what God had to say; surely the Just would set the mind of his justice-loving creature at rest!

His friends, good men, religious men, but of the pharisaic type—that is, men who would pay their court to God, instead of coming into his presence as children; men with traditional theories which have served their poor turn, satisfied their feeble intellectual demands, they think others therefore must accept or perish; men anxious to appease God rather than trust in him; men who would rather receive salvation from God, than God their salvation—these his friends would persuade Job to the confession that he was a hypocrite, insisting that such things could not have come upon him but because of wickedness, and as they knew of none open, it must be for some secret vileness. They grow angry with him when he refuses to be persuaded against his knowledge of himself. They insist on his hypocrisy, he on his righteousness. Nor may we forget that herein lies not any overweening on the part of Job, for the poem prepares us for the right understanding of the man by telling us in the prologue, that God said thus to the accuser of men: 'Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?' God gives Job into Satan's hand with confidence in the result; and at the end of the trial approves of what Job has said concerning himself. But the very appearance of God is enough to make Job turn against himself: his part was to have trusted God altogether, in spite of every appearance, in spite of every reality! He will justify himself no more. He sees that though God has not been punishing him for his sins, yet is he far from what he ought to be, and must become: 'Behold,' he says, 'I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.'

But let us look a little closer at Job's way of thinking and speaking about God, and his manner of addressing him—so different from the pharisaic in all ages, in none more than in our own.

Waxing indignant at the idea that his nature required such treatment—'Am I a sea or a whale,' he cries out, 'that thou settest a watch over me?' Thou knowest that I am not wicked. 'Thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet!'—that the way I have gone may be known by my footprints! To his friends he cries: 'Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him?' Do you not know that I am the man I say? 'Will ye accept His person?'—siding with Him against me? 'Will ye contend for God?'—be special pleaders for him, his partisains? 'Is it good that He should search you out? or as one man mocketh another, do ye so mock Him?'—saying what you do not think? 'He will surely reprove you, if ye do secretly accept persons!'—even the person of God himself!

Such words are pleasing in the ear of the father of spirits. He is not a God to accept the flattery which declares him above obligation to his creatures; a God to demand of them a righteousness different from his own; a God to deal ungenerously with his poverty-stricken children; a God to make severest demands upon his little ones! Job is confident of receiving justice. There is a strange but most natural conflict of feeling in him. His faith is in truth profound, yet is he always complaining. It is but the form his faith takes in his trouble. Even while he declares the hardness and unfitness of the usage he is receiving, he yet seems assured that, to get things set right, all he needs is admission to the presence of God—an interview with the Most High. To be heard must be to have justice. He uses language which, used by any living man, would horrify the religious of the present day, in proportion to the lack of truth in them, just as it horrified his three friends, the honest pharisees of the time, whose religion was 'doctrine' and rebuke. God speaks not a word of rebuke to Job for the freedom of his speech:—he has always been seeking such as Job to worship him. It is those who know only and respect the outsides of religion, such as never speak or think of God but as the Almighty or Providence, who will say of the man who would go close up to God, and speak to him out of the deepest in the nature he has made, 'he is irreverent.' To utter the name of God in the drama—highest of human arts, is with such men blasphemy. They pay court to God, not love him; they treat him as one far away, not as the one whose bosom is the only home. They accept God's person. 'Shall not his excellency'—another thing quite than that you admire—'make you afraid? Shall not his dread'—another thing quite than that to which you show your pagan respect—'fall upon you?'

In the desolation of this man, the truth of God seems to him, yet more plainly than hitherto, the one thing that holds together the world which by the word of his mouth came first into being. If God be not accessible, nothing but despair and hell are left the man so lately the greatest in the east. Like a child escaping from the dogs of the street, he flings the door to the wall, and rushes, nor looks behind him, to seek the presence of the living one.

Bearing with him the burden of his death, he cries, 'Look what thou hast laid upon me! Shall mortal man, the helpless creature thou hast made, bear cross like this?' He would cast his load at the feet of his maker!—God is the God of comfort, known of man as the refuge, the life-giver, or not known at all. But alas! he cannot come to him! Nowhere can he see his face! He has hid himself from him! 'Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No! but he would put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: but he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.'

He cannot find him! Yet is he in his presence all the time, and his words enter into the ear of God his Saviour.

The grandeur of the poem is that Job pleads his cause with God against all the remonstrance of religious authority, recognizing no one but God, and justified therein. And the grandest of all is this, that he implies, if he does not actually say, that God owes something to his creature. This is the beginning of the greatest discovery of all—that God owes himself to the creature he has made in his image, for so he has made him incapable of living without him. This, his creatures' highest claim upon him, is his divinest gift to them. For the fulfilling of this their claim he has sent his son, that he may himself, the father of him and of us, follow into our hearts. Perhaps the worst thing in a theology constructed out of man's dull possible, and not out of the being and deeds and words of Jesus Christ, is the impression it conveys throughout that God acknowledges no such obligation. Are not we the clay, and he the potter? how can the clay claim from the potter? We are the clay, it is true, but his clay, but spiritual clay, live clay, with needs and desires—and rights; we are clay, but clay worth the Son of God's dying for, that it might learn to consent to be shaped unto honour. We can have no merits—a merit is a thing impossible; but God has given us rights. Out of him we have nothing; but, created by him, come forth from him, we have even rights towards him—ah, never, never against him! his whole desire and labour is to make us capable of claiming, and induce us to claim of him the things whose rights he bestowed in creating us. No claim had we to be created: that involves an absurdity; but, being made, we have claims on him who made us: our needs are our claims. A man who will not provide for the hunger of his child, is condemned by the whole world.

'Ah, but,' says the partisan of God, 'the Almighty stands in a relation very different from that of an earthly father: there is no parallel.' I grant it: there is no parallel. The man did not create the child, he only yielded to an impulse created in himself: God is infinitely more

bound to provide for his child than any man is to provide for his. The relation is infinitely, divinely closer. It is God to whom every hunger, every aspiration, every desire, every longing of our nature is to be referred; he made all our needs—made us the creatures of a thousand necessities—and have we no claim on him? Nay, we have claims innumerable, infinite; and his one great claim on us is that we should claim our claims of him.

It is terrible to represent God as unrelated to us in the way of appeal to his righteousness. How should he be righteous without owing us anything? How would there be any right for the judge of all the earth to do if he owed nothing? Verily he owes us nothing that he does not pay like a God; but it is of the devil to imagine imperfection and disgrace in obligation. So far is God from thinking so that in every act of his being he lays himself under obligation to his creatures. Oh, the grandeur of his goodness, and righteousness, and fearless unselfishness! When doubt and dread invade, and the voice of love in the soul is dumb, what can please the father of men better than to hear his child cry to him from whom he came, 'Here I am, O God! Thou hast made me: give me that which thou hast made me needing.' The child's necessity, his weakness, his helplessness, are the strongest of all his claims. If I am a whale, I can claim a sea; if I am a sea, I claim room to roll, and break in waves after my kind; if I am a lion, I seek my meat from God; am I a child, this, beyond all other claims, I claim—that, if any of my needs are denied me, it shall be by the love of a father, who will let me see his face, and allow me to plead my cause before him. And this must be just what God desires! What would he have, but that his children should claim their father? To what end are all his dealings with them, all his sufferings with and for and in them, but that they should claim their birthright? Is not their birthright what he made them for, made in them when he made them? Is it not what he has been putting forth his energy to give them ever since first he began them to be—the divine nature, God himself? The child has, and must have, a claim on the father, a claim which it is the joy of the father's heart to acknowledge. A created need is a created claim. God is the origin of both need and supply, the father of our necessities, the abundant giver of the good things. Right gloriously he meets the claims of his child! The story of Jesus is the heart of his answer, not primarily to the prayers, but to the divine necessities of the children he has sent out into his universe.

Away with the thought that God could have been a perfect, an adorable creator, doing anything less than he has done for his children! that any other kind of being than Jesus Christ could have been worthy of all-glorifying worship! that his nature demanded less of him than he has done! that his nature is not absolute love, absolute self-devotion—could have been without these highest splendours!

In the light of this truth, let us then look at the words at the head of this sermon: 'Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave!' Job appeals to his creator, whom his sufferings compel him to regard as displeased with him, though he knows not why. We know he was not displeased but Job had not read the preface to his own story. He prays him to hide him,

and forget him for a time, that the desire of the maker to look again upon the creature he had made, to see once more the work of his hands, may awake within him; that silence and absence and loss may speak for the buried one, and make the heart of the parent remember and long after the face of the child; then 'thou shalt call and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands;' then will he rise in joy, to plead with confidence the cause of his righteousness. For God is nigher to the man than is anything God has made: what can be closer than the making and the made? that which is, and that which is because the other is? that which wills, and that which answers, owing to the will, the heart, the desire of the other, its power to answer? What other relation imaginable could give claims to compare with those arising from such a relation? God must love his creature that looks up to him with hungry eyes—hungry for life, for acknowledgment, for justice, for the possibilities of living that life which the making life has made him alive for the sake of living. The whole existence of a creature is a unit, an entirety of claim upon his creator:—just therefore, let him do with me as he will—even to seating me in the ashes, and seeing me scrape myself with a potsherd!—not the less but ever the more will I bring forward my claim! assert it—insist on it—assail with it the ear and the heart of the father. Is it not the sweetest music ear of maker can hear?—except the word of perfect son, 'Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!' We, imperfect sons, shall learn to say the same words too: that we may grow capable and say them, and so enter into our birthright, yea, become partakers of the divine nature in its divinest element, that Son came to us—died for the slaying of our selfishness, the destruction of our mean hollow pride, the waking of our childhood. We are his father's debtors for our needs, our rights, our claims, and he will have us pay the uttermost farthing. Yea, so true is the Father, he will even compel us, through misery if needful, to put in our claims, for he knows we have eternal need of these things: without the essential rights of his being, who can live?

I protest, therefore, against all such teaching as, originating in and fostered by the faithlessness of the human heart, gives the impression that the exceeding goodness of God towards man is not the natural and necessary outcome of his being. The root of every heresy popular in the church draws its nourishment merely and only from the soil of unbelief. The idea that God would be God all the same, as glorious as he needed to be, had he not taken upon himself the divine toil of bringing home his wandered children, had he done nothing to seek and save the lost, is false as hell. Lying for God could go no farther. As if the idea of God admitted of his being less than he is, less than perfect, less than all-in-all, less than Jesus Christ! less than Love absolute, less than entire unselfishness! As if the God revealed to us in the New Testament were not his own perfect necessity of loving-kindness, but one who has made himself better than, by his own nature, by his own love, by the laws which he willed the laws of his existence, he needed to be! They would have it that, being unbound, he deserves the greater homage! So it might be, if he were not our father. But to think of the

living God not as our father, but as one who has condescended greatly, being nowise, in his own willed grandeur of righteous nature, bound to do as he has done, is killing to all but a slavish devotion. It is to think of him as nothing like the God we see in Jesus Christ.

It will be answered that we have fallen, and God is thereby freed from any obligation, if any ever were. It is but another lie. No amount of wrong-doing in a child can ever free a parent from the divine necessity of doing all he can to deliver his child; the bond between them cannot be broken. It is the vulgar, slavish, worldly idea of freedom, that it consists in being bound to nothing. Not such is God's idea of liberty! To speak as a man—the more of vital obligation he lays on himself, the more children he creates, with the more claims upon him, the freer is he as creator and giver of life, which is the essence of his Godhead: to make scope for his essence is to be free. Our Lord teaches us that the truth, known by obedience to him, will make us free: our freedom lies in living the truth of our relations to God and man. For a man to be alone in the universe would be to be a slave to unspeakable longings and lonelinesses. And again to speak after the manner of men: God could not be satisfied with himself without doing all that a God and Father could do for the creatures he had made—that is, without doing just what he has done, what he is doing, what he will do, to deliver his sons and daughters, and bring them home with rejoicing. To answer the cry of the human heart, 'Would that I could see him! would that I might come before him, and look upon him face to face!' he sent his son, the express image of his person. And again, that we might not be limited in our understanding of God by the constant presence to our weak and dullable spiritual sense of any embodiment whatever, he took him away. Having seen him, in his absence we understand him better. That we might know him he came; that we might go to him he went. If we dare, like Job, to plead with him in any of the heart-eating troubles that arise from the impossibility of loving such misrepresentation of him as is held out to us to love by our would-be teachers; if we think and speak out before him that which seems to us to be right, will he not be heartily pleased with his children's love of righteousness—with the truth that will not part him and his righteousness? Verily he will not plead against us with his great power, but will put strength in us, and where we are wrong will instruct us. For the heart that wants to do and think aright, the heart that seeks to worship him as no tyrant, but as the perfectly, absolutely righteous God, is the delight of the Father. To the heart that will not call that righteousness which it feels to be unjust, but clings to the skirt of his garment, and lifts pleading eyes to his countenance—to that heart he will lay open the riches of his being—riches which it has not entered that heart to conceive. 'O Lord, they tell me I have so offended against thy law that, as I am, thou canst not look upon me, but threatenest me with eternal banishment from thy presence. But if thou look not upon me, how can I ever be other than I am? Lord, remember I was born in sin: how then can I see sin as thou seest it? Remember, Lord, that I have never known myself clean: how can I cleanse myself? Thou must needs take me as I am and cleanse me. Is it not impossible that

I should behold the final goodness of good, the final evilness of evil? how then can I deserve eternal torment? Had I known good and evil, seeing them as thou seest them, then chosen the evil, and turned away from the good, I know not what I should not deserve; but thou knowest it has ever been something good in the evil that has enticed my selfish heart—nor mine only, but that of all my kind. Thou requirest of us to forgive: surely thou forgivest freely! Bound thou mayest be to destroy evil, but art thou bound to keep the sinner alive that thou mayest punish him, even if it make him no better? Sin cannot be deep as life, for thou art the life; and sorrow and pain go deeper than sin, for they reach to the divine in us: thou canst suffer, though thou wilt not sin. To see men suffer might make us shun evil, but it never could make us hate it. We might see thereby that thou hatest sin, but we never could see that thou lovest the sinner. Chastise us, we pray thee, in loving kindness, and we shall not faint. We have done much that is evil, yea, evil is very deep in us, but we are not all evil, for we love righteousness; and art not thou thyself, in thy Son, the sacrifice for our sins, the atonement of our breach? Thou hast made us subject to vanity, but hast thyself taken thy godlike share of the consequences. Could we ever have come to know good as thou knowest it, save by passing through the sea of sin and the fire of cleansing? They tell me I must say for Christ's sake, or thou wilt not pardon: it takes the very heart out of my poor love to hear that thou wilt not pardon me except because Christ has loved me; but I give thee thanks that nowhere in the record of thy gospel, does one of thy servants say any such word. In spite of all our fears and grovelling, our weakness, and our wrongs, thou wilt be to us what thou art—such a perfect Father as no most loving child-heart on earth could invent the thought of! Thou wilt take our sins on thyself, giving us thy life to live withal. Thou bearest our griefs and carriest our sorrows; and surely thou wilt one day enable us to pay every debt we owe to each other! Thou wilt be to us a right generous, abundant father! Then truly our hearts shall be jubilant, because thou art what thou art—infinitely beyond all we could imagine. Thou wilt humble and raise us up. Thou hast given thyself to us that, having thee, we may be eternally alive with thy life. We run within the circle of what men call thy wrath, and find ourselves clasped in the zone of thy love!'

But be it well understood that when I say rights, I do not mean merits—of any sort. We can deserve from him nothing at all, in the sense of any right proceeding from ourselves. All our rights are such as the bounty of love inconceivable has glorified our being with—bestowed for the one only purpose of giving the satisfaction, the fulfilment of the same—rights so deep, so high, so delicate, that their satisfaction cannot be given until we desire it—yea long for it with our deepest desire. The giver of them came to men, lived with men, and died by the hands of men, that they might possess these rights abundantly: more not God could do to fulfil his part—save indeed what he is doing still every hour, every moment, for every individual. Our rights are rights with God himself at the heart of them. He could recall them if he pleased, but only by recalling us, by making us cease. While we

exist, by the being that is ours, they are ours. If he could not fulfil our rights to us—because we would not have them, that is—if he could not make us such as to care for these rights which he has given us out of the very depth of his creative being, I think he would have to uncreate us. But as to deserving, that is absurd: he had to die in the endeavour to make us listen and receive. 'When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.' Duty is a thing prepaid: it can never have desert. There is no claim on God that springs from us: all is from him.

But, lest it should be possible that any unchildlike soul might, in arrogance and ignorance, think to stand upon his rights against God, and demand of him this or that after the will of the flesh, I will lay before such a possible one some of the things to which he has a right, yea, perhaps has first of all a right to, from the God of his life, because of the beginning he has given him—because of the divine germ that is in him. He has a claim on God, then, a divine claim, for any pain, want, disappointment, or misery, that would help to show him to himself as the fool he is; he has a claim to be punished to the last scorpion of the whip, to be spared not one pang that may urge him towards repentance; yea, he has a claim to be sent out into the outer darkness, whether what we call hell, or something speechlessly worse, if nothing less will do. He has a claim to be compelled to repent; to be hedged in on every side; to have one after another of the strong, sharp-toothed sheep-dogs of the great shepherd sent after him, to thwart him in any desire, foil him in any plan, frustrate him of any hope, until he come to see at length that nothing will ease his pain, nothing make life a thing worth having, but the presence of the living God within him; that nothing is good but the will of God; nothing noble enough for the desire of the heart of man but oneness with the eternal. For this God must make him yield his very being, that He may enter in and dwell with him.

That the man would enforce none of these claims, is nothing; for it is not a man who owes them to him, but the eternal God, who by his own will of right towards the creature he has made, is bound to discharge them. God has to answer to himself for his idea; he has to do with the need of the nature he made, not with the self-born choice of the self-ruined man. His candle yet burns dim in the man's soul; that candle must shine as the sun. For what is the all-pervading dissatisfaction of his wretched being but an unrecognized hunger after the righteousness of his father. The soul God made is thus hungering, though the selfish, usurping self, which is its consciousness, is hungering only after low and selfish things, ever trying, but in vain, to fill its mean, narrow content, with husks too poor for its poverty-stricken desires. For even that most degraded chamber of the soul which is the temple of the deified Self, cannot be filled with less than God; even the usurping Self must be miserable until it cease to look at itself in the mirror of Satan, and open the door of its innermost closet to the God who means to dwell there, and make peace.

He that has looked on the face of God in Jesus Christ, whose heart overflows, if ever so little, with answering love, sees God standing with full hands to give the abundance for which he created his children, and those children hanging back, refusing to take, doubting the God-heart which knows itself absolute in truth and love.

It is not at first easy to see wherein God gives Job any answer; I cannot find that he offers him the least explanation of why he has so afflicted him. He justifies him in his words; he says Job has spoken what is right concerning him, and his friends have not; and he calls up before him, one after another, the works of his hands. The answer, like some of our Lord's answers if not all of them, seems addressed to Job himself, not to his intellect; to the revealing, God-like imagination in the man, and to no logical faculty whetever. It consists in a setting forth of the power of God, as seen in his handywork, and wondered at by the men of the time; and all that is said concerning them has to do with their show of themselves to the eyes of men. In what belongs to the deeper meanings of nature and her mediation between us and God, the appearances of nature are the truths of nature, far deeper than any scientific discoveries in and concerning them. The show of things is that for which God cares most, for their show is the face of far deeper things than they; we see in them, in a distant way, as in a glass darkly, the face of the unseen. It is through their show, not through their analysis, that we enter into their deepest truths. What they say to the childlike soul is the truest thing to be gathered of them. To know a primrose is a higher thing than to know all the botany of it—just as to know Christ is an infinitely higher thing than to know all theology, all that is said about his person, or babbled about his work. The body of man does not exist for the sake of its hidden secrets; its hidden secrets exist for the sake of its outside—for the face and the form in which dwells revelation: its outside is the deepest of it. So Nature as well exists primarily for her face, her look, her appeals to the heart and the imagination, her simple service to human need, and not for the secrets to be discovered in her and turned to man's farther use. What in the name of God is our knowledge of the elements of the atmosphere to our knowledge of the elements of Nature? What are its oxygen, its hydrogen, its nitrogen, its carbonic acid, its ozone, and all the possible rest, to the blowing of the wind on our faces? What is the analysis of water to the babble of a running stream? What is any knowledge of things to the heart, beside its child-play with the Eternal! And by an infinite decomposition we should know nothing more of what a thing really is, for, the moment we decompose it, it ceases to be, and all its meaning is vanished. Infinitely more than astronomy even, which destroys nothing, can do for us, is done by the mere aspect and changes of the vault over our heads. Think for a moment what would be our idea of greatness, of God, of infinitude, of aspiration, if, instead of a blue, far withdrawn, light-spangled firmament, we were born and reared under a flat white ceiling! I would not be supposed to depreciate the labours of science, but I say its discoveries are unspeakably less precious than the merest gifts of Nature, those which, from morning to night, we take unthinking from her hands. One day, I trust,

we shall be able to enter into their secrets from within them—by natural contact between our heart and theirs. When we are one with God we may well understand in an hour things that no man of science, prosecuting his investigations from the surface with all the aids that keenest human intellect can supply, would reach in the longest lifetime. Whether such power will ever come to any man in this world, or can come only in some state of existence beyond it, matters nothing to me: the question does not interest me; life is one, and things will be then what they are now; for God is one and the same there and here; and I shall be the same there I am here, however larger the life with which it may please the Father of my being to endow me.

The argument implied, not expressed, in the poem, seems to be this—that Job, seeing God so far before him in power, and his works so far beyond his understanding that they filled him with wonder and admiration—the vast might of the creation, the times and the seasons, the marvels of the heavens, the springs of the sea, and the gates of death; the animals, their generations and providing, their beauties and instincts; the strange and awful beasts excelling the rest, behemoth on the land, leviathan in the sea, creatures, perhaps, now vanished from the living world;—that Job, beholding these things, ought to have reasoned that he who could work so grandly beyond his understanding, must certainly use wisdom in things that touched him nearer, though they came no nearer his understanding: 'shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it.' 'Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me that thou mayest be righteous?' In this world power is no proof of righteousness; but was it likely that he who could create should be unrighteous? Did not all he made move the delight of the beholding man? Did such things foreshadow injustice towards the creature he had made in his image? If Job could not search his understanding in these things, why should he conclude his own case wrapt in the gloom of injustice? Did he understand his own being, history, and destiny? Should not God's ways in these also be beyond his understanding? Might he not trust him to do him justice? In such high affairs as the rights of a live soul, might not matters be involved too high for Job? The maker of Job was so much greater than Job, that his ways with him might well be beyond his comprehension! God's thoughts were higher than his thoughts, as the heavens were higher than the earth!

The true child, the righteous man, will trust absolutely, against all appearances, the God who has created in him the love of righteousness.

God does not, I say, tell Job why he had afflicted him: he rouses his child-heart to trust. All the rest of Job's life on earth, I imagine, his slowly vanishing perplexities would yield him ever fresh meditations concerning God and his ways, new opportunities of trusting him, light upon many things concerning which he had not as yet begun to doubt, added means of growing in all directions into the knowledge of God. His perplexities would thus prove of divinest gift. Everything, in truth, which we cannot understand, is a closed book

of larger knowledge and blessedness, whose clasps the blessed perplexity urges us to open. There is, there can be, nothing which is not in itself a righteous intelligibility—whether an intelligibility for us, matters nothing. The awful thing would be, that anything should be in its nature unintelligible: that would be the same as no God. That God knows is enough for me; I shall know, if I can know. It would be death to think God did not know; it would be as much as to conclude there was no God to know.

How much more than Job are we bound, who know him in his Son as Love, to trust God in all the troubling questions that force themselves upon us concerning the motions and results of things! With all those about the lower animals, with all those about such souls as seem never to wake from, or seem again to fall into the sleep of death, we will trust him.

In the confusion of Job's thoughts—how could they be other than confused, in the presence of the awful contradiction of two such facts staring each other in the face, that God was just, yet punishing a righteous man as if he were wicked?—while he was not yet able to generate, or to receive the thought, that approving love itself might be inflicting or allowing the torture—that such suffering as his was granted only to a righteous man, that he might be made perfect—I can well imagine that at times, as the one moment he doubted God's righteousness, and the next cried aloud, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' there must in the chaos have mingled some element of doubt as to the existence of God. Let not such doubt be supposed a yet further stage in unbelief. To deny the existence of God may, paradoxical as the statement will at first seem to some, involve less unbelief than the smallest yielding to doubt of his goodness. I say yielding; for a man may be haunted with doubts, and only grow thereby in faith. Doubts are the messengers of the Living One to rouse the honest. They are the first knock at our door of things that are not yet, but have to be, understood; and theirs in general is the inhospitable reception of angels that do not come in their own likeness. Doubt must precede every deeper assurance; for uncertainties are what we first see when we look into a region hitherto unknown, unexplored, unannexed. In all Job's begging and longing to see God, then, may well be supposed to mingle the mighty desire to be assured of God's being. To acknowledge is not to be sure of God. One great point in the poem is—that when Job hears the voice of God, though it utters no word of explanation, it is enough to him to hear it: he knows that God is, and that he hears the cry of his creature. That he is there, knowing all about him, and what had befallen him, is enough; he needs no more to reconcile seeming contradictions, and the worst ills of outer life become endurable. Even if Job could not at first follow his argument of divine probability, God settled everything for him when, by answering him out of the whirlwind, he showed him that he had not forsaken him. It is true that nothing but a far closer divine presence can ever make life a thing fit for a son of man—and that for the simplest of all reasons, that he is made in the image of God, and it is for him absolutely imperative that he should have in him the reality of which his being is the image: while he has it not in him, his being, his conscious self, is but

a mask, a spiritual emptiness; but for the present, Job, yielding to God, was calmed and satisfied. Perhaps he came at length to see that, if anything God could do to him would trouble him so as to make him doubt God—if he knew him so imperfectly who could do nothing ill, then it was time that he should be so troubled, that the imperfection of his knowledge of God and his lack of faith in him should be revealed to him—that an earthquake of his being should disclose its hollowness, and at the same time bring to the surface the gold of God that was in him. To know that our faith is weak is the first step towards its strengthening; to be capable of distrusting is death; to know that we are, and cry out, is to begin to live—to begin to be made such that we cannot distrust—such that God may do anything with us and we shall never doubt him. Until doubt is impossible, we are lacking in the true, the childlike knowledge of God; for either God is such that one may distrust him, or he is such that to distrust him is the greatest injustice of which a man can be guilty. If then we are able to distrust him, either we know God imperfect, or we do not know him. Perhaps Job learned something like this; anyhow, the result of what he had had to endure was a greater nearness to God. But all that he was required to receive at the moment was the argument from God's loving wisdom in his power, to his loving wisdom in everything else. For power is a real and a good thing, giving an immediate impression that it proceeds from goodness. Nor, however long it may last after goodness is gone, was it ever born of anything but goodness. In a very deep sense, power and goodness are one. In the deepest fact they are one.

Seeing God, Job forgets all he wanted to say, all he thought he would say if he could but see him. The close of the poem is grandly abrupt. He had meant to order his cause before him; he had longed to see him that he might speak and defend himself, imagining God as well as his righteous friends wrongfully accusing him; but his speech is gone from him; he has not a word to say. To justify himself in the presence of Him who is Righteousness, seems to him what it is—foolishness and worthless labour. If God do not see him righteous, he is not righteous, and may hold his peace. If he is righteous, God knows it better than he does himself. Nay, if God do not care to justify him, Job has lost his interest in justifying himself. All the evils and imperfections of his nature rise up before him in the presence of the one pure, the one who is right, and has no selfishness in him. 'Behold,' he cries, 'I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.' Then again, after God has called to witness for him behemoth and leviathan, he replies, 'I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?' This question was the word with which first God made his presence known to him; and in the mouth of Job now repeating the question, it is the humble confession, 'I am that foolish man.'—'Therefore,' he goes on, 'have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.' He had not knowledge enough to have a right to speak.

'Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak:'—In the time to come, he will yet cry—to be taught, not to justify himself. 'I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.'—The more diligently yet will he seek to know the counsel of God. That he cannot understand will no longer distress him; it will only urge him to fresh endeavour after the knowledge of him who in all his doings is perfect. 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.'

Job had his desire: he saw the face of God—and abhorred himself in dust and ashes. He sought justification; he found self-abhorrence. Was this punishment? The farthest from it possible. It was the best thing—to begin with—that the face of God could do for him. Blessedest gift is self-contempt, when the giver of it is the visible glory of the Living One. For there to see is to partake; to be able to behold that glory is to live; to turn from and against self is to begin to be pure of heart. Job was in the right when he said that he did not deserve to be in such wise punished for his sins: neither did he deserve to see the face of God, yet had he that crown of all gifts given him—and it was to see himself vile, and abhor himself. By very means of the sufferings against which he had cried out, the living one came near to him, and he was silent. Oh the divine generosity that will grant us to be abashed and self-condemned before the Holy!—to come so nigh him as to see ourselves dark spots against his brightness! Verily we must be of his kind, else no show of him could make us feel small and ugly and unclean! Oh the love of the Father, that he should give us to compare ourselves with him, and be buried in humility and shame! To be rebuked before him is to be his. Good man as Job was, he had never yet been right near to God; now God has come near to him, has become very real to him; he knows now in very deed that God is he with whom he has to do. He had laid all these troubles upon him that He might through them draw nigh to him, and enable him to know him.

Two things are clearly contained in, and manifest from this poem:—that not every man deserves for his sins to be punished everlastingly from the presence of the Lord; and that the best of men, when he sees the face of God, will know himself vile. God is just, and will never deal with the sinner as if he were capable of sinning the pure sin; yet if the best man be not delivered from himself, that self will sink him into Tophet.

Any man may, like Job, plead his cause with God—though possibly it may not be to like justification: he gives us liberty to speak, and will hear with absolute fairness. But, blessed be God, the one result for all who so draw nigh to him will be—to see him plainly, surely right, the perfect Saviour, the profoundest refuge even from the wrongs of their own being, yea, nearer to them always than any wrong they could commit; so seeing him, they will abhor themselves, and rejoice in him. And, as the poem indicates, when we turn from ourselves to him, becoming true, that is, being to God and to ourselves what we are, he will turn again our captivity; they that have sown in tears shall reap in joy; they shall doubtless come again

with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. Then will the waters that rise from God's fountains, run in God's channels.

For the prosperity that follows upon Job's submission, is the embodiment of a great truth. Although a man must do right if it send him to Hades, yea, even were it to send him for ever to hell itself, yet, while the Lord liveth, we need not fear: all good things must grow out of and hang upon the one central good, the one law of life—the Will, the One Good. To submit absolutely to him is the only reason: circumstance as well as all being must then bud and blossom as the rose. And it will!—what matter whether in this world or the next, if one day I know my life as a perfect bliss, having neither limitation nor hindrance nor pain nor sorrow more than it can dominate in peace and perfect assurance?

I care not whether the book of Job be a history or a poem. I think it is both—I do not care how much relatively of each. It was probably, in the childlike days of the world, a well-known story in the east, which some man, whom God had made wise to understand his will and his ways, took up, and told after the fashion of a poet. What its age may be, who can certainly tell!—it must have been before Moses. I would gladly throw out the part of Elihu as an interpolation. One in whom, of all men I have known, I put the greatest trust, said to me once what amounted to this: 'There is as much difference between the language of the rest of the poem and that of Elihu, as between the language of Chaucer and that of Shakspere.'

The poem is for many reasons difficult, and in the original to me inaccessible; but, through all the evident inadequacy of our translation, who can fail to hear two souls, that of the poet and that of Job, crying aloud with an agonized hope that, let the evil shows around them be what they may, truth and righteousness are yet the heart of things. The faith, even the hope of Job seems at times on the point of giving way; he struggles like a drowning man when the billow goes over him, but with the rising of his head his courage revives. Christians we call ourselves!—what would not our faith be, were it as much greater than Job's as the word from the mouth of Jesus is mightier than that he heard out of the whirlwind! Here is a book of faith indeed, ere the law was given by Moses: Grace and Truth have visited us—but where is our faith?

Friends, our cross may be heavy, and the via dolorosa rough; but we have claims on God, yea the right to cry to him for help. He has spent, and is spending himself to give us our birthright, which is righteousness. Though we shall not be condemned for our sins, we cannot be saved but by leaving them; though we shall not be condemned for the sins that are past, we shall be condemned if we love the darkness rather than the light, and refuse to come to him that we may have life. God is offering us the one thing we cannot live without—his own self: we must make room for him; we must cleanse our hearts that he may come in; we must do as the Master tells us, who knew all about the Father and the way to him—we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily, and follow him.

SELF-DENIAL.

'And he said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.'—St. Luke ix. 23, 24.

Christ is the way out, and the way in; the way from slavery, conscious or unconscious, into liberty; the way from the unhomeliness of things to the home we desire but do not know; the way from the stormy skirts of the Father's garments to the peace of his bosom. To picture him, we need not only endless figures, but sometimes quite opposing figures: he is not only the door of the sheepfold, but the shepherd of the sheep; he is not only the way, but the leader in the way, the rock that followed, and the captain of our salvation. We must become as little children, and Christ must be born in us; we must learn of him, and the one lesson he has to give is himself: he does first all he wants us to do; he is first all he wants us to be. We must not merely do as he did; we must see things as he saw them, regard them as he regarded them; we must take the will of God as the very life of our being; we must neither try to get our own way, nor trouble ourselves as to what may be thought or said of us. The world must be to us as nothing.

I would not be misunderstood if I may avoid it: when I say the world, I do not mean the world God makes and means, yet less the human hearts that live therein; but the world man makes by choosing the perversion of his own nature—a world apart from and opposed to God's world. By the world I mean all ways of judging, regarding, and thinking, whether political, economical, ecclesiastical, social, or individual, which are not divine, which are not God's ways of thinking, regarding, or judging; which do not take God into account, do not set his will supreme, as the one only law of life; which do not care for the truth of things, but the customs of society, or the practice of the trade; which heed not what is right, but the usage of the time. From everything that is against the teaching and thinking of Jesus, from the world in the heart of the best man in it, specially from the world in his own heart, the disciple must turn to follow him. The first thing in all progress is to leave something behind; to follow him is to leave one's self behind. 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself.'

Some seem to take this to mean that the disciple must go against his likings because they are his likings; must be unresponsive to the tendencies and directions and inclinations that are his, because they are such, and his; they seem to think something is gained by abstinence from what is pleasant, or by the doing of what is disagreeable—that to thwart the lower nature is in itself a good. Now I will not dare say what a man may not get good from, if the thing be done in simplicity and honesty. I believe that when a man, for the sake of doing the thing that is right, does in mistake that which is not right, God will take care that he be shown the better way—will perhaps use the very thing which is his mistake to reveal to him the mistake it is. I will allow that the mere effort of will, arbitrary and uninformed

of duty, partaking of the character of tyranny and even schism, may add to the man's power over his lower nature; but in that very nature it is God who must rule and not the man, however well he may mean. From a man's rule of himself, in smallest opposition, however devout, to the law of his being, arises the huge danger of nourishing, by the pride of self-conquest, a far worse than even the unchained animal self—the demoniac self. True victory over self is the victory of God in the man, not of the man alone. It is not subjugation that is enough, but subjugation by God. In whatever man does without God, he must fail miserably—or succeed more miserably. No portion of a man can rule another portion, for God, not the man, created it, and the part is greater than the whole. In effecting what God does not mean, a man but falls into fresh ill conditions. In crossing his natural, therefore in themselves right inclinations, a man may develop a self-satisfaction which in its very nature is a root of all sin. Doing the thing God does not require of him, he puts himself in the place of God, becoming not a law but a law-giver to himself, one who commands, not one who obeys. The diseased satisfaction which some minds feel in laying burdens on themselves, is a pampering, little as they may suspect it, of the most dangerous appetite of that self which they think they are mortifying. All the creatures of God are good, received with thanksgiving; then only can any one of them become evil, when it is used in relations in which a higher law forbids it, or when it is refused for the sake of self-discipline, in relations in which no higher law forbids, and God therefore allows it. For a man to be his own schoolmaster, is a right dangerous position; the pupil cannot be expected to make progress—except, indeed, in the wrong direction. To enjoy heartily and thankfully, and do cheerfully without, when God wills we should, is the way to live in regard to things of the lower nature; these must nowise be confounded with the things of the world. If any one say this is dangerous doctrine, I answer, 'The law of God is enough for me, and for laws invented by man, I will none of them. They are false, and come all of rebellion. God and not man is our judge.'

Verily it is not to thwart or tease the poor self Jesus tells us. That was not the purpose for which God gave it to us! He tells us we must leave it altogether—yield it, deny it, refuse it, lose it: thus only shall we save it, thus only have a share in our own being. The self is given to us that we may sacrifice it; it is ours that we like Christ may have somewhat to offer—not that we should torment it, but that we should deny it; not that we should cross it, but that we should abandon it utterly: then it can no more be vexed.

'What can this mean?—we are not to thwart, but to abandon? How abandon, without thwarting?'

It means this:—we must refuse, abandon, deny self altogether as a ruling, or determining, or originating element in us. It is to be no longer the regent of our action. We are no more to think, 'What should I like to do?' but 'What would the Living One have me do?' It is not selfish to take that which God has made us to desire; neither are we very good to yield it—we should only be very bad not to do so, when he would take it from us; but to yield it heartily,

without a struggle or regret, is not merely to deny the Self a thing it would like, but to deny the Self itself, to refuse and abandon it. The Self is God's making—only it must be the 'slave of Christ,' that the Son may make it also the free son of the same Father; it must receive all from him—not as from nowhere; as well as the deeper soul, it must follow him, not its own desires. It must not be its own law; Christ must be its law. The time will come when it shall be so possessed, so enlarged, so idealized, by the indwelling God, who is its deeper, its deepest self, that there will be no longer any enforced denial of it needful; it has been finally denied and refused and sent into its own obedient place; it has learned to receive with thankfulness, to demand nothing; to turn no more upon its own centre, or any more think to minister to its own good. God's eternal denial of himself, revealed in him who for our sakes in the flesh took up his cross daily, will have been developed in the man; his eternal rejoicing will be in God—and in his fellows, before whom he will cast his glad self to be a carpet for their walk, a footstool for their rest, a stair for their climbing.

To deny oneself then, is to act no more from the standing—ground of self; to allow no private communication, no passing influence between the self and the will; not to let the right hand know what the left hand doeth. No grasping or seeking, no hungering of the individual, shall give motion to the will; no desire to be conscious of worthiness shall order the life; no ambition whatever shall be a motive of action; no wish to surpass another be allowed a moment's respite from death; no longing after the praise of men influence a single throb of the heart. To deny the self is to shrink from no dispraise or condemnation or contempt of the community, or circle, or country, which is against the mind of the Living one; for no love or entreaty of father or mother, wife or child, friend or lover, to turn aside from following him, but forsake them all as any ruling or ordering power in our lives; we must do nothing to please them that would not first be pleasing to him. Right deeds, and not the judgment thereupon; true words, and not what reception they may have, shall be our care. Not merely shall we not love money, or trust in it, or seek it as the business of life, but, whether we have it or have it not, we must never think of it as a windfall from the tree of event or the cloud of circumstance, but as the gift of God. We must draw our life, by the uplooking, acknowledging will, every moment fresh from the living one, the causing life, not glory in the mere consciousness of health and being. It is God feeds us, warms us, quenches our thirst. The will of God must be to us all in all; to our whole nature the life of the Father must be the joy of the child; we must know our very understanding his—that we live and feed on him every hour in the closest, veriest way: to know these things in the depth of our knowing, is to deny ourselves, and take God instead. To try after them is to begin the denial, to follow him who never sought his own. So must we deny all anxieties and fears. When young we must not mind what the world calls failure; as we grow old, we must not be vexed that we cannot remember, must not regret that we cannot do, must not be miserable because we grow weak or ill: we must not mind anything. We have to do with God who can,

not with ourselves where we cannot; we have to do with the Will, with the Eternal Life of the Father of our spirits, and not with the being which we could not make, and which is his care. He is our care; we are his; our care is to will his will; his care, to give us all things. This is to deny ourselves. 'Self, I have not to consult you, but him whose idea is the soul of you, and of which as yet you are all unworthy. I have to do, not with you, but with the source of you, by whom it is that any moment you exist—the Causing of you, not the caused you. You may be my consciousness, but you are not my being. If you were, what a poor, miserable, dingy, weak wretch I should be! but my life is hid with Christ in God, whence it came, and whither it is returning—with you certainly, but as an obedient servant, not a master. Submit, or I will cast you from me, and pray to have another consciousness given me. For God is more to me than my consciousness of myself. He is my life; you are only so much of it as my poor half—made being can grasp—as much of it as I can now know at once. Because I have fooled and spoiled you, treated you as if you were indeed my own self, you have dwindled yourself and have lessened me, till I am ashamed of myself. If I were to mind what you say, I should soon be sick of you; even now I am ever and anon disgusted with your paltry, mean face, which I meet at every turn. No! let me have the company of the Perfect One, not of you! of my elder brother, the Living One! I will not make a friend of the mere shadow of my own being! Good-bye, Self! I deny you, and will do my best every day to leave you behind me.'

And in this regard we must not fail to see, or seeing ever forget, that, when Jesus tells us we must follow him, we must come to him, we must believe in him, he speaks first and always as the Son of the Father—and that in the active sense, as the obedient God, not merely as one who claims the sonship for the ground of being and so of further claim. He is the Son of the Father as the Son who obeys the Father, as the Son who came expressly and only to do the will of the Father, as the messenger whose delight it is to do the will of him that sent him. At the moment he says Follow me, he is following the Father; his face is set homeward. He would have us follow him because he is bent on the will of the Blessed. It is nothing even thus to think of him, except thus we believe in him—that is, so do. To believe in him is to do as he does, to follow him where he goes. We must believe in him practically—altogether practically, as he believed in his Father; not as one concerning whom we have to hold something, but as one whom we have to follow out of the body of this death into life eternal. It is not to follow him to take him in any way theoretically, to hold this or that theory about why he died, or wherein lay his atonement: such things can be revealed only to those who follow him in his active being and the principle of his life—who do as he did, live as he lived. There is no other following. He is all for the Father; we must be all for the Father too, else are we not following him. To follow him is to be learning of him, to think his thoughts, to use his judgments, to see things as he saw them, to feel things as he felt them, to be hearted, souled, minded, as he was—that so also we may be of the same

mind with his Father. This it is to deny self and go after him; nothing less, even if it be working miracles and casting out devils, is to be his disciple. Busy from morning to night doing great things for him on any other road, we should but earn the reception, 'I never knew you.' When he says, 'Take my yoke upon you,' he does not mean a yoke which he would lay upon our shoulders; it is his own yoke he tells us to take, and to learn of him—it is the yoke he is himself carrying, the yoke his perfect Father had given him to carry. The will of the Father is the yoke he would have us take, and bear also with him. It is of this yoke that he says, It is easy, of this burden, It is light. He is not saying, 'The yoke I lay upon you is easy, the burden light;' what he says is, 'The yoke I carry is easy, the burden on my shoulders is light.' With the garden of Gethsemane before him, with the hour and the power of darkness waiting for him, he declares his yoke easy, his burden light. There is no magnifying of himself. He first denies himself, and takes up his cross—then tells us to do the same. The Father magnifies the Son, not the Son himself; the Son magnifies the Father.

We must be jealous for God against ourselves, and look well to the cunning and deceitful Self—ever cunning and deceitful until it is informed of God—until it is thoroughly and utterly denied, and God is to it also All-in-all—till we have left it quite empty of our will and our regard, and God has come into it, and made it—not indeed an adytum, but a pylon for himself. Until then, its very denials, its very turnings from things dear to it for the sake of Christ, will tend to foster its self-regard, and generate in it a yet deeper self-worship. While it is not denied, only thwarted, we may through satisfaction with conquered difficulty and supposed victory, minister yet more to its self-gratulation. The Self, when it finds it cannot have honour because of its gifts, because of the love lavished upon it, because of its conquests, and the 'golden opinions bought from all sorts of people,' will please itself with the thought of its abnegations, of its unselfishness, of its devotion to God, of its forsakings for his sake. It may not call itself, but it will soon feel itself a saint, a superior creature, looking down upon the foolish world and its ways, walking on high 'above the smoke and stir of this dim spot;'—all the time dreaming a dream of utter folly, worshipping itself with the more concentration that it has yielded the approbation of the world, and dismissed the regard of others: even they are no longer necessary to its assurance of its own worths and merits! In a thousand ways will Self delude itself, in a thousand ways befool its own slavish being. Christ sought not his own, sought not anything but the will of his Father: we have to grow diamond-clear, true as the white light of the morning. Hopeless task!—were it not that he offers to come himself, and dwell in us.

I have wondered whether the word of the Lord, 'take up his cross,' was a phrase in use at the time: when he used it first he had not yet told them that he would himself be crucified. I can hardly believe this form of execution such a common thing that the figure of bearing the cross had come into ordinary speech. As the Lord's idea was new to men, so I think was the image in which he embodied it. I grant it might, being such a hateful thing in the eyes

of the Jews, have come to represent the worst misery of a human being; but would they be ready to use as a figure a fact which so sorely manifested their slavery? I hardly think it. Certainly it had not come to represent the thing he was now teaching, that self-abnegation which he had but newly brought to light—nay, hardly to the light yet—only the twilight; and nothing less, it seems to me, can have suggested the terrible symbol!

But we must note that, although the idea of the denial of self is an entire and absolute one, yet the thing has to be done daily: we must keep on denying. It is a deeper and harder thing than any sole effort of most herculean will may finally effect. For indeed the will itself is not pure, is not free, until the Self is absolutely denied. It takes long for the water of life that flows from the well within us, to permeate every outlying portion of our spiritual frame, subduing everything to itself, making it all of the one kind, until at last, reaching the outermost folds of our personality, it casts out disease, our bodies by indwelling righteousness are redeemed, and the creation delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Every day till then we have to take up our cross; every hour to see that we are carrying it. A birthright may be lost for a mess of pottage, and what Satan calls a trifle must be a thing of eternal significance.

Is there not many a Christian who, having begun to deny himself, yet spends much strength in the vain and evil endeavour to accommodate matters between Christ and the dear Self-seeking to save that which so he must certainly lose—in how different a way from that in which the Master would have him lose it! It is one thing to have the loved self devoured of hell in hate and horror and disappointment; another to yield it to conscious possession by the living God himself, who will raise it then first and only to its true individuality, freedom, and life. With its cause within it, then, indeed, it shall be saved!—how then should it but live! Here is the promise to those who will leave all and follow him: 'Whosoever shall lose his life, for my sake, the same shall save it,'—in St. Matthew, 'find it.' What speech of men or angels will serve to shadow the dimly glorious hope! To lose ourselves in the salvation of God's heart! to be no longer any care to ourselves, but know God taking divinest care of us, his own! to be and feel just a resting-place for the divine love—a branch of the tree of life for the dove to alight upon and fold its wings! to be an open air of love, a thoroughfare for the thoughts of God and all holy creatures! to know one's self by the reflex action of endless brotherly presence—yearning after nothing from any, but ever pouring out love by the natural motion of the spirit! to revel in the hundredfold of everything good we may have had to leave for his sake—above all, in the unsought love of those who love us as we love them—circling us round, bathing us in bliss—never reached after, ever received, ever welcomed, altogether and divinely precious! to know that God and we mean the same thing, that we are in the secret, the child's secret of existence, that we are pleasing in the eyes and to the heart of the Father! to live nestling at his knee, climbing to his bosom, blessed in the mere and simple being which is one with God, and is the outgoing of his will, justifying the

being by the very facts of the being, by its awareness of itself as bliss!—what a self is this to receive again from him for that we left, forsook, refused! We left it paltry, low, mean; he took up the poor cinder of a consciousness, carried it back to the workshop of his spirit, made it a true thing, radiant, clear, fit for eternal companying and indwelling, and restored it to our having and holding for ever!

All high things can be spoken only in figures; these figures, having to do with matters too high for them, cannot fit intellectually; they can be interpreted truly, understood aright, only by such as have the spiritual fact in themselves. When we speak of a man and his soul, we imply a self and a self, reacting on each other: we cannot divide ourselves so; the figure suits but imperfectly. It was never the design of the Lord to explain things to our understanding—nor would that in the least have helped our necessity; what we require is a means, a word, whereby to think with ourselves of high things: that is what a true figure, for a figure may be true while far from perfect, will always be to us. But the imperfection of his figures cannot lie in excess. Be sure that, in dealing with any truth, its symbol, however high, must come short of the glorious meaning itself holds. It is the low stupidity of an unspiritual nature that would interpret the Lord's meaning as less than his symbols. The true soul sees, or will come to see, that his words, his figures always represent more than they are able to present; for, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the heavenly things higher than the earthly signs of them, let the signs be good as ever sign may be.

There is no joy belonging to human nature, as God made it, that shall not be enhanced a hundredfold to the man who gives up himself—though, in so doing, he may seem to be yielding the very essence of life. To yield self is to give up grasping at things in their second causes, as men call them, but which are merely God's means, and to receive them direct from their source—to take them seeing whence they come, and not as if they came from nowhere, because no one appears presenting them. The careless soul receives the Father's gifts as if it were a way things had of dropping into his hand. He thus grants himself a slave, dependent on chance and his own blundering endeavour—yet is he ever complaining, as if some one were accountable for the checks which meet him at every turn. For the good that comes to him, he gives no thanks—who is there to thank? at the disappointments that befall him he grumbles—there must be some one to blame! He does not think to what Power it could be of any consequence, nay, what power would not be worse than squandered, to sustain him after his own fashion, in his paltry, low—aimed existence! How could a God pour out his being to uphold the merest waste of his creatures? No world could ever be built or sustained on such an idea. It is the children who shall inherit the earth; such as will not be children, cannot possess. The hour is coming when all that art, all that science, all that nature, all that animal nature, in ennobling subjugation to the higher even as man is subject to the Father, can afford, shall be the possession, to the endless delight, of the sons and daughters of God: to him to whom he is all in all, God is able to give these things; to another

he cannot give them, for he is unable to receive them who is outside the truth of them. Assuredly we are not to love God for the sake of what he can give us; nay, it is impossible to love him save because he is our God, and altogether good and beautiful; but neither may we forget what the Lord does not forget, that, in the end, when the truth is victorious, God will answer his creature in the joy of his heart. For what is joy but the harmony of the spirit! The good Father made his children to be joyful; only, ere they can enter into his joy, they must be like himself, ready to sacrifice joy to truth. No promise of such joy is an appeal to selfishness. Every reward held out by Christ is a pure thing; nor can it enter the soul save as a death to selfishness. The heaven of Christ is a loving of all, a forgetting of self, a dwelling of each in all, and all in each. Even in our nurseries, a joyful child is rarely selfish, generally righteous. It is not selfish to be joyful. What power could prevent him who sees the face of God from being joyful?—that bliss is his which lies behind all other bliss, without which no other bliss could ripen or last. The one bliss of the universe is the presence of God—which is simply God being to the man, and felt by the man as being, that which in his own nature he is—the indwelling power of his life. God must be to his creature what he is in himself, for it is by his essential being alone, that by which he is, that he can create. His presence is the unintermittent call and response of the creative to the created, of the father to the child. Where can be the selfishness in being so made happy? It may be deep selfishness to refuse to be happy. Is there selfishness in the Lord's seeing of the travail of his soul and being satisfied? Selfishness consists in taking the bliss from another; to find one's bliss in the bliss of another is not selfishness. Joy is not selfishness; and the greater the joy thus reaped, the farther is that joy removed from selfishness. The one bliss, next to the love of God, is the love of our neighbour. If any say, 'You love because it makes you blessed,' I deny it: 'We are blessed, I say, because we love.' No one could attain to the bliss of loving his neighbour who was selfish and sought that bliss from love of himself. Love is unselfishness. In the main we love because we cannot help it. There is no merit in it: how should there be in any love?—but neither is it selfish. There are many who confound righteousness with merit, and think there is nothing righteous where there is nothing meritorious. 'If it makes you happy to love,' they say, 'where is your merit? It is only selfishness!' There is no merit, I reply, yet the love that is born in us is our salvation from selfishness. It is of the very essence of righteousness. Because a thing is joyful, it does not follow that I do it for the joy of it; yet when the joy is in others, the joy is pure. That certain joys should be joys, is the very denial of selfishness. The man would be a demoniacally selfish man, whom love itself did not make joyful. It is selfish to enjoy in content beholding others lack; even in the highest spiritual bliss, to sit careless of others would be selfishness, and the higher the bliss, the worse the selfishness; but surely that bliss is right altogether of which a great part consists in labour that others may share it. Such, I will not doubt—the labour to bring others in to share with us, will be a great part of our heavenly content and gladness. The making, the redeeming Father will

find plenty of like work for his children to do. Dull are those, little at least can they have of Christian imagination, who think that where all are good, things must be dull. It is because there is so little good yet in them, that they know so little of the power or beauty of merest life divine. Let such make haste to be true. Interest will there be and variety enough, not without pain, in the ministration of help to those yet wearily toiling up the heights of truth—perhaps yet unwilling to part with miserable self, which cherishing they are not yet worth being, or capable of having.

Some of the things a man may have to forsake in following Christ, he has not to forsake because of what they are in themselves. Neither nature, art, science, nor fit society, is of those things a man will lose in forsaking himself: they are God's, and have no part in the world of evil, the false judgments, low wishes, and unrealities generally, that make up the conscious life of the self which has to be denied: such will never be restored to the man. But in forsaking himself to do what God requires of him—his true work in the world, that is, a man may find he has to leave some of God's things—not to repudiate them, but for the time to forsake them, because they draw his mind from the absolute necessities of the true life in himself or in others. He may have to deny himself in leaving them—not as bad things, but as things for which there is not room until those of paramount claim have been so heeded, that these will no longer impede but further them. Then he who knows God, will find that knowledge open the door of his understanding to all things else. He will become able to behold them from within, instead of having to search wearily into them from without. This gave to king David more understanding than had all his teachers. Then will the things he has had to leave, be restored to him a hundred fold. So will it be in the forsaking of friends. To forsake them for Christ, is not to forsake them as evil. It is not to cease to love them, 'for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' it is—not to allow their love to cast even a shadow between us and our Master; to be content to lose their approval, their intercourse, even their affection, where the Master says one thing and they another. It is to learn to love them in a far higher, deeper, tenderer, truer way than before—a way which keeps all that was genuine in the former way, and loses all that was false. We shall love their selves, and disregard our own.

I do not forget the word of the Lord about hating father and mother: I have a glimpse of the meaning of it, but dare not attempt explaining it now. It is all against the self—not against the father and mother.

There is another kind of forsaking that may fall to the lot of some, and which they may find very difficult: the forsaking of such notions of God and his Christ as they were taught in their youth—which they held, nor could help holding, at such time as they began to believe—of which they have begun to doubt the truth, but to cast which away seems like parting with every assurance of safety.

There are so-called doctrines long accepted of good people, which how any man can love God and hold, except indeed by fast closing of the spiritual eyes, I find it hard to understand. If a man care more for opinion than for life, it is not worth any other man's while to persuade him to renounce the opinions he happens to entertain; he would but put other opinions in the same place of honour—a place which can belong to no opinion whatever: it matters nothing what such a man may or may not believe, for he is not a true man. By holding with a school he supposes to be right, he but bolsters himself up with the worst of all unbelief—opinion calling itself faith—unbelief calling itself religion. But for him who is in earnest about the will of God, it is of endless consequence that he should think rightly of God. He cannot come close to him, cannot truly know his will, while his notion of him is in any point that of a false god. The thing shows itself absurd. If such a man seem to himself to be giving up even his former assurance of salvation, in yielding such ideas of God as are unworthy of God, he must none the less, if he will be true, if he would enter into life, take up that cross also. He will come to see that he must follow no doctrine, be it true as word of man could state it, but the living Truth, the Master himself.

Good souls many will one day be horrified at the things they now believe of God. If they have not thought about them, but given themselves to obedience, they may not have done them much harm as yet; but they can make little progress in the knowledge of God, while, if but passively, holding evil things true of him. If, on the other hand, they do think about them, and find in them no obstruction, they must indeed be far from anything to be called a true knowledge of God. But there are those who find them a terrible obstruction, and yet imagine, or at least fear them true: such must take courage to forsake the false in any shape, to deny their old selves in the most seemingly sacred of prejudices, and follow Jesus, not as he is presented in the tradition of the elders, but as he is presented by himself, his apostles, and the spirit of truth. There are 'traditions of men' after Christ as well as before him, and far worse, as 'making of none effect' higher and better things; and we have to look to it, how we have learned Christ.

THE TRUTH IN JESUS.

'But ye did not so learn Christ; if so be that ye heard him, and were taught in him, even as truth is in Jesus: that ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit.'—Eph. iv. 20-22.

How have we learned Christ? It ought to be a startling thought, that we may have learned him wrong. That must be far worse than not to have learned him at all: his place is occupied by a false Christ, hard to exorcise! The point is, whether we have learned Christ as he taught himself, or as men have taught him who thought they understood, but did not understand him. Do we think we know him—with notions fleshly, after low, mean human fancies and explanations, or do we indeed know him—after the spirit, in our measure as God knows him? The Christian religion, throughout its history, has been open to more corrupt misrepresentation than ever the Jewish could be, for as it is higher and wider, so must it yield larger scope to corruption:—have we learned Christ in false statements and corrupted lessons about him, or have we learned himself? Nay, true or false, is only our brain full of things concerning him, or does he dwell himself in our hearts, a learnt, and ever being learnt lesson, the power of our life?

I have been led to what I am about to say, by a certain utterance of one in the front rank of those who assert that we can know nothing of the 'Infinite and Eternal energy from which all things proceed;' and the utterance is this:—

'The visiting on Adam's descendants through hundreds of generations dreadful penalties for a small transgression which they did not commit; the damning of all men who do not avail themselves of an alleged mode of obtaining forgiveness, which most men have never heard of; and the effecting a reconciliation by sacrificing a son who was perfectly innocent, to satisfy the assumed necessity for a propitiatory victim; are modes of action which, ascribed to a human ruler, would call forth expressions of abhorrence; and the ascription of them to the Ultimate Cause of things, even not felt to be full of difficulties, must become impossible.'

I do not quote the passage with the design of opposing either clause of its statement, for I entirely agree with it: almost it feels an absurdity to say so. Neither do I propose addressing a word to the writer of it, or to any who hold with him. The passage bears out what I have often said—that I never yet heard a word from one of that way of thinking, which even touched anything I hold. One of my earliest recollections is of beginning to be at strife with the false system here assailed. Such paganism I scorn as heartily in the name of Christ, as I scorn it in the name of righteousness. Rather than believe a single point involving its spirit, even with the assurance thereby of such salvation as the system offers, I would join the ranks of those who 'know nothing,' and set myself with hopeless heart to what I am now trying with an infinite hope in the help of the pure originating One—to get rid of my miserable mean self, comforted only by the chance that death would either leave me without thought more, or reveal something of the Ultimate Cause which it would not be an insult

to him, or a dishonour to his creature, to hold concerning him. Even such a chance alone might enable one to live.

I will not now enquire how it comes that the writer of the passage quoted seems to put forward these so-called beliefs as representing Christianity, or even the creed of those who call themselves Christians, seeing so many, and some of them of higher rank in literature than himself, believing in Christ with true hearts, believe not one of such things as he has set down, but hold them in at least as great abhorrence as he: his answer would probably be, that, even had he been aware of such being the fact, what he had to deal with was the forming and ruling notions of religious society;—and that such are the things held by the bulk of both educated and uneducated calling themselves Christians, however many of them may vainly think by an explanatory clause here and there to turn away the opprobrium of their falsehood, while they remain virtually the same—that such are the things so held, I am, alas! unable to deny. It helps nothing, I repeat, that many, thinking little on the matter, use quasi mitigated forms to express their tenets, and imagine that so they indicate a different class of ideas: it would require but a brief examination to be convinced that they are not merely analogous—they are ultimately identical.

But had I to do with the writer, I should ask how it comes that, refusing these dogmas as abominable, and in themselves plainly false, yet knowing that they are attributed to men whose teaching has done more to civilize the world than that of any men besides—how it comes that, seeing such teaching as this could not have done so, he has not taken such pains of enquiry as must surely have satisfied a man of his faculty that such was not their teaching; that it was indeed so different, and so good, that even the forced companionship of such horrible lies as those he has recounted, has been unable to destroy its regenerative power. I suppose he will allow that there was a man named Jesus, who died for the truth he taught: can he believe he died for such alleged truth as that? Would it not be well, I would ask him, to enquire what he did really teach, according to the primary sources of our knowledge of him? If he answered that the question was uninteresting to him, I should have no more to say; nor did I now start to speak of him save with the object of making my position plain to those to whom I would speak—those, namely, who call themselves Christians.

If of them I should ask, 'How comes it that such opinions are held concerning the Holy One, whose ways you take upon you to set forth?' I should be met by most with the answer, 'Those are the things he tells us himself in his word; we have learned them from the Scriptures;' by many with explanations which seem to them so to explain the things that they are no longer to be reprobated; and by others with the remark that better ideas, though largely held, had not yet had time to show themselves as the belief of the thinkers of the nation. Of those whose presentation of Christian doctrine is represented in the quotation above, there are two classes—such as are content it should be so, and such to whom those things are grievous, but who do not see how to get rid of them. To the latter it may be some little

comfort to have one who has studied the New Testament for many years and loves it beyond the power of speech to express, declare to them his conviction that there is not an atom of such teaching in the whole lovely, divine utterance; that such things are all and altogether the invention of men—honest invention, in part at least, I grant, but yet not true. Thank God, we are nowise bound to accept any man's explanation of God's ways and God's doings, however good the man may be, if it do not commend itself to our conscience. The man's conscience may be a better conscience than ours, and his judgment clearer; nothing the more can we accept while we cannot see good: to do so would be to sin.

But it is by no means my object to set forth what I believe or do not believe; a time may come for that; my design is now very different indeed. I desire to address those who call themselves Christians, and expostulate with them thus:—

Whatever be your opinions on the greatest of all subjects, is it well that the impression with regard to Christianity made upon your generation, should be that of your opinions, and not of something beyond opinion? Is Christianity capable of being represented by opinion, even the best? If it were, how many of us are such as God would choose to represent his thoughts and intents by our opinions concerning them? Who is there of his friends whom any thoughtful man would depute to represent his thoughts to his fellows? If you answer, 'The opinions I hold and by which I represent Christianity, are those of the Bible,' I reply, that none can understand, still less represent, the opinions of another, but such as are of the same mind with him—certainly none who mistake his whole scope and intent so far as in supposing opinion to be the object of any writer in the Bible. Is Christianity a system of articles of belief, let them be correct as language can give them? Never. So far am I from believing it, that I would rather have a man holding, as numbers of you do, what seem to me the most obnoxious untruths, opinions the most irreverent and gross, if at the same time he lived in the faith of the Son of God, that is, trusted in God as the Son of God trusted in him, than I would have a man with every one of whose formulas of belief I utterly coincided, but who knew nothing of a daily life and walk with God. The one, holding doctrines of devils, is yet a child of God; the other, holding the doctrines of Christ and his Apostles, is of the world, yea, of the devil.

'How! a man hold the doctrine of devils, and yet be of God?'

Yes; for to hold a thing with the intellect, is not to believe it. A man's real belief is that which he lives by; and that which the man I mean lives by, is the love of God, and obedience to his law, so far as he has recognized it. Those hideous doctrines are outside of him; he thinks they are inside, but no matter; they are not true, and they cannot really be inside any good man. They are sadly against him; for he cannot love to dwell upon any of those supposed characteristics of his God; he acts and lives nevertheless in a measure like the true God. What a man believes, is the thing he does. This man would shrink with loathing from actions such as he thinks God justified in doing; like God, he loves and helps and saves. Will the

living God let such a man's opinions damn him? No more than he will let the correct opinions of another, who lives for himself, save him. The best salvation even the latter could give would be but damnation. What I come to and insist upon is, that, supposing your theories right, and containing all that is to be believed, yet those theories are not what makes you Christians, if Christians indeed you are. On the contrary, they are, with not a few of you, just what keeps you from being Christians. For when you say that, to be saved, a man must hold this or that, then are you leaving the living God and his will, and putting trust in some notion about him or his will. To make my meaning clearer,—some of you say we must trust in the finished work of Christ; or again, our faith must be in the merits of Christ—in the atonement he has made—in the blood he has shed: all these statements are a simple repudiation of the living Lord, in whom we are told to believe, who, by his presence with and in us, and our obedience to him, lifts us out of darkness into light, leads us from the kingdom of Satan into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. No manner or amount of belief about him is the faith of the New Testament. With such teaching I have had a lifelong acquaintance, and declare it most miserably false. But I do not now mean to dispute against it; except the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus make a man sick of his opinions, he may hold them to doomsday for me; for no opinion, I repeat, is Christianity, and no preaching of any plan of salvation is the preaching of the glorious gospel of the living God. Even if your plan, your theories, were absolutely true, the holding of them with sincerity, the trusting in this or that about Christ, or in anything he did or could do, the trusting in anything but himself, his own living self, is a delusion. Many will grant this heartily, and yet the moment you come to talk with them, you find they insist that to believe in Christ is to believe in the atonement, meaning by that only and altogether their special theory about the atonement; and when you say we must believe in the atoning Christ, and cannot possibly believe in any theory concerning the atonement, they go away and denounce you, saying, 'He does not believe in the atonement!' If I explain the atonement otherwise than they explain it, they assert that I deny the atonement; nor count it of any consequence that I say I believe in the atoner with my whole heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. This they call contending for the truth! Because I refuse an explanation which is not in the New Testament, though they believe it is, because they can think of no other, one which seems to me as false in logic as detestable in morals, not to say that there is no spirituality in it whatever, therefore I am not a Christian! What wonder men such as I have quoted refuse the Christianity they suppose such 'believers' to represent! I do not say that with this sad folly may not mingle a potent faith in the Lord himself; but I do say that the importance they place on theory is even more sadly obstructive to true faith than such theories themselves: while the mind is occupied in enquiring,

'Do I believe or feel this thing right?'—the true question is forgotten: 'Have I left all to follow him?' To the man who gives himself to the living Lord, every belief will necessarily

come right; the Lord himself will see that his disciple believe aright concerning him. If a man cannot trust him for this, what claim can he make to faith in him? It is because he has little or no faith, that he is left clinging to preposterous and dishonouring ideas, the traditions of men concerning his Father, and neither his teaching nor that of his apostles. The living Christ is to them but a shadow; the all but obliterated Christ of their theories no soul can thoroughly believe in: the disciple of such a Christ rests on his work, or his merits, or his atonement!

What I insist upon is, that a man's faith shall be in the living, loving, ruling, helping Christ, devoted to us as much as ever he was, and with all the powers of the Godhead for the salvation of his brethren. It is not faith that he did this, that his work wrought that—it is faith in the man who did and is doing everything for us that will save him: without this he cannot work to heal spiritually, any more than he would heal physically, when he was present to the eyes of men. Do you ask, 'What is faith in him?' I answer, The leaving of your way, your objects, your self, and the taking of his and him; the leaving of your trust in men, in money, in opinion, in character, in atonement itself, and doing as he tells you. I can find no words strong enough to serve for the weight of this necessity—this obedience. It is the one terrible heresy of the church, that it has always been presenting something else than obedience as faith in Christ. The work of Christ is not the Working Christ, any more than the clothing of Christ is the body of Christ. If the woman who touched the hem of his garment had trusted in the garment and not in him who wore it, would she have been healed? And the reason that so many who believe about Christ rather than in him, get the comfort they do, is that, touching thus the mere hem of his garment, they cannot help believing a little in the live man inside the garment. It is not wonderful that such believers should so often be miserable; they lay themselves down to sleep with nothing but the skirt of his robe in their hand—a robe too, I say, that never was his, only by them is supposed his—when they might sleep in peace with the living Lord in their hearts. Instead of so knowing Christ that they have him in them saving them, they lie wasting themselves in soul-sickening self-examination as to whether they are believers, whether they are really trusting in the atonement, whether they are truly sorry for their sins—the way to madness of the brain, and despair of the heart. Some even ponder the imponderable—whether they are of the elect, whether they have an interest in the blood shed for sin, whether theirs is a saving faith—when all the time the man who died for them is waiting to begin to save them from every evil—and first from this self which is consuming them with trouble about its salvation; he will set them free, and take them home to the bosom of the Father—if only they will mind what he says to them—which is the beginning, middle, and end of faith. If, instead of searching into the mysteries of corruption in their own charnel-houses, they would but awake and arise from the dead, and come out into the light which Christ is waiting to give them, he would begin at once to fill them with the fulness of God.

'But I do not know how to awake and arise!'

I will tell you:—Get up, and do something the master tells you; so make yourself his disciple at once. Instead of asking yourself whether you believe or not, ask yourself whether you have this day done one thing because he said, Do it, or once abstained because he said, Do not do it. It is simply absurd to say you believe, or even want to believe in him, if you do not anything he tells you. If you can think of nothing he ever said as having had an atom of influence on your doing or not doing, you have too good ground to consider yourself no disciple of his. Do not, I pray you, worse than waste your time in trying to convince yourself that you are his disciple notwithstanding—that for this reason or that you still have cause to think you believe in him. What though you should succeed in persuading yourself to absolute certainty that you are his disciple, if, after all, he say to you, 'Why did you not do the things I told you? Depart from me; I do not know you!' Instead of trying to persuade yourself, if the thing be true you can make it truer; if it be not true, you can begin at once to make it true, to be a disciple of the Living One—by obeying him in the first thing you can think of in which you are not obeying him. We must learn to obey him in everything, and so must begin somewhere: let it be at once, and in the very next thing that lies at the door of our conscience! Oh fools and slow of heart, if you think of nothing but Christ, and do not set yourselves to do his words! you but build your houses on the sand. What have such teachers not to answer for who have turned your regard away from the direct words of the Lord himself, which are spirit and life, to contemplate plans of salvation tortured out of the words of his apostles, even were those plans as true as they are false! There is but one plan of salvation, and that is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, to take him for what he is—our master, and his words as if he meant them, which assuredly he did. To do his words is to enter into vital relation with him, to obey him is the only way to be one with him. The relation between him and us is an absolute one; it can nohow begin to live but in obedience: it is obedience. There can be no truth, no reality, in any initiation of at-one-ment with him, that is not obedience. What! have I the poorest notion of a God, and dare think of entering into relations with him, the very first of which is not that what he saith, I will do? The thing is eternally absurd, and comes of the father of lies. I know what he whispers to those to whom such teaching as this is distasteful: 'It is the doctrine of works!' But one word of the Lord humbly heard and received will suffice to send all the demons of false theology into the abyss. He says the man that does not do the things he tells him, builds his house to fall in utter ruin. He instructs his messengers to go and baptize all nations, 'teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' Tell me it is faith he requires: do I not know it? and is not faith the highest act of which the human mind is capable? But faith in what? Faith in what he is, in what he says—a faith which can have no existence except in obedience—a faith which is obedience. To do what he wishes is to put forth faith in him. For this the teaching of men has substituted this or that belief about him, faith in this or

that supposed design of his manifestation in the flesh. It was himself, and God in him that he manifested; but faith in him and his father thus manifested, they make altogether secondary to acceptance of the paltry contrivance of a juggling morality, which they attribute to God and his Christ, imagining it the atonement, and 'the plan of salvation.' 'Do you put faith in him,' I ask, 'or in the doctrines and commandments of men?' If you say 'In him,'—'Is it then possible,' I return, 'that you do not see that, above all things and all thoughts, you are bound to obey him?' Do you not mourn that you cannot trust in him as you would, that you find it too hard? Too hard it is for you, and too hard it will remain, while the things he tells you to do—the things you can do—even those you will not try! How should you be capable of trusting in the true one while you are nowise true to him? How are you to believe he will do his part by you, while you are not such as to do your part by him? How are you to believe while you are not faithful? How, I say, should you be capable of trusting in him? The very thing to make you able to trust in him, and so receive all things from him, you turn your back upon: obedience you decline, or at least neglect. You say you do not refuse to obey him? I care not whether you refuse or not, while you do not obey. Remember the parable: 'I go, sir, and went not.' What have you done this day because it was the will of Christ? Have you dismissed, once dismissed, an anxious thought for the morrow? Have you ministered to any needy soul or body, and kept your right hand from knowing what your left hand did? Have you begun to leave all and follow him? Did you set yourself to judge righteous judgment? Are you being ware of covetousness? Have you forgiven your enemy? Are you seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness before all other things? Are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Have you given to some one that asked of you? Tell me something that you have done, are doing, or are trying to do because he told you. If you do nothing that he says, it is no wonder that you cannot trust in him, and are therefore driven to seek refuge in the atonement, as if something he had done, and not he himself in his doing were the atonement. That is not as you understand it? What does it matter how you understand, or what you understand, so long as you are not of one mind with the Truth, so long as you and God are not at one, do not atone together? How should you understand? Knowing that you do not heed his word, why should I heed your explanation of it? You do not his will, and so you cannot understand him; you do not know him, that is why you cannot trust in him. You think your common sense enough to let you know what he means? Your common sense ought to be enough to know itself unequal to the task. It is the heart of the child that alone can understand the Father. Would you have me think you guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost—that you understand Jesus Christ and yet will not obey him? That were too dreadful. I believe you do not understand him. No man can do yet what he tells him aright—but are you trying? Obedience is not perfection, but trying. You count him a hard master, and will not stir. Do you suppose he ever gave a commandment knowing it was of no use for it could not be done? He tells us a thing knowing that we must do it, or

be lost; that not his Father himself could save us but by getting us at length to do everything he commands, for not otherwise can we know life, can we learn the holy secret of divine being. He knows that you can try, and that in your trying and failing he will be able to help you, until at length you shall do the will of God even as he does it himself. He takes the will in the imperfect deed, and makes the deed at last perfect. Correctest notions without obedience are worthless. The doing of the will of God is the way to oneness with God, which alone is salvation. Sitting at the gate of heaven, sitting on the footstool of the throne itself, yea, clasping the knees of the Father, you could not be at peace, except in their every vital movement, in every their smallest point of consciousness, your heart, your soul, your mind, your brain, your body, were one with the living God. If you had one brooding thought that was not a joy in him, you would not be at peace; if you had one desire you could not leave absolutely to his will you would not be at peace; you would not be saved, therefore could not feel saved. God, all and in all, ours to the fulfilling of our very being, is the religion of the perfect, son-hearted Lord Christ.

Well do I know it is faith that saves us—but not faith in any work of God—it is faith in God himself. If I did not believe God as good as the tenderest human heart, the fairest, the purest, the most unselfish human heart could imagine him, yea, an infinitude better, higher than we as the heavens are higher than the earth—believe it, not as a proposition, or even as a thing I was convinced of, but with the responsive condition and being of my whole nature; if I did not feel every fibre of heart and brain and body safe with him because he is the Father who made me that I am—I would not be saved, for this faith is salvation; it is God and the man one. God and man together, the vital energy flowing unchecked from the creator into his creature—that is the salvation of the creature. But the poorest faith in the living God, the God revealed in Christ Jesus, if it be vital, true, that is obedient, is the beginning of the way to know him, and to know him is eternal life. If you mean by faith anything of a different kind, that faith will not save you. A faith, for instance, that God does not forgive me because he loves me, but because he loves Jesus Christ, cannot save me, because it is a falsehood against God: if the thing were true, such a gospel would be the preaching of a God that was not love, therefore in whom was no salvation, a God to know whom could not be eternal life. Such a faith would damn, not save a man; for it would bind him to a God who was anything but perfect. Such assertions going by the name of Christianity, are nothing but the poor remnants of paganism; and it is only with that part of our nature not yet Christian that we are able to believe them—so far indeed as it is possible a lie should be believed. We must forsake all our fears and distrusts for Christ. We must receive his teaching heartily, nor let the interpretation of it attributed to his apostles make us turn aside from it. I say interpretation attributed to them; for what they teach is never against what Christ taught, though very often the exposition of it is—and that from no fault in the apostles, but from the grievous fault of those who would understand, and even explain, rather than obey.

We may be sure of this, that no man will be condemned for any sin that is past; that, if he be condemned, it will be because he would not come to the light when the light came to him; because he would not cease to do evil and learn to do well; because he hid his unbelief in the garment of a false faith, and would not obey; because he imputed to himself a righteousness that was not his; because he preferred imagining himself a worthy person, to confessing himself everywhere in the wrong, and repenting. We may be sure also of this, that, if a man becomes the disciple of Christ, he will not leave him in ignorance as to what he has to believe; he shall know the truth of everything it is needful for him to understand. If we do what he tells us, his light will go up in our hearts. Till then we could not understand even if he explained to us. If you cannot trust him to let you know what is right, but think you must hold this or that before you can come to him, then I justify your doubts in what you call your worst times, but which I suspect are your best times in which you come nearest to the truth—those, namely, in which you fear you have no faith.

So long as a man will not set himself to obey the word spoken, the word written, the word printed, the word read, of the Lord Christ, I would not take the trouble to convince him concerning the most obnoxious doctrines that they were false as hell. It is those who would fain believe, but who by such doctrines are hindered, whom I would help. Disputation about things but hides the living Christ who alone can teach the truth, who is the truth, and the knowledge of whom is life; I write for the sake of those whom the false teaching that claims before all to be true has driven away from God—as well it might, for the God so taught is not a God worthy to be believed in. A stick, or a stone, or a devil, is all that some of our brethren of mankind have to believe in: he who believes in a God not altogether unselfish and good, a God who does not do all he can for his creatures, belongs to the same class; his is not the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the fountains of water—not the God revealed in Christ. If a man see in God any darkness at all, and especially if he defend that darkness, attempting to justify it as one who respects the person of God, I cannot but think his blindness must have followed his mockery of 'Lord! Lord!' Surely, if he had been strenuously obeying Jesus, he would ere now have received the truth that God is light, and in him is no darkness—a truth which is not acknowledged by calling the darkness attributed to him light, and the candle of the Lord in the soul of man darkness. It is one thing to believe that God can do nothing wrong, quite another to call whatever presumption may attribute to him right.

The whole secret of progress is the doing of the thing we know. There is no other way of progress in the spiritual life; no other way of progress in the understanding of that life: only as we do, can we know.

Is there then anything you will not leave for Christ? You cannot know him—and yet he is the Truth, the one thing alone that can be known! Do you not care to be imperfect? would you rather keep this or that, with imperfection, than part with it to be perfect? You cannot

know Christ, for the very principle of his life was the simple absolute relation of realities; his one idea was to be a perfect child to his Father. He who will not part with all for Christ, is not worthy of him, and cannot know him; and the Lord is true, and cannot acknowledge him: how could he receive to his house, as one of his kind, a man who prefers something to his Father; a man who is not for God; a man who will strike a bargain with God, and say, 'I will give up so much, if thou wilt spare me'! To yield all to him who has only made us and given us everything, yea his very self by life and by death, such a man counts too much. His conduct says, 'I never asked thee to do so much for me, and I cannot make the return thou demandest.' The man will have to be left to himself. He must find what it is to be without God! Those who know God, or have but begun to catch a far-off glimmer of his gloriousness, of what he is, regard life as insupportable save God be the All in all, the first and the last.

To let their light shine, not to force on them their interpretations of God's designs, is the duty of Christians towards their fellows. If you who set yourselves to explain the theory of Christianity, had set yourselves instead to do the will of the Master, the one object for which the Gospel was preached to you, how different would now be the condition of that portion of the world with which you come into contact! Had you given yourselves to the understanding of his word that you might do it, and not to the quarrying from it of material wherewith to buttress your systems, in many a heart by this time would the name of the Lord be loved where now it remains unknown. The word of life would then by you have been held out indeed. Men, undeterred by your explanations of Christianity, for you would not be forcing them on their acceptance, and attracted by your behaviour, would be saying to each other, as Moses said to himself when he saw the bush that burned with fire and was not consumed, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight!' they would be drawing nigh to behold how these Christians loved one another, and how just and fair they were to every one that had to do with them! to note that their goods were the best, their weight surest, their prices most reasonable, their word most certain! that in their families was neither jealousy nor emulation! that mammon was not there worshipped! that in their homes selfishness was neither the hidden nor the openly ruling principle; that their children were as diligently taught to share, as some are to save, or to lay out only upon self—their mothers more anxious lest a child should hoard than lest he should squander; that in no house of theirs was religion one thing, and the daily life another; that the ecclesiastic did not think first of his church, nor the peer of his privileges.

What do I hear you say?—'How then shall the world go on?' The Lord's world will go on, and that without you; the devil's world will go on, and that with you. The objection is but another and overwhelming proof of your unbelief. Either you do not believe the word the Lord spake—that, if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all things needful will be added to us; or what he undertakes does not satisfy you; it is not enough; you want more; you prefer the offers of Mammon. You are nowise anxious to be saved from

the too-much that is a snare; you want what you call a fortune—the freedom of the world. You would not live under such restrictions as the Lord might choose to lay upon you if he saw that something might be made of you precious in his sight! You would inherit the earth, and not by meekness; you would have the life of this world sweet, come of the life eternal, the life that God shares with you, what may: so much as that comes to, you would gladly leave God to look after, if only you might be sure of not sharing with the rich man when you die. But you find that, unable to trust him for this world, neither can you trust him for the world to come. Refusing to obey him in your life, how can you trust him for your life? Hence the various substitutes you seek for faith in him: you would hold him to his word, bind him by his promises, appeal to the atonement, to the satisfaction made to his justice, as you call it—while you will take no trouble to fulfil the absolutely reasonable and necessary condition, yea, morally and spiritually imperative condition—condition and means in one—on which he offers, and through which alone he can offer you deliverance from the burden of life into the strength and glory of life—that you shall be true, and to him obedient children. You say 'Christ has satisfied the law,' but you will not satisfy him! He says, 'Come unto me,' and you will not rise and go to him. You say, 'Lord I believe; help mine unbelief,' but when he says, 'Leave everything behind you, and be as I am towards God, and you shall have peace and rest,' you turn away, muttering about figurative language. If you had been true, had been living the life, had been Christians indeed, you would, however little, have drawn the world after you. In your churches you would be receiving truest nourishment, yea strength to live—thinking far less of serving God on the Sunday, and far more of serving your neighbour in the week. The sociable vile, the masterful rich, the deceitful trader, the ambitious poor, whom you have attracted to your communities with the offer of a salvation other than deliverance from sin, would not be lording it over them and dragging them down; they would be the cleaner and the stronger for their absence; while the publicans and the sinners would have been drawn instead, and turned into true men and women; and the Israelite indeed, who is yet more repelled by your general worldliness than by your misrepresentations of God, showing him selfish like yourselves who is the purity of the creation—the Israelite in whom is no guile would have hastened to the company of the loving men and true, eager to learn what it was that made them so good, so happy, so unselfish, so free of care, so ready to die, so willing to live, so hopeful, so helpful, so careless to possess, so undeferential to possession. Finding you to hold, from the traditional force of false teaching, such things as you do, he would have said, 'No! such beliefs can never account for such mighty results!' You would have answered, 'Search the Scriptures and see.' He would have searched, and found—not indeed the things you imagine there, but things infinitely better and higher, things that indeed account for the result he wondered at; he would have found such truth as he who has found will hold for ever as the only gladness of his being. There you would have had your reward for being true Christians in spite of the evil doctrines you

had been taught and teaching: you would have been taught in return the truth of the matter by him whom your true Christianity had enticed to itself, and sent to the fountainhead free of the prejudices that disabled your judgment. Thus delivered from the false notions which could not fail to have stunted your growth hitherto, how rapid would it not have become!

If any of you tell me my doctrine is presumptuous, that it is contrary to what is taught in the New Testament, and what the best of men have always believed, I will not therefore proceed to defend even my beliefs, the principles on which I try to live—how much less my opinions! I appeal to you instead, whether or not I have spoken the truth concerning our paramount obligation to do the word of Christ. If you answer that I have not, I have nothing more to say; there is no other ground on which we can meet. But if you allow that it is a prime, even if you do not allow it the prime duty, then what I insist upon is, that you should do it, so and not otherwise recommending the knowledge of him. I do not attempt to change your opinions; if they are wrong, the obedience alone on which I insist can enable you to set them right; I only pray you to obey, and assert that thus only can you fit yourselves for understanding the mind of Christ. I say none but he who does right, can think right; you cannot know Christ to be right until you do as he does, as he tells you to do; neither can you set him forth, until you know him as he means himself to be known, that is, as he is. If you are serving and trusting in Mammon, how can you know the living God who, the source of life, is alone to be trusted in! If you do not admit that it is the duty of a man to do the word of Christ, or if, admitting the duty, you yet do not care to perform it, why should I care to convince you that my doctrine is right? What is it to any true man what you think of his doctrine? What does it matter what you think of any doctrine? If I could convince your judgment, your hearts remaining as they are, I should but add to your condemnation. The true heart must see at once, that, however wrong I may or may not be in other things, at least I am right in this, that Jesus must be obeyed, and at once obeyed, in the things he did say: it will not long imagine to obey him in things he did not say. If a man do what is unpleasing to Christ, believing it his will, he shall yet gain thereby, for it gives the Lord a hold of him, which he will use; but before he can reach liberty, he must be delivered from that falsehood. For him who does not choose to see that Christ must be obeyed, he must be left to the teaching of the Father, who brings all that hear and learn of him to Christ, that they may learn what he is who has taught them and brought them. He will leave no man to his own way, however much he may prefer it. The Lord did not die to provide a man with the wretched heaven he may invent for himself, or accept invented for him by others; he died to give him life, and bring him to the heaven of the Father's peace; the children must share in the essential bliss of the Father and the Son. This is and has been the Father's work from the beginning—to bring us into the home of his heart, where he shares the glories of life with the Living One, in whom was born life to light men back to the original life. This is our destiny; and however a man may refuse, he will find it hard to fight with God—useless

to kick against the goads of his love. For the Father is goading him, or will goad him, if needful, into life by unrest and trouble; hell-fire will have its turn if less will not do: can any need it more than such as will neither enter the kingdom of heaven themselves, nor suffer them to enter it that would? The old race of the Pharisees is by no means extinct; they were St Paul's great trouble, and are yet to be found in every religious community under the sun.

The one only thing truly to reconcile all differences is, to walk in the light. So St Paul teaches us in his epistle to the Philippians, the third chapter and sixteenth verse. After setting forth the loftiest idea of human endeavour in declaring the summit of his own aspiration, he says—not, 'This must be your endeavour also, or you cannot be saved;' but, 'If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless whereto we have already attained, let us walk by that same.' Observe what widest conceivable scope is given by the apostle to honest opinion, even in things of grandest import!—the one only essential point with him is, that whereto we have attained, what we have seen to be true, we walk by that. In such walking, and in such walking only, love will grow, truth will grow; the soul, then first in its genuine element and true relation towards God, will see into reality that was before but a blank to it; and he who has promised to teach, will teach abundantly. Faster and faster will the glory of the Lord dawn upon the hearts and minds of his people so walking—then his people indeed; fast and far will the knowledge of him spread, for truth of action, both preceding and following truth of word, will prepare the way before him. The man walking in that whereto he has attained, will be able to think aright; the man who does not think right, is unable because he has not been walking right; only when he begins to do the thing he knows, does he begin to be able to think aright; then God comes to him in a new and higher way, and works along with the spirit he has created. The soul, without its heaven above its head, without its life-breath around it, without its love-treasure in its heart, without its origin one with it and bound up in it, without its true self and originating life, cannot think to any real purpose—nor ever would to all eternity. When man joins with God, then is all impotence and discord cast out. Until then, there can be but jar; God is in contest with the gates of hell that open in the man, and can but hold his own; when the man joins him, then is Satan foiled. For then first nature receives her necessity: no such necessity has she as this law of all laws—that God and man are one. Until they begin to be one in the reality as in the divine idea, in the flower as in the root, in the finishing as in the issuing creation, nothing can go right with the man, and God can have no rest from his labour in him. As the greatest orbs in heaven are drawn by the least, God himself must be held in divine disquiet until every one of his family be brought home to his heart, to be one with him in a unity too absolute, profound, far-reaching, fine, and intense, to be understood by any but the God from whom it comes, yet to be guessed at by the soul from the unspeakableness of its delight when at length it is with the only that can be its own, the one that it can possess, the one that can possess it. For God is the heritage of the soul in the ownness of origin; man

is the offspring of his making will, of his life; God himself is his birthplace; God is the self that makes the soul able to say I too, I myself. This absolute unspeakable bliss of the creature is that for which the Son died, for which the Father suffered with him. Then only is life itself; then only is it right, is it one; then only is it as designed and necessitated by the eternal life-outgiving Life.

Whereto then we have attained let us walk by that same!

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