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**Expositions of  
Holy Scripture:  
St John Chs. XV  
to XXI**

**Alexander Maclaren**



## Expositions of Holy Scripture: St John Chs. XV to XXI

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**Author(s):** Maclaren, Alexander (1826-1910)

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**Description:** Called the "prince of expositors," Alexander MacLaren was a renowned preacher of the 19th and 20th century. *Expositions of Holy Scripture* brings together many of the sermons over his fifty years in ministry. Although it discusses many different books and passages of the Bible, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* isn't a commentary in the fullest sense--for example, MacLaren doesn't comment on every verse. Rather, these volumes are MacLaren's powerful sermons, arranged by the text of the sermons. Broadly evangelical in nature, MacLaren's sermons are not historical--rarely referring to the current events of his day--allowing them to retain their interest and power since he first gave them. *Expositions of Holy Scriptures* is thus highly practical and lively. It makes a wonderful companion to more textually oriented commentaries. To read *Expositions of Holy Scripture* is to be in the presence of one of the greatest preachers of the last few centuries.

Tim Perrine

CCEL Staff Writer

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**EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE**

**ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.**

**ST. JOHN**  
**Chaps. XV to XXI**

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## THE TRUE VINE

‘I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.’—[JOHN xv. 14](#).

WHAT suggested this lovely parable of the vine and the branches is equally unimportant and undiscoverable. Many guesses have been made, and, no doubt, as was the case with almost all our Lord’s parables, some external object gave occasion for it. It is a significant token of our Lord’s calm collectedness, even at that supreme and heart-shaking moment, that He should have been at leisure to observe, and to use for His purposes of teaching, something that was present at the instant. The deep and solemn lessons which He draws, perhaps from some vine by the wayside, are the richest and sweetest clusters that the vine has ever grown. The great truth in this chapter, applied in manifold directions, and viewed in many aspects, is that of the living union between Christ and those who believe on Him, and the parable of the vine and the branches affords the foundation for all which follows.

We take the first half of that parable now. It is somewhat difficult to trace the course of thought in it, but there seems to be, first of all, the similitude set forth, without explanation or interpretation, in its most general terms, and then various aspects in which its applications to Christian duty are taken up and reiterated, I simply follow the words which I have read for my text.

I. We have then, first, the Vine in the vital unity of all its parts.

‘I am the True Vine,’ of which the material one to which He perhaps points, is but a shadow and an emblem. The reality lies in Him. We shall best understand the deep significance and beauty of this thought if we recur in imagination to some of those great vines which we sometimes see in royal conservatories, where for hundred of yards the pliant branches stretch along the espaliers, and yet one life pervades the whole, from the root, through the crooked stem, right away to the last leaf at the top of the farthest branch, and reddens and mellows every cluster, ‘So,’ says Christ, ‘between Me and the totality of them that hold by Me in faith there is one life, passing ever from root through branches, and ever bearing fruit.’

Let me remind you that this great thought of the unity of life between Jesus Christ and all that believe upon Him is the familiar teaching of Scripture, and is set forth by other emblems besides that of the vine, the queen of the vegetable world; for we have it in the metaphor of the body and its members, where not only are the many members declared to be parts of one body, but the name of the collective body, made up of many members, is Christ. ‘So also is’—not as we might expect, ‘the Church,’ but—‘Christ,’ the whole bearing the name

of Him who is the Source of life to every part. Personality remains, individuality remains: I am I, and He is He, and thou art thou; but across the awful gulf of individual consciousness which parts us from one another, Jesus Christ assumes the Divine prerogative of passing and joining Himself to each of us, if we love Him and trust Him, in a union so close, and with a communication of life so real, that every other union which we know is but a faint and far-off adumbration of it. A oneness of life from root to branch, which is the sole cause of fruitfulness and growth, is taught us here.

And then let me remind you that that living unity between Jesus Christ and all who love Him is a oneness which necessarily results in oneness of relation to God and men, in oneness of character, and in oneness of destiny. In relation to God, He is the Son, and we in Him receive the standing of sons. He has access ever into the Father's presence, and we through Him and in Him have access with confidence and are accepted in the Beloved. In relation to men, since He is Light, we, touched with His light, are also, in our measure and degree, the lights of the world; and in the proportion in which we receive into our souls, by patient abiding in Jesus Christ, the very power of His Spirit, we, too, become God's anointed, subordinately but truly His messiahs, for He Himself says: 'As the Father hath sent Me, even so I send you.'

In regard to character, the living union between Christ and His members results in a similarity if not identity of character, and with His righteousness we are clothed, and by that righteousness we are justified, and by that righteousness we are sanctified. The oneness between Christ and His children is the ground at once of their forgiveness and acceptance, and of all virtue and nobleness of life and conduct that can ever be theirs.

And, in like manner, we can look forward and be sure that we are so closely joined with Him, if we love Him and trust Him, that it is impossible but that where He is there shall also His servants be; and that what He is that shall also His servants be. For the oneness of life, by which we are delivered from the bondage of corruption and the law of sin and death here, will never halt nor cease until it brings us into the unity of His glory, 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' And as He sits on the Father's throne, His children must needs sit with Him, on His throne.

Therefore the name of the collective whole, of which the individual Christian is part, is Christ. And as in the great Old Testament prophecy of the Servant of the Lord, the figure that rises before Isaiah's vision fluctuates between that which is clearly the collective Israel and that which is, as clearly, the personal Messiah; so the 'Christ' is not only the individual Redeemer who bears the body of the flesh literally here upon earth, but the whole of that redeemed Church, of which it is said, 'It is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.'

II. Now note, secondly, the Husbandman, and the dressing of the vine.

The one tool that a vinedresser needs is a knife. The chief secret of culture is merciless pruning. And so says my text, 'The Father is the Husbandman.' Our Lord assumes that office in other of His parables. But here the exigencies of the parabolic form require that the office of Cultivator should be assigned only to the Father; although we are not to forget that the Father, in that office, works through and in His Son.

But we should note that the one kind of husbandry spoken of here is pruning—not manuring, not digging, but simply the hacking away of all that is rank and all that is dead.

Were you ever in a greenhouse or in a vineyard at the season of cutting back the vines? What flagitious waste it would seem to an ignorant person to see scattered on the floor the bright green leaves and the incipient clusters, and to look up at the bare stem, bleeding at a hundred points from the sharp steel. Yes! But there was not a random stroke in it all, and there was nothing cut away which it was not loss to keep and gain to lose; and it was all done artistically, scientifically, for a set purpose—that the plant might bring forth more fruit.

Thus, says Christ, the main thing that is needed—not, indeed, to improve the life in the branches, but to improve the branches in which the life is—is excision. There are two forms of it given here—absolutely dead wood has to be cut out; wood that has life in it, but which has also rank shoots, that do not come from the all-pervading and hallowed life, has to be pruned back and deprived of its shoots.

It seems to me that the very language of the metaphor before us requires us to interpret the fruitless branches as meaning all those who have a mere superficial, external adherence to the True Vine. For, according to the whole teaching of the parable, if there be any real union, there will be some life, and if there be any life, there will be some fruit, and, therefore, the branch that has no fruit has no life, because it has no real union. And so the application, as I take it, is necessarily to those professing Christians, nominal adherents to Christianity or to Christ's Church, people that come to church and chapel, and if you ask them to put down in the census paper what they are, will say that they are Christians—Churchmen or Dissenters, as the case may be—but who have no real hold upon Jesus Christ, and no real reception of anything from Him; and the 'taking away' is simply that, somehow or other, God makes visible, what is a fact, that they do not belong to Him with whom they have this nominal connection.

The longer Christianity continues in any country, the more does the Church get weighted and lowered in its temperature by the aggregation round about it of people of that sort. And one sometimes longs and prays for a storm to come, of some sort or other, to blow the dead wood out of the tree, and to get rid of all this oppressive and stifling weight of sham Christians that has come round every one of our churches. 'His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor,' and every man that has any reality of Christian life in him should pray that this pruning and cutting out of the dead wood may be done, and that He would 'come as a refiner's fire and purify' His priesthood.

Then there is the other side, the pruning of the fruitful branches. We all, in our Christian life, carry with us the two natures—our own poor miserable selves, and the better life of Jesus Christ within us. The one flourishes at the expense of the other; and it is the Husbandman's merciful, though painful work, to cut back unsparingly the rank shoots that come from self, in order that all the force of our lives may be flung into the growing of the cluster which is acceptable to Him.

So, dear friends, let us understand the meaning of all that comes to us. The knife is sharp and the tendrils bleed, and things that seem very beautiful and very precious are unsparingly shorn away, and we are left bare, and, as it seems to ourselves, impoverished. But Oh! it is all sent that we may fling our force into the production of fruit unto God. And no stroke will be a stroke too many or too deep if it helps us to that. Only let us take care that we do not let regrets for the vanished good harm us just as much as joy in the present good did, and let us rather, in humble submission of will to His merciful knife, say to Him, 'Cut to the quick, Lord, if only thereby my fruit unto Thee may increase.'

III. Lastly, we have here the branches abiding in the Vine, and therefore fruitful.

Our Lord deals with the little group of His disciples as incipiently and imperfectly, but really, cleansed through 'the word which He has spoken to them,' and gives them His exhortation towards that conduct through which the cleansing and the union and the fruitfulness will all be secured. 'Now ye are clean: abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me.'

Union with Christ is the condition of all fruitfulness. There may be plenty of activity and yet barrenness. Works are not fruit. We can bring forth a great deal 'of ourselves,' and because it is of ourselves it is nought. Fruit is possible only on condition of union with Him. He is the productive source of it all.

There is the great glory and distinctive blessedness of the Gospel. Other teachers come to us and tell us how we ought to live, and give us laws, patterns and examples, reasons and motives for pure and noble lives. The Gospel comes and gives us life, if we will take it, and unfolds itself in us into all the virtues that we have to possess. What is the use of giving a man a copy if he cannot copy it? Morality comes and stands over the cripple, and says to him, 'Look here! This is how you ought to walk,' and he lies there, paralysed and crippled, after as before the exhibition of what graceful progression is. But Christianity comes and bends over him, and lays hold of his hand, and says, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk,' and his feet and ankle bones receive strength, and 'he leaps, and walks, and praises God.' Christ gives more than commandments, patterns, motives; He gives the power to live soberly, righteously, and godly, and in Him alone is that power to be found.

Then note that our reception of that power depends upon our own efforts. 'Abide in Me and I in you.' Is that last clause a commandment as well as the first? How can His abiding in us be a duty incumbent upon us? But it is. And we might paraphrase the intention of this

imperative in its two halves, by—Do you take care that you abide in Christ, and that Christ abides in you. The two ideas are but two sides of the one great sphere; they complement and do not contradict each other. We dwell in Him as the part does in the whole, as the branch does in the vine, recipient of its life and fruit-bearing energy. He dwells in us as the whole does in the part, as the vine dwells in the branch, communicating its energy to every part; or as the soul does in the body, being alive equally in every part, though it be sight in the eyeball, and hearing in the ear, and colour in the cheek, and strength in the hand, and swiftness in the foot.

‘Abide in Me and I in you.’ So we come down to very plain, practical exhortations. Dear brethren, suppress yourselves, and empty your lives of self, that the life of Christ may come in. A lock upon a canal, if it is empty, will have its gates pressed open by the water in the canal and will be filled. Empty the heart and Christ will come in. ‘Abide in Him’ by continual direction of thought, love, desire to Him; by continual and reiterated submission of the will to Him, as commanding and as appointing; by the honest reference to Him of daily life and all petty duties which otherwise distract us and draw us away from Him. Then, dwelling in Him we shall share in His life, and shall bring forth fruit to His praise.

Here is encouragement for us all. To all of us, sometimes, our lives seem barren and poor; and we feel as if we had brought forth no fruit to perfection. Let us get nearer to Him and He will see to the fruit. Some poor stranded sea-creature on the beach, vainly floundering in the pools, is at the point of death; but the great tide comes, leaping and rushing over the sands, and bears it away out into the middle deeps for renewed activity and joyous life. Let the flood of Christ’s life bear you on its bosom, and you will rejoice and expatiate therein.

Here is a lesson of solemn warning to professing Christians. The lofty mysticism and inward life in Jesus Christ all terminate at last in simple, practical obedience; and the fruit is the test of the life. ‘Depart from Me, I never knew you, ye that work iniquity.’

And here is a lesson of solemn appeal to us all. Our only opportunity of bearing any fruit worthy of our natures and of God’s purpose concerning us is by vital union with Jesus Christ. If we have not that, there may be plenty of activity and mountains of work in our lives, but there will be no fruit. Only that is fruit which pleases God and is conformed to His purpose concerning us, and all the rest of our busy doings is no more the fruit a man should bear than cankers are roses, or than oak-galls are acorns. They are but the work of a creeping grub, and diseased excrescences that suck into themselves the juices that should swell the fruit. Open your hearts to Christ and let His life and His Spirit come into you, and then you will have ‘your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.’

## THE TRUE BRANCHES OF THE TRUE VINE

‘I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples.’—[JOHN xv. 5-8](#).

No wise teacher is ever afraid of repeating himself. The average mind requires the reiteration of truth before it can make that truth its own. One coat of paint is not enough, it soon rubs off. Especially is this true in regard to lofty spiritual and religious truth, remote from men’s ordinary thinkings, and in some senses unwelcome to them. So our Lord, the great Teacher, never shrank from repeating His lessons when He saw that they were but partially apprehended. It was not grievous to Him to ‘say the same things,’ because for them it was safe. He broke the bread of life into small pieces, and fed them little and often.

So here, in the verses that we have to consider now, we have the repetition, and yet not the mere repetition, of the great parable of the vine, as teaching the union of Christians with Christ, and their consequent fruitfulness. He saw, no doubt, that the truth was but partially dawning upon His disciples’ minds. Therefore He said it all over again, with deepened meaning, following it out into new applications, presenting further consequences, and, above all, giving it a more sharp and definite personal application.

Are we any swifter scholars than these first ones were? Have we absorbed into our own thinking this truth so thoroughly and constantly, and wrought it out in our lives so completely, that we do not need to be reminded of it any more? Shall we not be wise if we faithfully listen to His repeated teachings?

The verses which I have read give us four aspects of this great truth of union with Jesus Christ; or of its converse, separation from Him. There is, first, the fruitfulness of union; second, the withering and destruction of separation; third, the satisfaction of desire which comes from abiding in Christ; and, lastly, the great, noble issue of fruitfulness, in God’s glory, and our own increasing discipleship. Now let me touch upon these briefly.

I. First, then, our Lord sets forth, with no mere repetition, the same broad idea which He has already been insisting upon—viz., that union with Him is sure to issue in fruitfulness. He repeats the theme, ‘I am the Vine’; but He points its application by the next clause, ‘Ye are the branches.’ That had been implied before, but it needed to be said more definitely. For are we not all too apt to think of religious truth as swinging *in vacuo* as it were, with no personal application to ourselves, and is not the one thing needful in regard to the truths which are most familiar to us, to bring them into close connection with our own personal life and experience?

'I am the Vine' is a general truth, with no clear personal application. 'Ye are the branches' brings each individual listener into connection with it. How many of us there are, as there are in every so-called Christian communion, that listen pleasedly, and, in a fitful sort of languid way, interestedly, to the most glorious and most solemn words that come from a preacher's lips, and never dream that what he has been saying has any bearing upon themselves! And the one thing that is most of all needed with people like some of you, who have been listening to the truth all your days, is that it should be sharpened to a point, and the conviction driven into you, that *you* have some personal concern in this great message. 'Ye are the branches' is the one side of that sharpening and making definite of the truth in its personal application, and the other side is, 'Thou art the man.' All preaching and religious teaching is toothless generality, utterly useless, unless we can manage somehow or other to force it through the wall of indifference and vague assent to a general proposition, with which 'Gospel-hardened hearers' surround themselves, and make them feel that the thing has got a point, and that the point is touching their own consciousness. 'Ye are the branches.'

Note next the great promise of fruitfulness. 'He that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.'

I need not repeat what I have said in former sermons as to the plain, practical duties which are included in that abiding in Christ, and Christ's consequent abiding in us. It means, on the part of professedly Christian people, a temper and tone of mind very far remote from the noisy, bustling distractions too common in our present Christianity. We want quiet, patient waiting within the veil. We want stillness of heart, brought about by our own distinct effort to put away from ourselves the strife of tongues and the pride of life. We want activity, no doubt, but we want a wise passiveness as its foundation.

'Think you, midst all this mighty sum  
Of things for ever speaking,  
That nothing of itself will come,  
But we must still be seeking?'

Get away into the 'secret place of the Most High,' and rise into a higher altitude and atmosphere than the region of work and effort; and sitting still with Christ, let His love and His power pour themselves into your hearts. 'Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee.' Get away from the jangling of politics, and empty controversies and busy distractions of daily duty. The harder our toil necessarily is, the more let us see to it that we keep a little cell within the central life where in silence we hold communion with the Master. 'Abide in Me and I in you.'

That is the way to be fruitful, rather than by efforts after individual acts of conformity and obedience, howsoever needful and precious these are. There is a deeper thing wanted



than these. The best way to secure Christian conduct is to cultivate communion with Christ. It is better to work at the increase of the central force than at the improvement of the circumferential manifestations of it. Get more of the sap into the branch, and there will be more fruit. Have more of the life of Christ in the soul, and the conduct and the speech will be more Christlike. We may cultivate individual graces at the expense of the harmony and beauty of the whole character. We may grow them artificially and they will be of little worth—by imitation of others, by special efforts after special excellence, rather than by general effort after the central improvement of our nature and therefore of our life. But the true way to influence conduct is to influence the springs of conduct; and to make a man's life better, the true way is to make the man better. First of all be, and then do; first of all receive, and then give forth; first of all draw near to Christ, and then there will be fruit to His praise. That is the Christian way of mending men, not tinkering at this, that, and the other individual excellence, but grasping the secret of total excellence in communion with Him.

Our Lord is here not merely laying down a law, but giving a promise, and putting his veracity into pawn for the fulfilment of it. 'If a man will keep near Me,' He says, 'he shall bear fruit.'

Notice that little word which now appears for the first time. 'He shall bear *much* fruit.' We are not to be content with a little fruit; a poor shrivelled bunch of grapes that are more like marbles than grapes, here and there, upon the half-nourished stem. The abiding in Him will produce a character rich in manifold graces. 'A little fruit' is not contemplated by Christ at all. God forbid that I should say that there is no possibility of union with Christ and a little fruit. Little union will have little fruit; but I would have you notice that the only two alternatives which come into Christ's view here are, on the one hand, 'no fruit,' and on the other hand, 'much fruit.' And I would ask why it is that the average Christian man of this generation bears only a berry or two here and there, like such as are left upon the vines after the vintage, when the promise is that if he will abide in Christ, he will bear much fruit?

This verse, setting forth the fruitfulness of union with Jesus, ends with the brief, solemn statement of the converse—the barrenness of separation—'Apart from Me' (not merely 'without,' as the Authorised Version has it) 'ye can do nothing.' *There* is the condemnation of all the busy life of men which is not lived in union with Jesus Christ. It is a long row of figures which, like some other long rows of algebraic symbols added up, amount just to *zero*. 'Without me, nothing.' All your busy life, when you come to sum it up, is made up of plus and minus quantities, which precisely balance each other, and the net result, unless you are in Christ, is just nothing; and on your gravestones the only right epitaph is a great round cypher. 'He did not do anything. There is nothing left of his toil; the whole thing has evaporated and disappeared.' That is life apart from Jesus Christ.

II. And so note, secondly, the withering and destruction following separation from Him.

Commentators tell us, I think a little prosaically, that when our Lord spoke, it was the time of pruning the vine in Palestine, and that, perhaps, as they went from the upper room to the garden, they might see in the valley, here and there, the fires that the labourers had kindled in the vineyards to burn the loppings of the vines. That does not matter. It is of more consequence to notice how the solemn thought of withering and destruction forces itself, so to speak, into these gracious words; and how, even at that moment, our Lord, in all His tenderness and pity, could not but let words of warning—grave, solemn, tragical—drop from His lips.

This generation does not like to hear them, for its conception of the Gospel is a thing with no minor notes in it, with no threatenings, a proclamation of a deliverance, and no proclamation of anything from which deliverance is needed—which is a strange kind of Gospel! But Jesus Christ could not speak about the blessedness of fruitfulness and the joy of life in Himself without speaking about its necessary converse, the awfulness of separation from Him, of barrenness, of withering, and of destruction.

Separation is withering. Did you ever see a hawthorn bough that children bring home from the woods, and stick in the grate; how in a day or two the little fresh green leaves all shrivel up and the white blossoms become brown and smell foul, and the only thing to be done with it is to fling it into the fire and get rid of it? 'And so,' says Jesus Christ, 'as long as a man holds on to Me and the sap comes into him, he will flourish, and as soon as the connection is broken, all that was so fair will begin to shrivel, and all that was green will grow brown and turn to dust, and all that was blossom will droop, and there will be no more fruit any more for ever.' Separate from Christ, the individual shrivels, and the possibilities of fair buds wither and set into no fruit, and no man is the man he might have been unless he holds by Jesus Christ and lets His life come into him.

And as for individuals, so for communities. The Church or the body of professing Christians that is separate from Jesus Christ dies to all noble life, to all high activity, to all Christlike conduct, and, being dead, rots.

Withering means destruction. The language of our text is a description of what befalls the actual branches of the literal vine; but it is made a representation of what befalls the individuals whom these branches represent, by that added clause, 'like a branch.' Look at the mysteriousness of the language. 'They gather them.' Who? 'They cast them into the fire.' Who have the tragic task of flinging the withered branches into some mysterious fire? All is left vague with unexplained awfulness. The solemn fact that the withering of manhood by separation from Jesus Christ requires, and ends in, the consuming of the withered, is all that we have here. We have to speak of it pityingly, with reticence, with terror, with tenderness, with awe lest it should be our fate.

But O, dear brethren! be on your guard against the tendency of the thinking of this generation, to paste a bit of blank paper over all the threatenings of the Bible, and to blot

out from its consciousness the grave issues that it holds forth. One of two things must befall the branch, either it is in the Vine or it gets into the fire. If we would avoid the fire let us see to it that we are in the Vine.

III. Thirdly, we have here the union with Christ as the condition of satisfied desires.

‘If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.’ Notice how our Lord varies His phraseology here, and instead of saying ‘I in you,’ says ‘My words in you.’ He is speaking about prayers, consequently the variation is natural. In fact, His abiding in us is largely the abiding of His words in us; or, to speak more accurately, the abiding of His words in us is largely the means of His abiding in us.

What is meant by Christ’s words abiding in us? Something a great deal more than the mere intellectual acceptance of them. Something very different from reading a verse of the Gospels of a morning before we go to our work, and forgetting all about it all the day long; something very different from coming in contact with Christian truth on a Sunday, when somebody else preaches to us what he has found in the Bible, and we take in a little of it. It means the whole of the conscious nature of a man being, so to speak, saturated with Christ’s words; his desires, his understanding, his affections, his will, all being steeped in these great truths which the Master spoke. Put a little bit of colouring matter into the fountain at its source, and you will have the stream dyed down its course for ever so far. See that Christ’s words be lodged in your inmost selves, by patient meditation upon them, by continual recurrence to them, and all your life will be glorified and flash into richness of colouring and beauty by their presence.

The main effect of such abiding of the Lord’s words in us which our Lord touches upon here is, that in such a case, if our whole inward nature is influenced by the continual operation upon it of the words of the Lord, then our desires will be granted. Do not so vulgarise and lower the nobleness and the loftiness of this great promise as to suppose that it only means—If you remember His words you will get anything you like. It means something a great deal better than that. It means that if Christ’s words are the substratum, so to speak, of your wishes, then your wishes will harmonise with His will, and so ‘ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.’

Christ loves us a great deal too well to give to our own foolish and selfish wills the keys of His treasure-house. The condition of our getting what we will is our willing what He desires; and unless our prayers are a great deal more the utterance of the submission of our wills to His than they are the attempt to impose ours upon Him, they will not be answered. We get our wishes when our wishes are moulded by His word.

IV. The last thought that is here is that this union and fruitfulness lead to the noble ends of glorifying God and increasing discipleship.

‘Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.’ Christ’s life was all for the glorifying of God. The lives which are ours in name—but being drawn from Him, in their

depths are much rather the life of Christ in us than our lives—will have the same end and the same issue.

Ah, dear brethren, we come here to a very sharp test for us all. I wonder how many of us there are, on whom men looking think more loftily of God and love Him better, and are drawn to Him by strange longings. How many of us are there about whom people will say, ‘There must be something in the religion that makes a man like that?’ How many of us are there, to look upon whom suggests to men that God, who can make such a man, must be infinitely sweet and lovely? And yet that is what we should all be—mirrors of the divine radiance, on which some eyes, that are too dim and sore to bear the light as it streams from the Sun, may look, and, beholding the reflection, may learn to love. Does God so shine in me that I lead men to magnify His name? If I am dwelling with Christ it will be so.

I shall not know it. ‘Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone’; but, in meek unconsciousness of the glory that rays from us, we may walk the earth, reflecting the light and making God known to our fellows.

And if thus we abide in Him and bear fruit we shall ‘be’ or (as the word might more accurately be rendered), we shall ‘*become* His disciples.’ The end of our discipleship is never reached on earth: we never so much *are* as we are in the process of *becoming*, His true followers and servants.

If we bear fruit because we are knit to Him, the fruit itself will help us to get nearer Him, and so to be more His disciples and more fruitful. Character produces conduct, but conduct rests on character, and strengthens the impulses from which it springs. And thus our action as Christian men and women will tell upon our inward lives as Christians, and the more our outward conduct is conformed to the pattern of Jesus Christ, the more shall we love Him in our inmost hearts. We ourselves shall eat of the fruit which we ourselves have borne to Him.

The alternatives are before us—in Christ, living and fruitful; out of Christ, barren, and destined to be burned. As the prophet says, ‘Will men take of the wood of the vine for any work?’ Vine-wood is worthless, its only use is to bear fruit; and if it does not do that, there is only one thing to be done with it, and that is, ‘They cast it into the fire, and it is burned.’

## ABIDING IN LOVE

‘As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye In My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.’—**JOHN xv. 9-11.**

The last of these verses shows that they are to be taken as a kind of conclusion of the great parable of the Vine and the branches, for it looks back and declares Christ’s purpose in His preceding utterances. The parable proper is ended, but the thoughts of it still linger in our Lord’s mind, and echo through His words, as the vibration of some great bell after the stroke has ceased. The main thoughts of the parable were these two, that participation in Christ’s life was the source of all good, and that abiding in Him was the means of participation in His life. And these same thoughts, though modified in their form, and free from the parabolical element, appear in the words that we have to consider on this occasion. The parable spoke about abiding in Christ; our text defines that abiding, and makes it still more tender and gracious by substituting for it, ‘abiding in His love.’ The parable spoke of conduct as ‘fruit,’ the effortless result of communion with Jesus. Our text speaks of it with more emphasis laid on the human side, as ‘keeping the commandments.’ The parable told us that abiding in Christ was the condition of bearing fruit. Our text tells us the converse, which is also true, that bearing fruit, or keeping the commandments, is the condition of abiding in Christ. So our Lord takes His thought, as it were, and turns it round before us, letting us see both sides of it, and then tells us that He does all this for one purpose, which in itself is a token of His love, namely, that our hearts may be filled with perfect and perennial joy, a drop from the fountain of His own.

These three verses have three words which may be taken as their key-notes—love, obedience, joy. We shall look at them in that order.

I. First, then, we have here the love in which it is our sweet duty to abide. ‘As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My love.’

What shall we say about these mysterious and profound first words of this verse? They carry us into the very depths of divinity, and suggest for us that wonderful analogy between the relation of the Father to the Son, and that of the Son to His disciples, which appears over and over again in the solemnities of these last hours and words of Jesus. Christ here claims to be, in a unique and solitary fashion, the Object of the Father’s love, and He claims to be able to love like God. ‘As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you’; as deeply, as purely, as fully, as eternally, and with all the unnameable perfectnesses which must belong to the divine affection, does Christ declare that He loves us.

I know not whether the majesty and uniqueness of His nature stand out more clearly in the one or in the other of these two assertions. As beloved of God, and as loving like God,

He equally claims for Himself a place which none other can fill, and declares that the love which falls on us from His pierced and bleeding heart is really the love of God.

In this mysterious, awful, tender, perfect affection He exhorts us to abide. That comes yet closer to our hearts than the other phrase of which it is the modification, and in some sense the explanation. The command to abide in Him suggests much that is blessed, but to have all that mysterious abiding in Him resolved into abiding in His love is infinitely tenderer, and draws us still closer to Himself. Obviously, what is meant is not our continuance in the attitude of love to Him, but rather our continuance in the sweet and sacred atmosphere of His love to us. For the connection between the two halves of the verse necessarily requires that the love in which we are to abide should be identical with the love which had been previously spoken of, and *that* is clearly His love to us, and not ours to Him. But then, on the other hand, whosoever thus abides in Christ's love to Him will echo it back again, in an equally continuous love to Him. So that the two things flow together, and to abide in the conscious possession of Christ's love to me is the certain and inseparable cause of its effect, my abiding in the continual exercise and outgoing of my love to Him.

Now note that this continuance in Christ's love is a thing in our power, since it is commanded. Although it is His affection to us of which my text primarily speaks, I can so modify and regulate the flow of that divine love to my heart that it becomes my duty to continue in Christ's love to me.

What a quiet, blessed home that is for us! The image, I suppose, that underlies all this sweet speech in these last hours, about dwelling in Christ, in His joy, in His words, in His peace, and the like, is that of some safe house, into which going, we may be secure. And what sorrow or care or trouble or temptation would be able to reach us if we were folded in the protection of that strong love, and always felt that it was the fortress into which we might continually resort? They who make their abode there, and dwell behind those firm bastions, need fear no foes, but are lifted high above them all. 'Abide in My love,' for they who dwell within the clefts of that Rock need none other defence; and they to whom the riven heart of Christ is the place of their abode are safe, whatsoever befalls. 'As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My love.'

II. Now note, secondly, the obedience by which we continue in Christ's love.

The analogy, on which He has already touched, is still continued. 'If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.' Note that Christ here claims for Himself absolute and unbroken conformity with the Father's will, and consequent uninterrupted and complete communion with the Father's love. It is the utterance of a nature conscious of no sin, of a humanity that never knew one instant's film of separation, howsoever thin, howsoever brief, between Him and the Father. No more tremendous words were ever spoken than these quiet ones in which Jesus Christ declares that never, all His life long, had there been the smallest deflection or

want of conformity between the Father's will and *His* desires and doings, and that never had there been one grain of dust, as it were, between the two polished plates which adhered so closely in inseparable union of harmony and love.

And then notice, still further, how Christ here, with His consciousness of perfect obedience and communion, intercepts *our* obedience and diverts it to Himself. He does not say, 'Obey God as I have done, and He will love you'; but He says, 'Obey *Me* as I obey God, and *I* will love you.' Who is this that thus comes between the child's heart and the Father's? Does He come *between* when He stands thus? or does He rather lead us up to the Father, and to a share in His own filial obedience?

He further assures us that, by keeping His commandments, we shall continue in that sweet home and safe stronghold of His love. Of course the keeping of the commandments is something more than mere outward conformity by action. It is the inward harmony of will, and the bowing of the whole nature. It is, in fact, the same thing (though considered under a different aspect, and from a somewhat different point of view), as He has already been speaking about as the 'fruit' of the vine, by the bearing of which the Father is glorified. And this obedience, the obedience of the hands because the heart obeys, and does so because it loves, the bowing of the will in glad submission to the loved and holy will of the heavens—this obedience is the condition of our continuing in Christ's love.

He will love us better, the more we obey His commandments, for although His tender heart is charged towards all, even the disobedient, with the love of pity and of desire to help, He cannot but feel a growing thrill of satisfied and gratified affection towards us, in the measure in which we become like Himself. The love that wept over us, when we were enemies, will 'rejoice over us with singing,' when we are friends. The love that sought the sheep when it was wandering will pour itself yet more tenderly and with selector gifts upon it when it follows in the footsteps of the flock, and keeps close at the heels of the Good Shepherd. 'If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love,' so we will put nothing between us and Him which will make it impossible for the tenderest tenderness of that holy love to come to your hearts.

The obedience which we render for love's sake will make us more capable of receiving, and more blessedly conscious of possessing, the love of Jesus Christ. The lightest cloud before the sun will prevent it from focussing its rays to a burning point on the convex glass. And the small, thin, fleeting, scarcely visible acts of self-will that sometimes pass across our skies will prevent our feeling the warmth of that love upon our shrouded hearts. Every known piece of rebellion against Christ will shatter all true enjoyment of His favour, unless we are hopeless hypocrites or self-deceived. The condition of knowing and feeling the warmth and blessedness of Christ's love to me is the honest submission of my nature to His commandments. You cannot rejoice in Jesus Christ unless you do His will. You will have no real comfort and blessedness in your religion unless it works itself out in your daily lives. That

is why so many of you know nothing, or next to nothing, about the joy of Christ's felt presence, because you do not, for all your professions, hourly and momentarily regulate and submit your wills to His commandments. Do what He wants, and do it because He wants it, if you wish that His love should fill your hearts.

And, further, we shall continue in His love by obedience, inasmuch as every emotion which finds expression in our daily life is strengthened by the fact that it is expressed. The love which works is love which grows, and the tree that bears fruit is the tree that is healthy and increases. So note how all these deepest things of Christian teaching come at last to a plain piece of practical duty. We talk about the mysticism of John's Gospel, about the depth of these last sayings of Jesus Christ. Yes! they are mystical, they are deep—unfathomably deep, thank God!—but connected by the shortest possible road with the plainest possible duties. 'Let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous.' It is of no use to talk about communion with Jesus Christ, and abiding in Him, in possession of His love, and all those other properly mystical sides of Christian experience, unless you verify them for yourselves by the plain way of practice. Doing as Christ bids us, and doing that habitually, and doing it gladly, then, and only then, are we in no danger of losing ourselves on the heights, or of forgetting that Christ's mission has for its last result the influencing of character and of conduct. 'If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.'

III. Lastly, note the joy which follows on this practical obedience. 'These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain,' (or 'might be') 'in you, and that your joy might be full.'

'My joy might be in you'—a strange time to talk of His 'joy.' In half an hour he would be in Gethsemane, and we know what happened there. Was Christ a joyful man? He was a 'Man of sorrows' but one of the old Psalms says, 'Thou hast loved righteousness . . . therefore God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.' The deep truth that lies there is the same that He here claims as being fulfilled in His own experience, that absolute surrender and submission in love to the beloved commands of a loving Father made Him—in spite of sorrows, in spite of the baptism with which He was baptized, in spite of all the burden and the weight of our sins—the most joyful of men.

This joy He offers to us, a joy coming from perfect obedience, a joy coming from a surrender of self at the bidding of love, to a love that to us seems absolutely good and sweet. There is no joy that humanity is capable of to compare for a moment with that bright, warm, continuous sunshine which floods the soul, that is freed from all the clouds and mists of self and the darkness of sin. Self-sacrifice at the bidding of Jesus Christ is the recipe for the highest, the most exquisite, the most godlike gladnesses of which the human heart is capable. Our joy will remain if His joy is ours. Then our joy will be, up to the measure of its capacity, ennobled, and filled, and progressive, advancing ever towards a fuller possession of His joy,



and a deeper calm of that pure and perennial rapture, which makes the settled and celestial bliss of those who have ‘entered into the joy of their Lord.’

Brother! there is only one gladness that is worth calling so—and that is, that which comes to us, when we give ourselves utterly away to Jesus Christ, and let Him do with us as He will. It is better to have a joy that is central and perennial—though there may be, as there will be, a surface of sorrow and care—than to have the converse, a surface of joy, and a black, unsympathetic kernel of aching unrest and sadness. In one or other of these two states we all live. Either we have to say, ‘as sorrowful yet always rejoicing’ or we have to feel that ‘even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.’ Let us choose for ourselves, and let us choose aright, the gladness which coils round the heart, and endures for ever, and is found in submission to Jesus Christ, rather than the superficial, fleeting joys which are rooted on earth and perish with time.

## THE ONENESS OF THE BRANCHES

‘This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.’—[JOHN xv. 12, 13](#).

The union between Christ and His disciples has been tenderly set forth in the parable of the Vine and the branches. We now turn to the union between the disciples, which is the consequence of their common union to the Lord. The branches are parts of one whole, and necessarily bear a relation to each other. We may modify for our present purpose the analogous statement of the Apostle in reference to the Lord’s Supper, and as He says, ‘We being many, are one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread,’ so we may say—The branches, being many, are one Vine, for they are all partakers of that one Vine. Of this union amongst the branches, which results from their common inherence in the Vine, the natural expression and manifestation is the mutual love, which Christ here gives as *the* commandment, and commends to us all by His own solemn example.

There are four things suggested to me by the words of our text—the Obligation, the Sufficiency, the Pattern, and the Motive, of Christian love.

I. First, the Obligation of love.

The two ideas of commandment and love do not go well together. You cannot pump up love to order, and if you try you generally produce, what we see in abundance in the world and in the Church, sentimental hypocrisy, hollow and unreal. But whilst that is true, and whilst it seems strange to say that we are commanded to love, still we can do a great deal, directly and indirectly, for the cultivation and strengthening of any emotion. We can either cast ourselves into the attitude which is favourable or unfavourable to it. We can either look at the facts which will create it or at those who will check it. We can go about with a sharp eye for the lovable or for the unlovable in man. We can either consciously war against or lazily acquiesce in our own predominant self-absorption and selfishness. And in these and in a number of other ways, our feelings towards other Christian people are very largely under our own control, and therefore are fitting subjects for commandment.

Our Lord lays down the obligation which devolves upon all Christian people, of cherishing a kindly and loving regard to all others who find their place within the charmed circle of His Church. It is an obligation because He commands it. He puts Himself here in the position of the absolute Lawgiver, who has the right of entire and authoritative control over men’s affections and hearts. And it is further obligatory because such an attitude is the only fitting expression of the mutual relation of Christian men, through their common relation to the Vine. If there be the one life-sap circling through all parts of the mighty whole, how anomalous and how contradictory it is that these parts should not be harmoniously concordant among themselves! However unlike any two Christian people are to each other in character, in culture, in circumstances, the bond that knits those who have the same relations

to Jesus Christ one to another is far deeper, far more real, and ought to be far closer, than the bond that knits either of them to the men or women to whom they are likeliest in all these other respects, and to whom they are unlike in this central one. Christian men! you are closer to every other Christian man, down in the depths of your being, however he may be differenced from you by things that are very hard to get over, than you are to the people that you like best, and love most, if they do not participate with you in this common love to Jesus Christ.

I dread talking mere sentiment about this matter, for there is perhaps no part of Christian duty which has been so vulgarised and pawed over by mere unctuous talk, as that of the fellowship that should subsist between all Christians. But I have one plain question to put,—Does anybody believe that the present condition of Christendom, and the relations to one another even of good Christian people in the various churches and communions of our own and of other lands, is the sort of thing that Jesus Christ meant, or is anything like a fair and adequate representation of the deep, essential unity that knits us all together?

We need far more to realise the fact that our emotions towards our brother Christians are not matters in which our own inclinations may have their way, but that there is a simple commandment given to us, and that we are bound to cherish love to every man who loves Jesus Christ. Never mind though he does not hold your theology; never mind though he be very ignorant and narrow as compared with you; never mind though your outlook on the world may be entirely unlike his. Never mind though you be a rich man and he a poor one, or you a poor one and he rich, which is just as hard to get over. Let all these secondary grounds of union and of separation be relegated to their proper subordinate place; and let us recognise this, that the children of one Father are brethren. And do not let it be possible that it shall be said, as so often has been said, and said truly, that 'brethren' in the Church means a great deal less than *brothers* in the world. Lift your eyes beyond the walls of the little sheepfold in which you live, and hearken to the bleating of the flocks away out yonder, and feel—'Other sheep He has which are not of this fold'; and recognise the solemn obligation of the commandment of love.

II. Note, secondly, the Sufficiency of love.

Our Lord has been speaking in a former verse about the keeping of His commandments. Now He gathers them all up into one. 'This is my commandment, that ye love one another' All duties to our fellows, and all duties to our brethren, are summed up in, or resolved into, this one germinal, encyclopaedical, all-comprehensive simplification of duty, into the one word 'love.'

Where the heart is right the conduct will be right. Love will soften the tones, will instinctively teach what we ought to be and do; will take the bitterness out of opposition and diversity, will make even rebuke, when needful, only a form of expressing itself. If the heart be right all else will be right; and if there be a deficiency of love nothing will be right. You cannot

help anybody except on condition of having an honest, beneficent, and benevolent regard towards him. You cannot do any man in the world any good unless there is a shoot of love in your heart towards him. You may pitch him benefits, and you will neither get nor deserve thanks for them; you may try to teach him, and your words will be hopeless and profitless. The one thing that is required to bind Christian men together is this common affection. That being there, everything will come. It is the germ out of which all is developed. As we read in that great chapter to the Corinthians—the lyric praise of Charity,—all kinds of blessing and sweetness and gladness come out of this, It is the central force which, being present, secures that all shall be right, which, being absent, ensures that all shall be wrong.

And is it not beautiful to see how Jesus Christ, leaving the little flock of His followers in the world, gave them no other instruction for their mutual relationship? He did not instruct them about institutions and organisations, about orders of the ministry and sacraments, or Church polity and the like. He knew that all these would come. His one commandment was, ‘Love one another,’ and that will make you wise. Love one another, and you will shape yourselves into the right forms. He knew that they needed no exhortations such as ecclesiastics would have put in the foreground. It was not worth while to talk to them about organisations and officers. These would come to them at the right time and in the right way. The ‘one thing needful’ was that they should be knit together as true participators of His life. Love was sufficient as their law and as their guide.

III. Note, further, the Pattern of love.

‘As I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.’ Christ sets Himself forward then, here and in this aspect, as He does in all aspects of human conduct and character, as being the realised Ideal of them all. And although the thought is a digression from my present purpose, I cannot but pause for a moment to reflect upon the strangeness of a man thus calmly saying to the whole world, ‘I am the embodiment of all that love ought to be. You cannot get beyond Me, nor have anything more pure, more deep, more self-sacrificing, more perfect, than the love which I have borne to you.’

But passing that, the pattern that He proposes for us is even more august than appears at first sight. For, if you remember, a verse or two before our Lord had said, ‘As the Father hath loved Me so I have loved you.’ Now He says, ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’ There stand the three, as it were, the Father, the Son, the disciple. The Son in the midst receives and transmits the Father’s love to the disciple, and the disciple is to love his fellows, in some deep and august sense, as the Father loved the Son. The divinest thing in God, and that in which men can be like God, is love. In all our other attitudes to Him we rather correspond than copy. His fullness is met by our emptiness, His giving by our reciprocity, His faithfulness by our faith, His command by our obedience, His light by our eye. But here it is not a case of correspondence only, but of similarity. My faith *answers* God’s gift to me,

but my love is *like* God's love. 'Be ye, therefore, imitators of God as beloved children'; and having received that love into your hearts, ray it out, 'and walk in love as God also hath loved us.'

But then our Lord here, in a very wonderful manner, sets forth the very central point of His work, even His death upon the Cross for us, as being the pattern to which our poor affection ought to aspire, and after which it must tend to be conformed. I need not remind you, I suppose, that our Lord here is not speaking of the propitiatory character of His death, nor of the issues which depend upon it, and upon it alone, viz., the redemption and salvation of the world. He is not speaking, either, of the peculiar and unique sense in which He lays down His life for us, His friends and brethren, as none other can do. He is speaking about it simply in its aspect of being a voluntary surrender, at the bidding of love, for the good of those whom He loved, and that, He tells us—that, and nothing else—is the true pattern and model towards which all our love is bound to tend and to aspire. That is to say, the heart of the love which He commands is self-sacrifice, reaching to death if death be needful. And no man loves as Christ would have him love who does not bear in his heart affection which has so conquered selfishness that, if need be, he is ready to die.

The expression of Christian life is not to be found in honeyed words, or the indolent indulgence in benevolent emotion, but in self-sacrifice, modelled after that of Christ's sacrificial death, which is imitable by us.

Brethren, it is a solemn obligation, which may well make us tremble, that is laid on us in these words, 'As I have loved you.' Calvary was less than twenty-four hours off, and He says to us, '*That* is your pattern!' Contrast our love at its height with His—a drop to an ocean, a poor little flickering rushlight held up beside the sun. My love, at its best, has so far conquered my selfishness that now and then I am ready to suffer a little inconvenience, to sacrifice a little leisure, to give away a little money, to spend a little dribble of sympathy upon the people who are its objects. Christ's love nailed Him to the Cross, and led Him down from the throne, and shut for a time the gates of the glory behind Him. And He says, 'That is your pattern!'

Oh, let us bow down and confess how His word, which commands us, puts us to shame, when we think of how miserably we have obeyed.

Remember, too, that the restriction which here seems to be cast around the flow of His love is not a restriction in reality, but rather a deepening of it. He says, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' But evidently He calls them so from His point of view, and as He sees them, not from their point of view, as they see Him—that is to say, He means by 'friends' not those who love Him, but those whom He loves. The 'friends' for whom He dies are the same persons as the Apostle, in his sweet variation upon the words of my text, has called by the opposite name, when He says that He died for His 'enemies.'

There is an old, wild ballad that tells of how a knight found, coiling round a tree in a dismal forest, a loathly dragon breathing out poison; and how, undeterred by its hideousness and foulness, he cast his arms round it and kissed it on the mouth. Three times he did it undisgusted, and at the third the shape changed into a fair lady, and he won his bride. Christ 'kisses with the kisses of His mouth' His enemies, and makes them His friends because He loves them. 'If He had never died for His enemies' says one of the old fathers, 'He would never have possessed His friends.' And so He teaches us here in what seems to be a restriction of the purpose of His death and the sweep of His love, that the way by which we are to meet even alienation and hostility is by pouring upon it the treasures of an unselfish, self-sacrificing affection which will conquer at the last.

Christ's death is the pattern for our lives as well as the hope of our hearts.

IV. Lastly, we have here by implication, though not by direct statement, the Motive of the love.

Surely that, too, is contained in the words, 'As I have loved you.' Christ's commandment of love is a new commandment, not so much because it is a revelation of a new duty, though it is the casting of an old duty into new prominence, as because it is not merely a revelation of an obligation, but the communication of power to fulfil it. The novelty of Christian morality lies here, that in its law there is a self-fulfilling force. We have not to look to one place for the knowledge of our duty, and somewhere else for the strength to do it, but both are given to us in the one thing, the gift of the dying Christ and His immortal love.

That love, received into our hearts, will conquer, and it alone will conquer, our selfishness. That love, received into our hearts, will mould, and it alone will mould, them into its own likeness. That love, received into our hearts, will knit, and it alone will knit, all those who participate in it into a common bond, sweet, deep, sacred, and all-victorious.

And so, brethren, if we would know the blessedness and the sweetness of victory over these miserable, selfish hearts of ours, and to walk in the liberty of love, we can only get it by keeping close to Jesus Christ. In any circle, the nearer the points of the circumference are to the centre, the closer they will necessarily be to one another. As we draw nearer, each for himself, to our Centre, we shall feel that we have approximated to all those who stand round the same centre, and draw from it the same life. In the early spring, when the wheat is green and young, and scarcely appears above the ground, it comes up in the lines in which it was sown, parted from one another and distinctly showing their separation and the furrows. But when the full corn in the ear waves on the autumn plain, all the lines and separations have disappeared, and there is one unbroken tract of sunny fruitfulness. And so when the life in Christ is low and feeble, His servants may be separated and drawn up in rigid lines of denominations, and churches, and sects; but as they grow the lines disappear. If to the churches of England to-day there came a sudden accession of knowledge of Christ, and of union with Him, the first thing that would go would be the wretched barriers that separate

us from one another. For if we have the life of Christ in any adequate measure in ourselves, we shall certainly have grown up above the fences behind which we began to grow, and shall be able to reach out to all that love the Lord Jesus Christ, and feel with thankfulness that we are one in Him.

## CHRIST'S FRIENDS

'Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.'—[JOHN xv. 14-17](#).

A wonderful word has just dropped from the Master's lips, when He spoke of laying down His life for His friends. He lingers on it as if the idea conveyed was too great and sweet to be taken in at once, and with soothing reiteration He assures the little group that they, even they, are His friends.

I have ventured to take these four verses for consideration now, although each of them, and each clause of them, might afford ample material for a discourse, because they have one common theme. They are a description of what Christ's friends are to Him, of what He is to them, and of what they should be to one another. So they are a little picture, in the sweetest form, of the reality, the blessedness, the obligations, of friendship with Christ.

I. Notice what Christ's friends do for Him.

'Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' In the former verse, 'friends' means chiefly those whom He loved. Here it means mainly those who love Him. They love Him because He loves them, of course; and the two sides of the one thought cannot be parted. But still in this verse the idea of friendship to Christ is looked at from the human side, and He tells His disciples that they are His lovers as well as beloved of Him, on condition of their doing whatsoever He commands them.

He lingers, as I said, on the idea itself. As if He would meet the doubts arising from the sense of unworthiness, and from some dim perception of how He towers above them, and their limitations, He reiterates, 'Wonderful as it is, you poor men, half-intelligent lovers of Mine, *you* are My friends, beloved of Me, and loving Me, if ye do whatsoever I command you.'

How wonderful that stooping love of His is, which condescends to array itself in the garments of ours! Every form of human love Christ lays His hand upon, and claims that He Himself exercises it in a transcendent degree. 'He that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.' That which is even sacred, the purest and most complete union that humanity is capable of—that, too, He consecrates; for even it, sacred as it is, is capable of a higher consecration, and, sweet as it is, receives a new sweetness when we think of 'the Bride, the Lamb's wife,' and remember the parables in which He speaks of the Marriage Supper of the Great King, and sets forth Himself as the Husband of humanity. And passing from that Holy of Holies out into this outer court, He



lays His hand, too, on that more common and familiar, and yet precious and sacred, thing—the bond of friendship. The Prince makes a friend of the beggar.

Even if we do not think more loftily of Jesus Christ than do those who regard Him simply as the perfection of humanity, is it not beautiful and wonderful that He should look with such eyes of beaming love on that handful of poor, ignorant fishermen, who knew Him so dimly, and say: 'I pass by all the wise and the mighty, all the lofty and noble, and My heart clings to you poor, insignificant people?' He stoops to make them His friends, and there are none so low but that they may be His.

This friendship lasts to-day. A peculiarity of Christianity is the strong personal tie of real love and intimacy which will bind men, to the end of time, to this Man that died nineteen hundred years ago. We look back into the wastes of antiquity: mighty names rise there that we reverence; there are great teachers from whom we have learned, and to whom, after a fashion, we are grateful. But what a gulf there is between us and the best and noblest of them! But here is a dead Man, who to-day is the Object of passionate attachment and a love deeper than life to millions of people, and will be till the end of time. There is nothing in the whole history of the world in the least like that strange bond which ties you and me to the Saviour, and the paradox of the Apostle remains a unique fact in the experience of humanity: 'Jesus Christ, whom, having not seen, ye love.' We stretch out our hands across the waste, silent centuries, and there, amidst the mists of oblivion, thickening round all other figures in the past, we touch the warm, throbbing heart of our Friend, who lives for ever, and for ever is near us. We here, nearly two millenniums after the words fell on the nightly air on the road to Gethsemane, have them coming direct to our hearts. A perpetual bond unites men with Christ to-day; and for us, as really as in that long-past Paschal night, is it true, 'Ye are My friends.'

There are no limitations in that friendship, no misconstructions in that heart, no alienation possible, no change to be feared. There is absolute rest for us there. Why should I be solitary if Jesus Christ is my Friend? Why should I fear if He walks by my side? Why should anything be burdensome if He lays it upon me and helps me to bear it? What is there in life that cannot be faced and borne—aye, and conquered,—if we have Him, as we all may have Him, for the Friend and the Home of our hearts?

But notice the condition, 'If ye do what I command you.' Note the singular blending of friendship and command, involving on our parts the cultivation of the two things which are not incompatible, absolute submission and closest friendship. He commands though He is Friend; though He commands He is Friend. The conditions that He lays down are the same which have already occupied our attention in former sermons of this series, and so may be touched very lightly. 'Ye are My friends if ye do the things which I command you,' may either correspond with His former saying, 'If a Man love Me he will keep My commandments,' or with His later one, which immediately precedes our text, 'If ye keep My command-

ments ye shall abide in My love.' For this is the relationship between love and obedience, in regard to Jesus Christ, that the love is the parent of the obedience, and the obedience is the guard and guarantee of the love. They who love will obey, they who obey will strengthen love by acting according to its dictates, and will be in a condition to feel and realise more the warmth of the rays that stream down upon them, and to send back more fully answering obedience from their hearts. Not in mere emotion, not in mere verbal expression, not in mere selfish realising of the blessings of His friendship, and not in mere mechanical, external acts of conformity, but in the flowing down and melting of the hard and obstinate iron will, at the warmth of His great love, is our love made perfect. The obedience, which is the child and the preserver of love, is something far deeper than the mere outward conformity with externally apprehended commandments. To submit is the expression of love, and love is deepened by submission.

II. Secondly, note what Christ does for His friends.

'Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth.' The slave may see what his lord does, but he does not know his purpose in his acts—'Theirs not to reason why.' In so far as the relation of master and servant goes, and still more in that of owner and slave, there is simple command on the one side and unintelligent obedience on the other. The command needs no explanation, and if the servant is in his master's confidence he is more than a servant. But, says Christ, 'I have called you friends'; and He had called them so before He now named them so. He had called them so in act, and He points to all His past relationship, and especially to the heart-outpourings of the Upper Room, as the proof that He had called them His friends, in the fact that whatsoever He had heard of the Father He had made known to them.

Jesus Christ, then, recognises the obligation of absolute frankness, and He will tell His friends everything that He can. When He tells them what He can, the voice of the Father speaks through the Son. Every one of Christ's friends stands nearer to God than did Moses at the door of the Tabernacle, when the wondering camp beheld him face to face with the blaze of the Shekinah glory, and dimly heard the thunderous utterances of God as He spake to him 'as a man speaks to his friend.' That was surface-speech compared with the divine depth and fullness of the communications which Jesus Christ deems Himself bound, and assumes Himself able, to make to them who love Him and whom He loves.

Of course to Christ's frankness there are limits. He will not pour out His treasures into vessels that will spill them; and as He Himself says in the subsequent part of this great discourse, 'I have many things to say unto you, but you are not able to carry them now.' His last word was, 'I have declared Thy name unto My brethren, and *will declare it.*' And though here He speaks as if His communication was perfect, we are to remember that it was necessarily conditioned by the power of reception on the part of the hearers, and that there was

much yet to be revealed of what God had whispered to Him, ere these men, that clustered round Him, could understand the message.

That frank speech is continued to-day. Jesus Christ recognises the obligation that binds Him to impart to each of us all that each of us is in our inmost spirits capable of receiving. By the light which He sheds on the Word, by many a suggestion through human lips, by many a blessed thought rising quietly within our hearts, and bearing the token that it comes from a sacred source than our poor, blundering minds, He still speaks to us, His friends.

Ought not that thought of the utter frankness of Jesus make us, for one thing, very patient, intellectually and spiritually, of the gaps that are left in His communications and in our knowledge? There are so many things that we sometimes think we should like to know, things about that dark future where some of our hearts live so constantly, things about the depths of His nature and the divine character, things about the relation between God's love and God's righteousness, things about the meaning of all this dreadful mystery in which we grope our way. These and a hundred other questionings suggest to us that it would have been so easy for Him to have lifted a little corner of the veil, and let a little more of the light shine out. He holds all in His hand. Why does He thus open one finger instead of the whole palm? Because He loves. A friend exercises the right of reticence as well as the prerogative of speech. And for all the gaps that are left, let us bow quietly and believe that if it had been better for us He would have spoken. 'If it were not so I would have told you.' 'Trust Me! I tell you all that it is good for you to receive.'

And that frankness may well teach us another lesson, viz., the obligation of keeping our ears open and our hearts prepared to receive the speech that does come from Him. Ah, brother! many a message from your Lord flits past you, like the idle wind through an archway, because you are not listening for His voice. If we kept down the noise of that 'household jar within'; if we silenced passion, ambition, selfishness, worldliness; if we withdrew ourselves, as we ought to do, from the Babel of this world, and 'hid ourselves in His pavilion from the strife of tongues'; if we took less of our religion out of books and from other people, and were more accustomed to 'dwell in the secret place of the Most High,' and to say, 'Speak, Friend! for Thy friend heareth,' we should more often understand how real to-day is the voice of Christ to them that love Him.

'Such rebounds the inward ear  
Catches often from afar;  
Listen, prize them, hold them dear,  
For of God—of God—they are.'

III. Thirdly, notice how Christ's friends come to be so, and why they are so. 'Ye have not chosen,' etc. ([verse 16](#)).

Our Lord refers here, no doubt, primarily to the little group of the Apostles; the choice and ordaining as well as 'the fruit that abides,' point, in the first place, to their apostolic office, and to the results of their apostolic labours. But we must widen out the words a great deal beyond that reference.

In all the cases of friendship between Christ and men, the origination and initiation come from Him. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' He has told us how, in His divine alchemy, He changes by the shedding of His blood our enmity into friendship. In the previous verse He has said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' And as I remarked in my last sermon, the friends here are the same as 'the enemies' for whom, the Apostle tells us that Christ laid down His life. Since He has thus by the blood of the Cross changed men's enmity into friendship, it is true universally that the amity between us and Christ comes entirely from Him.

But there is more than that in the words. I do not suppose that any man, whatever his theological notions and standpoint may be, who has felt the love of Christ in his own heart in however feeble a measure, but will say, as the Apostle said, 'I was apprehended of Christ.' It is because He lays His seeking and drawing hand upon us that we ever come to love Him, and it is true that His choice of us precedes our choice of Him, and that the Shepherd always comes to seek the sheep that is lost in the wilderness.

This, then, is how we come to be His friends; because, when we were enemies, He loved us, and gave Himself for us, and ever since has been sending out the ambassadors and the messengers of His love—or, rather, the rays and beams of it, which are parts of Himself—to draw us to His heart. And the purpose which all this forthgoing of Christ's initial and originating friendship has had in view, is set forth in words which I can only touch in the lightest possible manner. The intention is twofold. First, it respects service or fruit. 'That ye may go'; there is deep pathos and meaning in that word. He had been telling them that He was going; now He says to them, 'You are to go. We part here. My road lies upward; yours runs onward. Go into all the world.' He gives them a *quasi*-independent position; He declares the necessity of separation; He declares also the reality of union in the midst of the separation; He sends *them* out on their course with His benediction, as He does *us*. Wheresoever we go in obedience to His will, we carry the consciousness of His friendship.

'That ye may bring forth fruit'—He goes back for a moment to the sweet emblem with which this chapter begins, and recurs to the imagery of the vine and the fruit. 'Keeping His commandments' does not explain the whole process by which we do the things that are pleasing in His sight. We must also take this other metaphor of the bearing of fruit. Neither an effortless, instinctive bringing forth from the renewed nature and the Christlike disposition, nor a painful and strenuous effort at obedience to His law, describe the whole realities of Christian service. There must be the effort, for men do not grow Christlike in character as the vine grows its grapes; but there must also be, regulated and disciplined by the effort,

the inward life, for no mere outward obedience and tinkering at duties and commandments will produce the fruit that Christ desires and rejoices to have. First comes unity of life with Him; and then effort. Take care of modern teachings that do not recognise these two as both essential to the complete ideal of Christian service—the spontaneous fruit-bearing, and the strenuous effort after obedience.

‘That your fruit should remain’; nothing corrupts faster than fruit. There is only one kind of fruit that is permanent, incorruptible. The only life’s activity that outlasts life and the world is the activity of the men who obey Christ.

The other half of the issues of this friendship is the satisfying of our desires, ‘That whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He may give it you.’ We have already had substantially the same promise in previous parts of this discourse, and therefore I may deal with it very lightly. How comes it that it is certain that Christ’s friends, living close to Him and bearing fruit, will get what they want? Because what they want will be ‘in His name’—that is to say, in accordance with His disposition and will. Make your desires Christ’s, and Christ’s yours, and you will be satisfied.

IV. And now, lastly, for one moment, note the mutual friendship of Christ’s friends.

We have frequently had to consider that point—the relation of the friends of Christ to each other. ‘These things I command you, that ye love one another.’ This whole context is, as it were, enclosed within a golden circling by that commandment which appeared in a former verse, at the beginning of it, ‘This is My commandment, that ye love one another,’ and reappears here at the close, thus shutting off this portion from the rest of the discourse. Friends of a friend should themselves be friends. We care for the lifeless things that a dear friend has cared for; books, articles of use of various sorts. If these have been of interest to him, they are treasures and precious evermore to us. And here are living men and women, in all diversities of character and circumstances, but with this stamped upon them all—Christ’s friends, lovers of and loved by Him. And how can we be indifferent to those to whom Christ is not indifferent? We are knit together by that bond. We are but poor friends of that Master unless we feel that all which is dear to Him is dear to us. Let us feel the electric thrill which ought to pass through the whole linked circle, and let us beware that we slip not our hands from the grasp of the neighbour on either side, lest, parted from them, we should be isolated from Him, and lose some of the love which we fail to transmit.

## SHEEP AMONG WOLVES

‘If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also.’—[JOHN xv. 18-20](#).

These words strike a discord in the midst of the sweet music to which we have been listening. The key-note of all that has preceded has been love—the love of Christ’s friends to one another, and of all to Him, as an answer to His love to all. That love, which is one, whether it rise to Him or is diffused on the level of earth, is the result of that unity of life between the Vine and the branches, of which our Lord has been speaking such great and wonderful things. But that unity of life between Christians and Christ has another consequence than the spread of love. Just because it binds them to Him in a sacred community, it separates them from those who do not share in His life, and hence the ‘hate’ of our context is the shadow of ‘love’; and there result two communities—to use the much-abused words that designate them—the Church and ‘the World’; and the antagonism between these is deep, fundamental, and perpetual.

Unquestionably, our Lord is here speaking with special reference to the Apostles, who, in a very tragic sense, were ‘sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.’ If we may trust tradition, every one of that little company, Speaker as well as hearers, died a martyr’s death, with the exception of John himself, who was preserved from it by a miracle. But, be that as it may, our Lord is here laying down a universal statement of the permanent condition of things; and there is no more reason for restricting the force of these words to the original hearers of them than there is for restricting the force of any of the rest of this wonderful discourse. ‘The world’ will be in antagonism to the Church until the world ceases to be a world, because it obeys the King; and then, and not till then, will it cease to be hostile to His subjects.

### I. What makes this hostility inevitable?

Our Lord here prepares His hearers for what is coming by putting it in the gentle form of an hypothesis. The frequency with which ‘If’ occurs in this section is very remarkable. He will not startle them by the bare, naked statement which they, in that hour of depression and agitation, were so little able to endure, but He puts it in the shape of a ‘suppose that,’ not because there is any doubt, but in order to alleviate the pain of the impression which He desires to make. He says, ‘If the world hates,’ not ‘if the world hate’; and the tense of the original shows that, whilst the form of the statement is hypothetical, the substance of it is prophetic.

Jesus points to two things, as you will observe, which make this hostility inevitable. 'If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you.' And again, 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' The very language carries with it the implication of necessary and continual antagonism. For what is 'the world,' in this context, but the aggregate of men, who have no share in the love and life that flow from Jesus Christ? Necessarily they constitute a unity, whatever diversities there may be amongst them, and necessarily, that unity in its banded phalanx is in antagonism, in some measure, to those who constitute the other unity, which holds by Christ, and has been drawn by Him from 'out of the world.'

If we share Christ's life, we must, necessarily, in some measure, share His fate. It is the typical example of what the world thinks of, and does to, goodness. And all who have 'the Spirit of life which was in Jesus Christ' for the animating principle of their lives, will, just in the measure in which they possess it, come under the same influences which carried Him to the Cross. In a world like this, it is impossible for a man to 'love righteousness and hate iniquity,' and to order his life accordingly, without treading on somebody's corns; being a rebuke to the opposite course of conduct, either interfering with men's self-complacency or with their interests. From the beginning the blind world has repaid goodness by antagonism and contempt.

And then our Lord touches another, and yet closely-connected, cause when He speaks of His selecting the Apostles, and drawing them out of the world, as a reason for the world's hostility. There are two groups, and the fundamental principles that underlie each are in deadly antagonism. In the measure in which you and I are Christians we are in direct opposition to all the maxims which rule the world and make it a world. What we believe to be precious it regards as of no account. What we believe to be fundamental truth it passes by as of little importance. Much which we feel to be wrong it regards as good. Our jewels are its tinsel, and its jewels are our tinsel. We and it stand in diametrical opposition of thought about God, about self, about duty, about life, about death, about the future; and that opposition goes right down to the bottom of things. However it may be covered over, there is a gulf, as in some of those American canons: the towering cliffs may be very near—only a yard or two seems to separate them; but they go down for thousands and thousands of feet, and never are any nearer each other, and between them at the bottom a black, sullen river flows. 'If ye were of the world, the world would love its own.' If it loves you, it is because ye are of it.

II. And so note, secondly, how this hostility is masked and modified.

There are a great many other bonds that unite men together besides the bonds of religious life or their absence. There are the domestic ties, there are the associations of commerce and neighbourhood, there are surface identities of opinion about many important things.

The greater portion of our lives moves on this surface, where all men are alike. 'If you tickle us, do we not laugh; if you wound us, do we not bleed?' We have all the same affections and needs, pursue the same avocations, do the same sort of things, and a large portion of every one's life is under the dominion of habit and custom, and determined by external circumstances. So there is a film of roofing thrown over the gulf. You can make up a crack in a wall with plaster after a fashion, and it will hide the solution of continuity that lies beneath. But let bad weather come, and soon the bricks gape apart as before. And so, as soon as we get down below the surface of things and grapple with the real, deep-lying, and formative principles of a life, we come to antagonism, just as they used to come to it long ago, though the form of it has become quite different.

Then there are other causes modifying this hostility. The world has got a dash of Christianity into it since Jesus Christ spoke. We cannot say that it is half Christianised, but some of the issues and remoter consequences of Christianity have permeated the general conscience, and the ethics of the Gospel are largely diffused in such a land as this. Thus Christian men and others have, to a large extent, a common code of morality, as long as they keep on the surface; and they not only do a good many things exactly alike, but do a great many things from substantially the same motives, and have the same way of looking at much. Thus the gulf is partly bridged over; and the hostility takes another form. We do not wrap Christians in pitch and stick them up for candles in the Emperor's garden nowadays, but the same thing can be done in different ways. Newspaper articles, the light laugh of scorn, the whoop of exultation over the failures or faults of any prominent man that has stood out boldly on Christ's side; all these indicate what lies below the surface, and sometimes not so very far below. Many a young man in a Manchester warehouse, trying to live a godly life, many a workman at his bench, many a commercial traveller in the inn or on the road, many a student on the college benches, has to find out that there is a great gulf between him and the man who sits next to him, and that he cannot be faithful to his Lord, and at the same time, down to the depths of his being, a friend of one who has no friendship to his Master.

Still another fact masks the antagonism, and that is, that after all, the world, meaning thereby the aggregate of godless men, has a conscience that responds to goodness, though grumblingly and reluctantly. After all, men do know that it is better to be good, that it is better and wiser to be like Christ, that it is nobler to live for Him than for self, and that consciousness cannot but modify to some extent the manifestations of the hostility, but it is there all the same, and whosoever will be a Christian after Christ's pattern will find out that it is there.

Let a man for Christ's sake avow unpopular beliefs, let him try honestly to act out the New Testament, let him boldly seek to apply Christian principles to the fashionable and popular sins of his class or of his country, let him in any way be ahead of the conscience of



the majority, and what a chorus will be yelping at his heels! Dear brethren, the law still remains, 'If any man will be a friend of the world he is at enmity with God.'

III. Thirdly, note how you may escape the hostility.

A half-Christianised world and a more than half-secularised Church get on well together. 'When they do agree, their agreement is wonderful.' And it is a miserable thing to reflect that about the average Christianity of this generation there is so very little that does deserve the antagonism of the world. Why should the world care to hate or trouble itself about a professing Church, large parts of which are only a bit of the world under another name? There is no need whatever that there should be any antagonism at all between a godless world and hosts of professing Christians. If you want to escape the hostility drop your flag, button your coat over the badge that shows that you belong to Christ, and do the things that the people round about you do, and you will have a perfectly easy and undisturbed life.

Of course, in the bad old slavery days, a Christianity that had not a word to say about the sin of slave-holding ran no risk of being tarred and feathered. Of course a Christianity in Manchester that winks hard at commercial immoralities is very welcome on the Exchange. Of course a Christianity that lets beer barrels alone may reckon upon having publicans for its adherents. Of course a Christianity that blesses flags and sings *Te Deums* over victories will get its share of the spoil. Why should the world hate, or persecute, or do anything but despise a Christianity like that, any more than a man need to care for a tame tiger that has had its claws pared? If the world can put a hook in the nostrils of leviathan, and make him play with its maidens, it will substitute good-nature, half contemptuous, for the hostility which our Master here predicts. It was out-and-out Christians that He said the world would hate; the world likes Christians that are like itself. Christian men and women! be you sure that you deserve the hostility which my text predicts.

IV. And now, lastly, note how to meet this antagonism.

Reckon it as a sign and test of true union with Jesus Christ. And so, if ever, by reason of our passing at the call of duty or benevolence outside the circle of those who sympathise with our faith and fundamental ideas, we encounter it more manifestly than when we 'dwell among our own people,' let us count the 'reproach of Christ' as a treasure to be proud of, and to be guarded.

Be sure that it is your goodness and not your evils or your weakness, that men dislike. The world has a very keen eye for the inconsistencies and the faults of professing Christians, and it is a good thing that it has. The loftier your profession the sharper the judgment that is applied to you. Many well-meaning Christian people, by an injudicious use of Christian phraseology in the wrong place, and by the glaring contradiction between their prayers and their talks and their daily life, bring down a great deal of deserved hostility upon themselves and of discredit upon Christianity; and then they comfort themselves and say they are bearing the 'reproach of the Cross.' Not a bit of it! They are bearing the natural results of

their own failings and faults. And it is for us to see to it that what provokes, if it does provoke, hostile judgments and uncharitable criticisms, insulting speeches and sarcasms, and the sense of our belonging to another regiment and having other objects, is our cleaving to Jesus Christ, and not the imperfections and the sins with which we so often spoil that cleaving. Be you careful for this, that it is Christ in you that men turn from, and not you yourself and your weakness and sin.

Meet this antagonism by not dropping your standard one inch. Keep the flag right at the masthead. If you begin to haul it down, where are you going to stop? Nowhere, until you have got it dragging in the mud at the foot. It is of no use to try to conciliate by compromise. All that we shall gain by that will be, as I have said, indifference and contempt; all that we shall gain will be a loss to the cause. A great deal is said in this day, and many efforts are being made—I cannot but think mistaken efforts—by Christian people to bridge over this gulf in the wrong way—that is, by trying to make out that Christianity in its fundamental principles does approximate a great deal more closely to the things that the world goes by than it really does. It is all vain, and the only issue of it will be that we shall have a decaying Christianity and a dying spiritual life. Keep the flag up; emphasise and accentuate the things that the world disbelieves and denies, not pushing them to the ‘falsehood of extremes,’ but not by one jot diminishing the clearness of our testimony by reason of the world’s unwillingness to receive it. Our victory is to be won only through absolute faithfulness to Christ’s ideal.

And, lastly, meet hostility with unmoved, patient, Christlike, and Christ-derived love and sympathy. The patient sunshine pours upon the glaciers and melts the thick-ribbed ice at last into sweet water. The patient sunshine beats upon the mist-cloud and breaks up its edges and scatters it at the last. And our Lord here tells us that our experience, if we are faithful to Him, will be like His experience, in that some will hearken to our word though others will persecute, and to some our testimony will come as a message from God that draws them to the Lord Himself. These are our only weapons, brethren! The only conqueror of the world is the love that was in Christ breathed through us; the only victory over suspicion, contempt, alienation, is pleading, persistent, long-suffering, self-denying love. The only way to overcome the world’s hostility is by turning the world into a church, and that can only be done when Christ’s servants oppose pity to wrath, love to hate, and in the strength of His life who has won us all by the same process, seek to win the world for Him by the manifestation of His victorious love in our patient love.

Dear brethren, to which army do you belong? Which community is yours? Are you in Christ’s ranks, or are you in the world’s? Do you love Him back again, or do you meet His open heart with a closed one, and His hand, laden with blessings, with hands clenched in refusal? To which class do I belong?—it is the question of questions for us all; and I pray that you and I, won from our hatred by His love, and wooed out of our death by His life,

and made partakers of His life by His death, may yield our hearts to Him, and so pass from out of the hostility and mistrust of a godless world into the friendships and peace of the sheltering Vine. And then we 'shall esteem the reproach of Christ' if it fall upon our heads, in however modified and mild a form, 'greater riches than the treasures of Egypt,' and 'have respect unto the recompense of the reward.'

May it be so with us all!

## THE WORLD'S HATRED, AS CHRIST SAW IT

'But all these things will they do unto you for My name's sake, because they know not Him that sent Me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated Me without a cause.'—[JOHN xv. 21-25](#).

Our Lord has been speaking of the world's hostility to His followers, and tracing that to its hostility to Himself. In these solemn words of our text He goes still deeper, and parallels the relation which His disciples bear to Him and the consequent hostility that falls on them, with the relation which He bears to the Father and the consequent hostility that falls on Him: 'They hate you because they hate Me.' And then His words become sadder and pierce deeper, and with a tone of wounded love and disappointed effort and almost surprise at the world's requital to Him, He goes on to say, 'They hate Me, because they hate the Father.'

So, then, here we have, in very pathetic and solemn words, Christ's view of the relation of the world to Him and to God.

I. The first point that He signalises is the world's ignorance.

'These things they will do unto you,' and they will do them 'for My name's sake'; they will do them 'because they know not Him that sent Me.'

'The world,' in Christ's language, is the aggregate of godless men. Or, to put it a little more sharply, our Lord, in this context, gives in His full adhesion to that narrow view which divides those who have come under the influence of His truth into two portions. There is no mincing of the matter in the antithesis which Christ here draws; no hesitation, as if there were a great central mass, too bad for a blessing perhaps, but too good for a curse; which was neither black nor white, but neutral grey. No! however it may be with the masses beyond the reach of the dividing and revealing power of His truth, the men that come into contact with Him, like a heap of metal filings brought into contact with a magnet, mass themselves into two bunches, the one those who yield to the attraction, and the other those who do not. The one is 'My disciples,' and the other is 'the world.' And now, says Jesus Christ, all that mass that stands apart from Him, and, having looked upon Him with the superficial eye of those men round about Him at that day, or of the men who hear of Him now, have no real love to Him—have, as the underlying motive of their conduct and their feelings, a real ignorance of God, 'They know not Him that sent Me.'

Our Lord assumes that He is so completely the Copy and Revealer of the divine nature as that any man that looks upon Him has had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with God, and that any man who turns away from Him has lost that opportunity. The God that the men who do not love Jesus Christ believe in, is not the Father that sent Him. It is a

fragment, a distorted image tinted by the lens. The world has its conception of God; but outside of Jesus Christ and His manifestation of the whole divine nature, the world's God is but a syllable, a fragment, a broken part of the perfect completeness. 'The Father of an infinite majesty,' and of as infinite a tenderness, the stooping God, the pitying God, the forgiving God, the loving God is known only where Christ is accepted. In other hearts He may be dimly hoped for, in other hearts He may be half believed in, in other hearts He may be thought possible; but hopes and anticipations and fears and doubts are not knowledge, and they who see not the light in Christ see but the darkness. Out of Him God is not known, and they that turn away from His beneficent manifestation turn their faces to the black north, from which no sun can shine. Brother, do you know God in Christ? Unless you do, you do not know the God who is.

But there is a deeper meaning in that word than simply the possession of true thoughts concerning the divine nature. We know God as we know one another; because God is a Person, as we are persons, and the only way to know persons is through familiar acquaintance and sympathy. So the world which turns away from Christ has no acquaintance with God.

This is a surface fact. Our Lord goes on to show what lies below it.

II. His second thought here is—the world's ignorance in the face of Christ's light is worse than ignorance; it is sin.

Mark how He speaks: 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.' And then again: 'If I had not done amongst them the works which none other men did, they had not had sin.' So then He puts before us two forms of His manifestation of the divine nature, by His words and His works. Of these two He puts His words foremost, as being a deeper and more precious and brilliant revelation of what God is than are His miracles. The latter are subordinate, they come as a second source of illumination. Men who will not see the beauty and listen to the truth that lie in His word may perchance be led by His deed. But the word towers in its nature high above the work, and the miracle to the word is but like the picture in the child's book to the text, fit for feeble eyes and infantile judgments, but containing far less of the revelation of God than the sacred words which He speaks. First the words, next the miracles.

But notice, too, how decisively, and yet simply and humbly and sorrowfully, our Lord here makes a claim which, on the lips of any but Himself, would have been mere madness of presumption. Think of any of us saying that our words made all the difference between innocent ignorance and criminality! Think of any of us saying that to listen to us, and not be persuaded, was the sin of sins! Think of any of us pointing to our actions and saying, In these God is so manifest that not to see Him augurs wickedness, and is condemnation! And yet Jesus Christ says all this. And, what is more wonderful, nobody wonders that He says it, and the world believes that He is saying the truth when He says it.

How does that come? There is only one answer; only one. His words were the illuminating manifestation of God, and His deeds were the plain and unambiguous operation of the divine hand then and there, only because He Himself was divine, and in Him 'God was manifested in the flesh.'

But passing from that, notice how our Lord here declares that in comparison with the sin of not listening to His words, and being taught by His manifestation, all other sins dwindle into nothing. 'If I had not spoken, they had not had sin.' That does not mean, of course, that these men would have been clear of all moral delinquency; it does not mean that there would not have been amongst them crimes against their own consciences, crimes against the law written on their own hearts, crimes against the law of revelation. There were liars, impure men, selfish men, and men committing all the ordinary forms of human transgression amongst them. And yet, says Christ, black and bespattered as these natures are, they are white in comparison with the blackness of the man who, looking into His face, sees nothing there that he should desire. Beside the mountain belching out its sulphurous flame the little pimple of a molehill is nought. And so, says Christ, heaven heads the count of sins with this—unbelief in Me.

Ah, brother, as light grows responsibility grows, and this is the misery of all illumination that comes through Jesus Christ, that where it does not draw a man into His sweet love, and fill him with the knowledge of God which is eternal life, it darkens his nature and aggravates his condemnation, and lays a heavier burden upon his soul. The truth that the measure of light is the measure of guilt has many aspects. It turns a face of alleviation to the dark places of the earth; but just in the measure that it lightens the condemnation of the heathen, it adds weight to the condemnation of you men and women who are bathed in the light of Christianity, and all your days have had it streaming in upon you. The measure of the guilt is the brightness of the light. No shadows are so black as those which the intense sunshine of the tropics casts. And you and I live in the very tropical regions of divine revelation, and 'if we turn away from Him that spoke on earth and speaketh from heaven, of how much sorer punishment, think you, shall we be thought worthy' than those who live away out in the glimmering twilight of an unevangelised paganism, or who stood by the side of Jesus Christ when they had only His earthly life to teach them?

III. The ignorance which is sin is the manifestation of hatred.

Our Lord has sorrowfully contemplated the not knowing God, which in the blaze of His light can only come from wilful closing of the eyes, and is therefore the very sin of sins. But that, sad as it is, is not all which has to be said about that blindness of unbelief in Him. It indicates a rooted alienation of heart and mind and will from God, and is, in fact, the manifestation of an unconscious but real hatred. It is an awful saying, and one which the lips 'into which grace was poured' could not pronounce without a sigh. But it is our wisdom to listen to what it was His mercy to say.

Observe our Lord's identification of Himself with the Father, so as that the feelings with which men regard Him are, *ipso facto*, the feelings with which they regard the Father God. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' 'He that hath loved Me hath loved the Father.' 'He that hath hated Me hath hated the Father.' An ugly word—a word that a great many of us think far too severe and harsh to be applied to men who simply are indifferent to the divine love. Some say, 'I am conscious of no hatred. I do not pretend to be a Christian, but I do not hate God. Take the ordinary run of people round about us in the world; if you say God is not in all their thoughts, I agree with you; but if you say that they *hate* God, I do not believe it.'

Well, what do you think the fact that men go through their days and weeks and months and years, and have not God in all their thoughts, indicates as to the central feeling of their hearts towards God? Granted that there is not actual antagonism, because there is no thought at all, do you think it would be possible for a man who loved God to go on for a twelvemonth and never think of, or care to please, or desire to be near, the object that he loved? And inasmuch as, deep down at the bottom of our moral being, there is no such thing possible as indifference and a perfect equipoise in reference to God, it is clear enough, I think, that—although the word must not be pressed as if it meant conscious and active antagonism,—where there is no love there is hate.

If a man does not love God as He is revealed to him in Jesus Christ, he neither cares to please Him nor to think about Him, nor does he order his life in obedience to His commands. And if it be true that obedience is the very life-breath of love, disobedience or non-obedience is the manifestation of antagonism, and antagonism towards God is the same thing as hate.

Dear friends, I want some of my hearers to-day who have never honestly asked themselves the question of what their relation to God is, to go down into the deep places of their hearts and test themselves by this simple inquiry: 'Do I do anything to please Him? Do I try to serve Him? Is it a joy to me to be near Him? Is the thought of Him a delight, like a fountain in the desert or the cool shadow of a great rock in the blazing wilderness? Do I turn to Him as my Home, my Friend, my All? If I do not, am I not deceiving myself by fancying that I stand neutral?' There is no neutrality in a man's relation to God. It is one thing or other. 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' 'The friendship of the world is enmity against God.'

IV. And now, lastly, note how our Lord here touches the deep thought that this ignorance, which is sin, and is more properly named hatred, is utterly irrational and causeless.

'All this will they do that it might be fulfilled which is written in their law, They hated Me without a cause.' One hears sighing through these words the Master's meek wonder that His love should be so met, and that the requital which He receives at men's hands, for such an unexampled and lavish outpouring of it, should be such a carelessness, reposing upon a hidden basis of such a rooted alienation.

'Without a cause'; yes! that suggests the deep thought that the most mysterious and irrational thing in men's whole history and experience is the way in which they recompense God in Christ for what He has done for them. 'Be astonished, O ye heavens! and wonder, O ye earth!' said one of the old prophets; the mystery of mysteries, which can give no account of itself to satisfy reason, which has no apology, excuse, or vindication, is just that when God loves me I do not love Him back again; and that when Christ pours out the whole fullness of His heart upon me, nay dull and obstinate heart gives back so little to Him who has given me so much.

'Without a cause.' Think of that Cross; think, as every poor creature on earth has a right to think, that he and she individually were in the mind and heart of the Saviour when He suffered and died, and then think of what we have brought Him for it. Do we not stand ashamed at—if I might use so trivial a word,—the absurdity as well as at the criminality of our requital? Causeless love on the one side, occasioned by nothing but itself, and causeless indifference on the other, occasioned by nothing but itself, are the two powers that meet in this mystery—men's rejection of the infinite love of God.

My friend, come away from the unreasonable people, come away from the men who can give no account of their attitude. Come away from those who pay benefits by carelessness, and a Love that died by an indifference that will not cast an eye upon that miracle of mercy, and let His love kindle the answering flame in your hearts. Then you will know God as only they who love Christ know Him, and in the sweetness of a mutual bond will lose the misery of self, and escape the deepening condemnation of those who see Christ on the Cross and do not care for the sight, nor learn by it to know the infinite tenderness and holiness of the Father that sent Him.



## OUR ALLY

‘But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning.’—[JOHN xv. 26, 27](#).

Our Lord has been speaking of a world hostile to His followers and to Him. He proceeds, in the words which immediately follow our text, to paint that hostility as aggravated even to the pitch of religious murder. But here He lets a beam of light in upon the darkness. These forlorn Twelve, listening to Him, might well have said, ‘Thou art about to leave us; how can we alone face this world in arms, with which Thou dost terrify us?’ And here He lets them see that they will not be left alone, but have a great Champion, clad in celestial armour, who, coming straight from God, will be with them and put into their hands a weapon, with which they may conquer the world, and turn it into a friend, and with which alone they must meet the world’s hate.

So, then, we have three things in this text; the great promise of an Ally in the conflict with the world; the witness which that Ally bears, to fortify against the world; and the consequent witness with which Christians may win the world.

I. Now consider briefly the first of these points, the great promise of an Ally in the conflict with the world.

I may touch, very lightly, upon the wonderful designation of this Champion-Friend whom Christ sends, because on former occasions in this course of sermons we have had to deal with the same thoughts, and there will be subsequent opportunities of recurring to them. But I may just emphasise in a few sentences the points which our Lord here signalises in regard to the Champion whom He sends. There is a double designation of that Spirit, ‘the Comforter’ and ‘the Spirit of truth.’ There is a double description of His mission, as being ‘sent’ by Jesus, and as ‘proceeding from the Father,’ and there is a single statement as to the position from which He comes to us. A word about each of these things.

I have already explained in former sermons that the notion of ‘Comforter,’ as it is understood in modern English, is a great deal too restricted and narrow to cover the whole ground of this great and blessed promise. The Comforter whom Christ sends is no mere drier of men’s tears and gentle Consoler of human sorrows, but He is a mightier Spirit than that, and the word by which He is described in our text, which means ‘one who is summoned to the side of another,’ conveys the idea of a helper who is brought to the man to be helped, in order to render whatever aid and succour that man’s weakness and circumstances may require. The verses before our text suggest what sort of aid and succour the disciples will need. They are to be as sheep in the midst of wolves. Their defenceless purity will need a Protector, a strong Shepherd. They stand alone amongst enemies. There must be some one beside them to fight for them, to shield and to encourage them, to be their Safety and their

Peace. And that Paraclete, who is called to our side, comes for the special help which these special circumstances require, and is a strong Spirit who will be our Champion and our Ally, whatever antagonism may storm against us, and however strong and well-armed may be the assaulting legions of the world's hate.

Then, still further, the other designation here of this strong Succourer and Friend is 'the Spirit of truth,' by which is designated, not so much His characteristic attribute, as rather the weapon which He wields, or the material with which He works. The 'truth' is His instrument; that is to say, the Spirit of God sent by Jesus Christ is the Strengtheners, the Encourager, the Comforter, the Fighter for us and with us, because He wields that great body of truth, the perfect revelation of God, and man, and duty, and salvation, which is embodied in the incarnation and work of Jesus Christ our Lord. The truth is His weapon, and it is by it that He makes us strong.

Then, still further, there is a twofold description here of the mission of this divine Champion, as 'sent' by Christ, and 'proceeding from the Father.'

In regard to the former, I need only remind you that, in a previous part of this wonderful discourse, our Lord speaks of that divine Spirit as being sent by the Father in His name and in answer to His prayer. The representation here is by no means antagonistic to, or diverse from, that other representation, but rather the fact that the Father and the Son, according to the deep teaching of Scripture, are in so far one as that 'whatsoever the Son seeth the Father do that also the Son doeth likewise,' makes it possible to attribute to Him the work which, in another place, is ascribed to the Father. In speaking of the *Persons* of the Deity, let us never forget that that word is only partially applicable to that ineffable Being, and that whilst with us it implies absolute separation of individuals, it does not mean such separation in the case of its imperfect transference to the mysteries of the divine nature; but rather, the Son doeth what the Father doeth, and therefore the Spirit is sent forth by the Father, and also the Son sends the Spirit.

But, on the other hand, we are not to regard that divine Spirit as merely a Messenger sent by another. He 'proceeds from the Father.' That word has been the battlefield of theological controversy, with which I do not purpose to trouble you now. For I do not suppose that in its use here it refers at all to the subject to which it has been sometimes applied, nor contains any kind of revelation of the eternal depths of the divine Nature and its relations to itself. What is meant here is the historical coming forth into human life of that divine Spirit. And, possibly, the word 'proceeds' is chosen in order to contrast with the word 'sent,' and to give the idea of a voluntary and personal action of the Messenger, who not only is *sent* by the Father, but of Himself *proceeds* on the mighty work to which He is destined.

Be that as it may, mark only, for the last thought here about the details of this great promise, that wonderful phrase, twice repeated in our Lord's words, and emphasised by its verbal repetition in the two clauses, which in all other respects are so different—'from the

Father.’ The word translated ‘*from*’ is not the ordinary word so rendered, but rather designates *a position at the side of* than an *origin from*, and suggests much rather the intimate and ineffable union between Father, Son, and Spirit, than the source from which the Spirit comes. I touch upon these things very lightly, and gather them up into one sentence. Here, then, are the points. A Person who is spoken of as ‘He’—a divine Person whose home from of old has been close by the Father’s side—a Person whose instrument is the revealed truth ensphered and in germ in the facts of Christ’s incarnation and life—a divine Person, wielding the truth, who is sent by Christ as His Representative, and in some sense a continuance of His personal Presence—a divine, personal Spirit coming from the Father, wielding the truth, sent by Christ, and at the side of all the persecuted and the weak, all world-hated and Christian men, as their Champion, their Combatant, their Ally, their Inspiration, and their Power. Is not that enough to make the weakest strong? Is not that enough to make us ‘more than conquerors through Him that loved us’? All nations have legends of the gods fighting at the head of their armies, and through the dust of battle the white horses and the shining armour of the celestial champions have been seen. The childish dream is a historical reality. It is not we that fight, it is the Spirit of God that fighteth in us.

II. And so note, secondly, the witness of the Spirit which fortifies against the world.

‘He shall bear witness of Me.’ Now we must especially observe here that little phrase, ‘unto you.’ For that tells us at once that the witness which our Lord has in mind here is something which is done within the circle of the Christian believers, and not in the wide field of the world’s history or in nature. Of course it is a great truth that long before Jesus Christ, and to-day far beyond the limits of His name and knowledge, to say nothing of His faith and obedience, the Spirit of God is working. As of old He brooded over the chaotic darkness, ever labouring to turn chaos into order, and darkness into light, and deformity into beauty; so today, all over the field of humanity, He is operating. Grand as that truth is, it is not the truth here. What is spoken of here is something that is done in and on Christian men, and not even through them on the world, but in them for themselves. ‘He shall testify of Me’ to you.

Now it is to be noted, also, that the first and special application of these words is to the little group listening to Him. Never were men more desolate and beaten down than these were, in the prospect of Christ’s departure. Never were men more utterly bewildered and dispirited than these were, in the days between His crucifixion and His resurrection. Think of them during His earthly life, their narrow understandings, their manifold faults, moral as well as intellectual. How little perception they had of anything that He said to them, as their own foolish questions abundantly show! How little they had drunk in His spirit, as their selfish and ambitious janglings amongst themselves abundantly show! They were but Jews like their brethren, believing, indeed, that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, but not knowing what it was that they believed, or of what kind the Messiah was in whom they were

thus partially trusting. But they loved Him and were led by Him, and so they were brought into a larger place by the Spirit whom Christ sent.

What was it that made these dwarfs into giants in six weeks? What was it that turned their narrowness into breadth; that made them start up all at once as heroes, and that so swiftly matured them, as the fruits and flowers are ripened under tropical sunshine? The resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ had a great deal to do with the change; but they were not its whole cause. There is no explanation of the extraordinary transformation of these men as we see them in the pages of the Gospels, and as we find them on the pages of the Acts of the Apostles, except this—the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ as facts, and the Spirit on Pentecost as an indwelling Interpreter of the facts. He came, and the weak became strong, and the foolish wise, and the blind enlightened, and they began to understand—though it needed all their lives to perfect the teaching,—what it was that their ignorant hands had grasped and their dim perceptions had seen, when they touched the hands and looked upon the face of Jesus Christ. The witness of the Spirit of God working within them, working upon what they knew of the historical facts of Christ's life, and interpreting these to them, was the explanation of their change and growth. And the New Testament is the product of that change. Christ's life was the truth which the Spirit used, and a product of His teaching was these Epistles which we have, and which for us step into the place which the historical facts held for them, and become the instrument with which the Spirit of God will deepen our understanding of Christ and enlarge our knowledge of what He is to us.

So, dear friends, whilst here we have a promise which specially applies, no doubt, to these twelve Apostles, and the result of which in them was different from its result in us, inasmuch as the Spirit's teaching, recorded in the New Testament, becomes for us the authoritative rule of faith and practice, the promise still applies to each of us in a secondary and modified sense. For there is nothing in these great valedictory words of our Lord's which has not a universal bearing, and is not the revelation of a permanent truth in regard to the Christian Church. And, therefore, here we have the promise of a universal gift to all Christian men and women, of an actual divine Spirit to dwell with each of us, to speak in our hearts.

And what will He speak there? He will teach us a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ. He will help us to understand better what He is. He will show us more and more of the whole sweep of His work, of the whole infinite truth for morals and religion, for politics and society, for time and for eternity, about men and about God, which is wrapped up in that great saying which we first of all, perhaps under the pressure of our own sense of sin, grasp as our deliverance from sin: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' That is the sum of truth which the Spirit of God interprets to every faithful heart. And as the days roll on, and

new problems rise, and new difficulties present themselves, and new circumstances emerge in our personal life, we find the truth, which we at first dimly grasped as life and salvation, opening out into wisdom and depth and meaning that we never dreamed of in the early hours. A Spirit that bears witness of Christ and will make us understand Him better every day we live, if we choose, is the promise that is given here, for all Christian men and women.

Then note that this inward witness of Christ's depth and preciousness is our true weapon and stay against a hostile world. A little candle in a room will make the lightning outside almost invisible; and if I have burning in my heart the inward experience and conviction of what Jesus Christ is and what He has done and will do for me—Oh! then, all the storm without may rage, and it will not trouble me.

If you take an empty vessel and bring pressure to bear upon it, in go the sides. Fill it, and they will resist the pressure. So with growing knowledge of Christ, and growing personal experience of His sweetness in our souls, we shall be able, untouched and undinted, to throw off the pressure which would otherwise have crushed us.

Therefore, dear friends, here is the true secret of tranquillity, in an age of questioning and doubt. Let me have that divine Voice speaking in my heart, as I may have, and no matter what questions may be doubtful, this is sure—'We know in whom we have believed'; and we can say, 'Settle all your controversies any way you like: one thing I know, and that divine Voice is ever saying it to me in my deepest consciousness—the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true.' Labour for more of this inward, personal conviction of the preciousness of Jesus Christ to strengthen you against a hostile world.

And remember that there are conditions under which this Voice speaks in our souls. One is that we attend to the instrument which the Spirit of God uses, and that is 'the truth.' If Christians will not read their Bibles, they need not expect to have the words of these Bibles interpreted and made real to them by any inward experience. If you want to have a faith which is vindicated and warranted by your daily experience, there is only one way to get it, and that is, to use the truth which the Spirit uses, and to bring yourself into contact, continual and reverent and intelligent, with the great body of divine truth that is conveyed in these authoritative words of the Spirit of God speaking through the first witnesses.

And there must be moral discipline too. Laziness, worldliness, the absorption of attention with other things, self-conceit, prejudice, and, I was going to say, almost above all, the taking of our religion and religious opinions at secondhand from men and teachers and books—all these stand in the way of our hearing the Spirit of God when He speaks. Come away from the babble and go by yourself, and take your Bibles with you, and read them, and meditate upon them, and get near the Master of whom they speak, and the Spirit which uses the truth will use it to fortify you.

III. And, lastly, note the consequent witness with which the Christian may win the world.

‘And ye also shall bear witness of Me, because ye have been with Me from the beginning.’ That ‘also’ has, of course, direct reference to the Apostles’ witness to the facts of our Lord’s historical appearance, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension; and therefore their qualification was simply the companionship with Him which enabled them to say, ‘We saw what we tell you; we were witnesses from the beginning.’

But then, again, I say that there is no word here that belongs only to the Apostles; it belongs to us all, and so here is the task of the Christian Church in all its members. They receive the witness of the Spirit, and they are Christ’s witnesses in the world.

Note what we have to do—to bear witness; not to argue, not to adorn, but simply to attest. Note what we have to attest—the fact, not of the historical life of Jesus Christ, because we are not in a position to be witnesses of that, but the fact of His preciousness and power, and the fact of our own experience of what He has done for us. Note, that that is by far the most powerful agency for winning the world. You can never make men angry by saying to them, ‘We have found the Messiah.’ You cannot irritate people, or provoke them into a controversial opposition when you say, ‘Brother, let me tell you my experience. I was dark, sad, sinful, weak, solitary, miserable; and I got light, gladness, pardon, strength, companionship, and a joyful hope. I was blind—you remember me when my eyes were dark, and I sat begging outside the Temple; I was blind, now I see—look at my eyeballs.’ We can all say that. This is the witness that needs no eloquence, no genius, no anything except honesty and experience; and whosoever has tasted and felt and handled of the Word of Life may surely go to a brother and say, ‘Brother, I have eaten and am satisfied. Will you not help yourselves?’ We can all do it, and we ought to do it. The Christian privilege of being witnessed to by the Spirit of God in our hearts brings with it the Christian duty of being witnesses in our turn to the world. That is our only weapon against the hostility which godless humanity bears to ourselves and to our Master. We may win men by that; we can win them by nothing else. ‘Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and My servants whom I have chosen.’ Christian friend, listen to the Master, who says, ‘Him that confesseth Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father in heaven.’

## WHY CHRIST SPEAKS

‘These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me. But these things have I told you, that, when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go My way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.’—[JOHN xvi. 1-6](#).

The unbroken flow of thought, and the many subtle links of connection between the parts, of these inexhaustible last words of our Lord make any attempt at grouping them into sections more or less unsatisfactory and artificial. But I have ventured to throw these, perhaps too many, verses together for our consideration now, because a phrase of frequent recurrence in them manifestly affords a key to their main subject. Notice how our Lord four times repeats the expression, ‘These things have I spoken unto you.’ He is not so much adding anything new to His words, as rather contemplating the reasons for His speech now, the reasons for His silence before, and the imperfect apprehension of the things spoken which His disciples had, and which led to their making His announcement, thus imperfectly understood, an occasion for sorrow rather than for joy. There is a kind of landing place or pause here in the ascending staircase. Our Lord meditates for Himself, and invites us to meditate with Him, rather upon His past utterances than upon anything additional to them. So, then, whilst it is true that we have in two of these verses a repetition, in a somewhat more intense and detailed form, of the previous warnings of the hostility of the world, in the main the subject of the present section is that which I have indicated. And I take the fourfold recurrence of that clause to which I have pointed as marking out for us the leading ideas that we are to gather from these words.

I. There is, first, our Lord’s loving reason for His speech.

This is given in a double form. ‘These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.’ And, again, ‘These things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.’ These two statements substantially coalesce and point to the same idea.

They are separated, as I have said, by a reiteration, in more emphatic form, of the dark prospect which He has been holding out to His disciples. He tells them that the world which hates them is to be fully identified with the apostate Jewish Church. ‘The synagogue’ is for them ‘the world.’ There is a solemn lesson in that. The organised body that calls itself God’s Church and House may become the most rampant enemy of Christ’s people, and be the truest embodiment on the face of the earth of all that He means by ‘the world.’ A formal

church is the true world always; and to-day as then. And such a body will do the cruellest things and believe that it is offering up Christ's witnesses as sacrifices to God. That is partly an aggravation and partly an alleviation of the sin. It is possible that the inquisitor and the man in the *San Benito*, whom he ties to the stake, may shake hands yet at His side up yonder. But a church which has become, the world will do its persecution and think that it is worship, and call the burning of God's people an *auto-da-fe* (act of faith); and the bottom of it all is that, in the blaze of light, and calling themselves God's, 'they do not know' either God or Christ. They do not know the one because they will not know the other.

But that is all parenthetical in the present section, and so I say nothing more about it; and ask you, rather, just to look at the loving reasons which Christ here suggests for His present speech—'that ye should not be offended,' or stumble. He warns them of the storm before it bursts, lest, when it bursts, it should sweep them away from their moorings. Of course, there could be nothing more productive of intellectual bewilderment, and more likely to lead to doubt as to one's own convictions, than to find oneself at odds with the synagogue about the question of the Messiah. A modest man might naturally say, 'Perhaps I am wrong and they are right.' A coward would be sure to say, 'I will sink my convictions and fall in with the majority.' The stumbling-block for these first Jewish converts, in the attitude of the whole mass of the nation towards Christ and His pretensions, is one of such a magnitude as we cannot, by any exercise of our imagination, realise. 'And,' says Christ, 'the only way by which you will ever get over the temptation to intellectual doubt or to cowardly apostasy that arises from your being thrown out of sympathy with the whole mass of your people, and the traditions of the generations, is to reflect that I told you it would be so, before it came to pass.'

Of course all that has a special bearing upon those to whom it was originally addressed, and then it has a secondary bearing upon Christians, whose lot it is to live in a time of actual persecution. But that does not in the slightest degree destroy the fact that it also has a bearing upon every one of us. For if you and I are Christian people, and trying to live like our Master, and to do as He would have us to do, we too shall often have to stand in such a very small minority, and be surrounded by people who take such an entirely opposite view of duty and of truth, as that we shall be only too much disposed to give up and falter in the clearness, fullness, and braveness of our utterance, and think, 'Well, perhaps after all it is better for me to hold my tongue.'

And then, besides this, there are all the cares and griefs which befall each of us, with regard to which also, as well as with regard to the difficulties and dangers and oppositions which we may meet with in a faithful Christian life, the principles of my text have a distinct and direct application. He has told us in order that we might not stumble, because when the hour comes and the sorrow comes with it, we remember that He told us all about it before.



It is one of the characteristics of Christianity that Jesus Christ does not try to enlist recruits by highly-coloured, rosy pictures of the blessing and joy of serving Him, keeping His hand all the while upon the weary marches and the wounds and pains. He tells us plainly at the beginning, 'If you take My yoke upon you, you will have to carry a heavy burden. You will have to abstain from a great many things that you would like to do. You will have to do a great many things that your flesh will not like. The road is rough, and a high wall on each side. There are lovely flowers and green pastures on the other side of the hedge, where it is a great deal easier walking upon the short grass than it is upon the stony path. The roadway is narrow, and the gateway is very strait, but the track goes steadily up. Will you accept the terms and come in and walk upon it?'

It is far better and nobler, and more attractive also, to tell us frankly and fully the difficulties and dangers than to try and coax us by dwelling on pleasures and ease. Jesus Christ will have no service on false pretences, but will let us understand at the beginning that if we serve under His flag we have to make up our minds to hardships which otherwise we may escape, to antagonisms which otherwise will not be provoked, and to more than an ordinary share of sorrow and suffering and pain. 'Through much tribulation we must enter the Kingdom.'

And the way by which all these troubles and cares, whether they be those incident and peculiar to Christian life, or those common to humanity, can best be met and overcome, is precisely by this thought, 'The Master has told us before.' Sorrows anticipated are more easily met. It is when the vessel is caught with all its sails set that it is almost sure to go down, and, at all events, sure to be badly damaged in the typhoon. But when the barometer has been watched, and its fall has given warning, and everything movable has been made fast, and every spare yard has been sent below, and all tightened up and ship-shape—then she can ride out the storm. Forewarned is forearmed. Savages think, when an eclipse comes, that a wolf has swallowed the sun, and it will never come out again. We know that it has all been calculated beforehand, and since we know that it is coming to-morrow, when it does come, it is only a passing darkness. Sorrow anticipated is sorrow half overcome; and when it falls on us, the bewilderment, as if 'some strange thing had happened,' will be escaped when we can remember that the Master has told us it all beforehand.

And again, sorrow foretold gives us confidence in our Guide. We have the chart, and as we look upon it we see marked 'waterless country,' 'pathless rocks,' 'desert and sand,' 'wells and palm-trees.' Well, when we come to the first of these, and find ourselves, as the map says, in the waterless country; and when, as we go on step by step, and mile after mile, we find it is all down there, we say to ourselves, 'The remainder will be accurate, too,' and if we are in 'Marah' to-day, where 'the water is bitter,' and nothing but the wood of the tree that grows there can ever sweeten it, we shall be at 'Elim' to-morrow, where there are 'the twelve wells and the seventy palm trees.' The chart is right, and the chart says that the end

of it all is ‘the land that flows with milk and honey.’ He *has* told us *this*; if there had been anything worse than this, He would have told us *that*. ‘If it were not so I would have told you.’ The sorrow foretold deepens our confidence in our Guide.

Sorrow that comes punctually in accordance with His word plainly comes in obedience to His will. Our Lord uses a little word in this context which is very significant. He says, ‘When *their hour* is come.’

‘Their hour’—the time allotted to them. Allotted by whom? Allotted by Him. He could tell that they would come, because it was as His instruments that they came. ‘Their time’ was His appointment. It was only an ‘hour,’ a definite, appointed, and brief period in accordance with His loving purpose. It takes all sorts of weathers to make a year; and after all the sorts of weathers are run out, the year’s results are realised and the calm comes. And so the good old hymn, with its rhythm that speaks at once of fear and triumph, has caught the true meaning of these words of our Lord’s—

‘Why should I complain  
Of want or distress,  
Temptation or pain?  
He told me no less.’

‘These things have I spoken unto you that ye might not be offended.’

II. Still further, note our Lord’s loving reasons for past silence. ‘These things I said not unto you from the beginning, because I was with you.’

Of course there had been in His early ministry hints, and very plain references, to persecutions and trials, but we must not restrict the ‘these things’ of my text to that only, but rather include the whole of the previous chapter, in which He sets the sorrow and the hostility which His servants have to endure in their true light, as being the consequences of their union with Him and of the closeness and the identity of life and fate between the Vine and the branches. In so systematic and detailed fashion, and with such an exhibition of the grounds of its necessity, our Lord had not spoken of the world’s hostility in His earlier ministry, but had reserved it to these last moments, and the reason why He had given but passing hints before was because He was there. What a superb confidence that expresses in His ability to shield His poor followers from all that might hurt and harm them! He spreads the ample robe of His protection over them, or rather, to go back to His own metaphor, ‘as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings’ so He gathers them to His own breast, and stretches over them that which is at once protection and warmth, and keeps them safe. As long as He is there, no harm can come to them. But He is going away, and so it is time to speak, and to speak more plainly.

That, too, yields for us, dear brethren, truths that apply to us quite as much as to that little group of silent listeners. For us, too, difficulties and sorrows, though foretold in general terms, are largely hidden till they are near. It would have been of little use for Christ to have spoken more plainly in those early days of His ministry. The disciples managed to forget and to misunderstand His plain utterances, for instance, about His own death and resurrection. There needs to be an adaptation between the hearing ear and the spoken word, in order that the word spoken should be of use, and there are great tracts of Scripture dealing with the sorrows of life, which lie perfectly dark and dead to us, until experience vitalises them. The old Greeks used to send messages from one army to another by means of a roll of parchment twisted spirally round a baton, and then written on. It was perfectly unintelligible when it fell into a man's hands that had not a corresponding baton to twist it upon. Many of Christ's messages to us are like that. You can only understand the utterances when life gives you the frame round which to wrap them, and then they flash up into meaning, and we say at once, 'He told us it all before, and I scarcely knew that He had told me, until this moment when I need it.'

Oh, it is merciful that there should be a gradual unveiling of what is to come to us, that the road should wind, and that we should see so short a way before us. Did you never say to yourselves, 'If I had known all this before, I do not think I could have lived to face it?' And did you not feel how good and kind and loving it was, that in the revelation there had been concealment, and that while Jesus Christ had told us in general terms that we must expect sorrows and trials, this specific form of sorrow and trial had not been foreseen by us until we came close to it? Thank God for the loving reticence, and for the as loving eloquence of His speech and of His silence, with regard to sorrow.

And take this further lesson, that there ought to be in all our lives times of close and blessed communion with that Master, when the sense of His presence with us makes all thought of sorrows and trials in the future out of place and needlessly disturbing. If these disciples had drunk in the spirit of Jesus Christ when they were with Him, then they would not have been so bewildered when He left them. When He was near them there was something better for them to do than to be 'over exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils' in the future—namely, to grow into His life, to drink in the sweetness of His presence, to be moulded into the likeness of His character, to understand Him better, and to realise His nearness more fully. And, dear brethren, for us all there are times—and it is our own fault if these are not very frequent and blessed—when thus, in such an hour of sweet communion with the present Christ, the future will be all radiant and calm, if we look into it, or, better, the present will be so blessed that there will be no need to think of the future. These men in the upper chamber, if they had learnt all the lessons that He was teaching them then, would not have gone out, to sleep in Gethsemane, and to tell lies in the high priest's hall, and to fly like frightened sheep from the Cross, and to despair at the tomb. And you and I, if we

sit at His table, and keep our hearts near Him, eating and drinking of that heavenly manna, shall 'go in the strength of that meat forty days into the wilderness,' and say—

'E'en let the unknown to-morrow  
Bring with it what it may.'

III. Lastly, I must touch, for the sake of completeness, upon the final thought in these pregnant verses, and that is, the imperfect apprehension of our Lord's words, which leads to sorrow instead of joy.

'Now I go My way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.' He had been telling them—and it was the one definite idea that they gathered from His words—that He was going. And what did they say? They said, 'Going! What is to become of *us*?' If there had been a little less selfishness and a little more love, and if they had put their question, 'Going! What is to become of *Him*?' then it would not have been sorrow that would have filled their hearts, but a joy that would have flooded out all the sorrow, 'and the winter of their discontent' would have been changed into 'glorious summer,' because He was going to Him that sent Him; that is to say, He was going with His work done and His message accomplished. And therefore, if they could only have overlooked their own selves, and the bearing of His departure, as it seemed to them, on themselves, and have thought of it a little as it affected Him, they would have found that all the oppressive and the dark in it would have disappeared, and they would have been glad.

Ah, dear brethren, that gives us a thought on which I can but touch now, that the steadfast contemplation of the ascended Christ, who has gone to the Father, having finished His work, is the sovereign antidote against all sense of separation and solitude, the sovereign power by which we may face a hostile world, the sovereign cure for every sorrow. If we could live in the light of the great triumphant, ascended Lord, then, Oh, how small would the babble of the world be. If the great White Throne, and He that sits upon it, were more distinctly before us, then we could face anything, and sorrow would 'become a solemn scorn of ills,' and all the transitory would be reduced to its proper insignificance, and we should be emancipated from fear and every temptation to unfaithfulness and apostasy. Look up to the Master who has gone, and as the dying martyr outside the city wall 'saw the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing'—having sprung to His feet to help His poor servant—'at the right hand of God,' so with that vision in our eyes and the light of that Face flashing upon our faces, and making them like the angels', we shall be masters of grief and care, and pain and trial, and enmity and disappointment, and sorrow and sin, and feel that the absent Christ is the present Christ, and that the present Christ is the conquering power in us.

Dear brethren, there is nothing else that will make us victors over the world and ourselves. If we can grasp Him by our faith and keep ourselves near Him, then union with Him as of the Vine and the branches, which will result inevitably in suffering here, will result as inevitably in joy hereafter. For He will never relax the adamantine grasp of His strong hand until He raises us to Himself, and 'if so be that we suffer with Him we shall also be glorified together.'

## THE DEPARTING CHRIST AND THE COMING SPIRIT

‘Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will *convince* the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.’—[JOHN xvi. 7, 8.](#)

We read these words in the light of all that has gone after, and to us they are familiar and almost thread-bare. But if we would appreciate their sublimity, we must think away nineteen centuries, and all Christendom, and recall these eleven poor men and their peasant Leader in the upper room. They were not very wise, nor very strong, and outside these four walls there was scarcely a creature in the whole world that had the least belief either in Him or in them. They had everything against them, and most of all their own hearts. They had nothing for them but their Master’s promise. Their eyes had been dimmed by their sorrowful hearts, so that they could not see the truth which He had been trying to reveal to them; and His departure had presented itself to them only as it affected themselves, and therefore had brought a sense of loss and desolation.

And now He bids them think of that departure, as it affects themselves, as pure gain. ‘It is for your profit that I go away.’ He explains that staggering statement by the thought which He has already presented to them, in varying aspects, of His departure as the occasion for the coming of that Great Comforter, who, when He is come, will through them work upon the world, which knows neither them nor Him. They are to go forth ‘as sheep in the midst of wolves,’ but in this promise He tells them that they will become the judges and accusers of the world, which, by the Spirit dwelling in them, they will be able to overcome, and convict of error and of fault.

We must remember that the whole purpose of the words which we are considering now is the strengthening of the disciples in their conflict with the world, and that, therefore, the operations of that divine Spirit which are here spoken of are operations carried on by their instrumentality and through the word which they spake. With that explanation we can consider the great words before us.

I. The first thing that strikes me about them is that wonderful thought of the gain to Christ’s servants from Christ’s departure. ‘It is expedient for you that I go away.’

I need not enlarge here upon what we have had frequent occasion to remark, the manner in which our Lord here represents the complex whole of His death and ascension as being His own voluntary act. He ‘goes.’ He is neither taken away by death nor rapt up to heaven in a whirlwind, but of His own exuberant power and by His own will He goes into the region of the grave and thence to the throne. Contrast the story of His ascension with that Old Testament story of the ascension of Elijah. One needed the chariot of fire and the horses of fire to bear him up into the sphere, all foreign to his mortal and earthly manhood; the Other

needed no outward power to lift Him, nor any vehicle to carry Him from this dim spot which men call earth, but slowly, serenely, upborne by His own indwelling energy, and rising as to His native home, He ascended up on high, and went where the very manner of His going proclaimed that He had been before. 'If I go away, I will send Him.'

But that is a digression. What we are concerned with now is the thought of Christ's departure as being a step in advance, and a positive gain, even to those poor, bewildered men who were clustering round Him, depending absolutely upon Himself, and feeling themselves orphaned and helpless without Him.

Now if we would feel the full force and singularity of this saying of our Lord's, let us put side by side with it that other one, 'I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.' Why is it that the Apostle says, 'Though I want to go I am bound to stay?' and why is it that the Master says, 'It is for your good that I am going,' but because of the essential difference in the relation of the two to the people who are to be left, and in the continuance of the work of the two after they had departed? Paul knew that when he went, whatever befell those whom he loved and would fain help, he could not stretch a hand to do anything for them. He knew that death dropped the portcullis between him and them, and, whatever their sore need on the one side of the iron gate, he on the other could not succour or save. Jesus Christ said, 'It is better for you that I should go,' because He knew that all His influences would flow through the grated door unchecked, and that, departed, He would still be the life of them that trusted in Him; and, having left them, would come near them, by the very act of leaving them.

And so there is here indicated for us—as we shall have occasion to see more fully, presently,—in that one singular and anomalous fact of Christ's departure being a positive gain to those that trust in Him, the singularity and uniqueness of His work for them and His relation to them.

The words mean a great deal more than the analogies of our relation to dear ones or great ones, loves or teachers, who have departed, might suggest. Of course we all know that it is quite true that death reveals to the heart the sweetness and the preciousness of the departed ones, and that its refining touch manifests to our blind eyes what we did not see so clearly when they were beside us. We all know that it needs distance to measure men, and the dropping away of the commonplace and the familiar ere we can see 'the likeness' of our contemporaries 'to the great of old.' We have to travel across the plains before we can measure the relative height of the clustered mountains, and discern which is manifestly the loftiest. And all *this* is true in reference to Jesus Christ and His relation to us. But that does not go half-way towards the understanding of such words as these of my text, which tell us that so singular and solitary is His relation to us that the thing which ends the work of all other men, and begins the decay of their influence, begins for Him a higher form of work and a wider sweep of sway. He is nearer us when He leaves us, and works with us and in us

more mightily from the throne than He did upon the earth. Who is He of whom this is true? And what kind of work is it of which it is true that death continues and perfects it?

So let me note, before I pass on, that there is a great truth here for us. We are accustomed to look back to our Lord's earthly ministry, and to fancy that those who gathered round Him, and heard Him speak, and saw His deeds, were in a better position for loving Him and trusting Him than you and I are. It is all a mistake. We have lost nothing that they had which was worth the keeping; and we have gained a great deal which they had not. We have not to compare our relation to Christ with theirs, as we might do our relation to some great thinker or poet, with that of his contemporaries, but we have Christ in a better form, if I may so speak; and we, on whom the ends of the world are come, may have a deeper and a fuller and a closer intimacy with Him than was possible for men whose perceptions were disturbed by sense, and who had to pierce through 'the veil, that is to say, His flesh,' before they reached the Holy of Holies of His spirit.

II. Note, secondly, the coming for which Christ's going was needful, and which makes that going a gain.

'If I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you.' Now we have already, in former sermons, touched upon many of the themes which would naturally be suggested by these words, and therefore I do not propose to dwell upon them at any length. There is only one point to which I desire to refer briefly here, and that is the necessity which here seems to be laid down by our Lord for His departure, in order that that divine Spirit may come and dwell with men. That necessity goes down deeper into the mysteries of the divinity and of the processes and order of divine revelation than it is given to us to follow. But though we can only speak superficially and fragmentarily about such a matter, let me just remind you, in the briefest possible words, of what Scripture plainly declares to us with regard to this high and, in its fullness, ineffable matter. It tells us that the complete work of Jesus Christ—not merely His coming upon earth, or His life amongst men, but also His sacrificial death upon the Cross—was the necessary preliminary, and in some sense procuring cause, of the gift of that divine Spirit. It tells us—and there we are upon ground on which we can more fully verify the statement—that His work must be completed ere that Spirit can be sent, because the word is the Spirit's weapon for the world, and the revelation of God in Jesus must be ended, ere the application of that revelation, which is the Spirit's work, can be begun in its full energy.

It tells us, further, (and there our eyesight fails, and we have to accept what we are told), that Jesus Christ must ascend on high and be at the right hand of God, ere He can pour down upon men the fullness of the Spirit which dwelt uncommunicated in Him in the time of His earthly humiliation. 'Thou hast ascended up on high,' and therefore 'Thou hast given gifts to men.' We accept the declaration, not knowing all the deep necessity in the divine



Nature on which it rests, but believing it, because He in whom we have confidence has declared it to us.

And we are further told—and there our experience may, in some degree, verify the statement,—that only those, in whose hearts there is union to Jesus Christ by faith in His completed work and ascended glory, are capable of receiving that divine gift. So every way, both as regards the depths of Deity and the processes of revelation, and as regards the power of the humanity of Christ to impart His Spirit, and as regards the capacity of us poor recipients to receive it, the words of my text seem to be confirmed, and we can, though not with full insight, at any rate with full faith, accept the statement, ‘If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you.’

That coming is gain. It teaches a deeper knowledge of Him. It teaches and gives a fuller possession of the life of righteousness which is like His own. It draws us into the fellowship of the Son.

III. Lastly, note here the threefold conflict of the Spirit through the Church with the world.

‘When He is come He will convict the world’ in respect ‘of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.’ By the ‘reproof,’ or rather ‘conviction,’ which is spoken about here, is meant the process by which certain facts are borne in upon men’s understanding and consciences, and, along with these facts, the conviction of error and fault in reference to them. It is no mere process of demonstration of an intellectual truth, but it is a process of conviction of error in respect to great moral and religious truth, and of manifestation of the truths in regard to which the error and the sin have been committed. So we have here the triple division of the great work which the divine Spirit does, through Christian men and women, in the world.

‘He shall convict the world of sin.’ The outstanding first characteristic of the whole Gospel message is the new gravity which it attaches to the fact of sin, the deeper meaning which it gives to the word, and the larger scope which it shows its blighting influences to have had in humanity. Apart from the conviction of sin by the Spirit using the word proclaimed by disciples, the world has scarcely a notion of what sin is, its inwardness, its universality, the awfulness of it as a fact affecting man’s whole being and all his relations to God. All these conceptions are especially the product of Christian truth. Without it, what does the world know about the poison of sin? And what does it care about the poison until the conviction has been driven home to the reluctant consciousness of mankind by the Spirit wielding the word? This conviction comes first in the divine order. I do not say that the process of turning a man of the world into a member of Christ’s Church always begins, as a matter of fact, with the conviction of sin. I believe it most generally does so; but without insisting upon a pedantic adherence to a sequence, and without saying a word about the depth and intensity of such a conviction, I am here to assert that a Christianity which is not

based upon the conviction of sin is an impotent Christianity, and will be of very little use to the men who profess it, and will have no power to propagate itself in the world. Everything in our conception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of His work for us depends upon what we think about this primary fact of man's condition, that he is a sinful man. The root of all heresy lies there. Every error that has led away men from Jesus Christ and His Cross may be traced up to defective notions of sin and a defective realisation of it. If I do not feel as the Bible would have me feel, that I am a sinful man, I shall think differently of Jesus Christ and of my need of Him, and of what He is to me. Christianity may be to me a system of beautiful ethics, a guide for life, a revelation of much precious truth, but it will not be the redemptive power without which I am lost. And Jesus Christ will be shorn of His brightest beams, unless I see Him as the Redeemer of my soul from sin, which else would destroy and is destroying it. Is Christianity merely a better morality? Is it merely a higher revelation of the divine Nature? Or does it *do* something as well as *say* something, and what does it do? Is Jesus Christ only a Teacher, a Wise Man, an Example, a Prophet, or is He the Sacrifice for the sins of the world? Oh, brethren, we must begin where this text begins; and our whole conception of Him and of His work for us must be based upon this fact, that we are sinful and lost, and that Jesus Christ, by His sweet and infinite love and all-powerful sacrifice, is our soul's Redeemer and our only Hope. The world has to be convicted and convinced of sin as the first step to its becoming a Church.

The next step of this divine Spirit's conviction is that which corresponds to the consciousness of sin, the dawning upon the darkened soul of the blessed sunrise of righteousness. The triple subjects of conviction must necessarily belong to the world of which our Lord is speaking. It must be the world that is convinced, and it must be the world's sin and the world's righteousness and the world's judgment of which my text speaks. How, then, can there follow on the conviction of sin as mine a conviction of righteousness as mine? I know but one way, 'Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of God through faith.' When a man is convinced of sin, there will dawn upon the heart the wondrous thought that a righteousness may be his, given to him from above, which will sweep away all his sin and make him righteous as Christ is righteous. That conviction will never awake in its blessed and hope-giving power unless it be preceded by the other. It is of no use to exhibit medicine to a man who does not know himself diseased. It is of no use to talk about righteousness to a man who has not found himself to be a sinner. And it is of as little use to talk to a man of sin unless you are ready to tell him of a righteousness that will cover all his sin. The one conviction without the other is misery, the second without the first is irrelevant and far away.

The world as a world has but dim and inadequate conceptions of what righteousness is. A Pharisee is its type, or a man that keeps a clean life in regard to great transgressions; a whited sepulchre of some sort or other. The world apart from Christ has but languid desires

after even the poor righteousness that it understands, and the world apart from Christ is afflicted by a despairing scepticism as to the possibility of ever being righteous at all. And there are men listening to me now in every one of these three conditions—not caring to be righteous, not understanding what it is to be righteous, and cynically disbelieving that it is possible to be so. My brother, here comes the message to you—first, Thou art sinful; second, God's righteousness lies at thy side to take and wear if thou wilt.

The last of these triple convictions is 'judgment.' If there be in the world these two things both operating, sin and righteousness, and if the two come together, what then? If there is to be a collision, as there must be, which will go down? Christ tells us that this divine Spirit will teach us that righteousness will triumph over sin, and that there will be a judgment which will destroy that which is the weaker, though it seems the stronger. Now I take it that the judgment which is spoken about here is not merely a future retribution beyond the grave, but that, whilst that is included, and is the principal part of the idea, we are always to regard the judgment of the hereafter as being prepared for by the continual judgment here.

And so there are two thoughts, a blessed one and a terrible one, wrapped up in that word—a blessed thought for us sinful men, inasmuch as we may be sure that the divine righteousness, which is given to us, will judge us and separate us day by day from our sins; and a terrible thought, inasmuch as if I, a sinful man, do not make friends with and ally myself to the divine righteousness which is proffered to me, I shall one day have to front it on the other side of the flood, when the contact must necessarily be to me destruction.

Time does not allow me to dwell upon these solemn matters as I fain would, but let me gather all I have been feebly trying to say to you now into one sentence. This threefold conviction, in conscience, understanding, and heart, of sin which is mine, of righteousness which may be mine, and of judgment which must be mine—this threefold conviction is that which makes the world into a Church. It is the message of Christianity to each of us. How do you stand to it? Do you hearken to the Spirit who is striving to convince you of these? Or do you gather yourselves together into an obstinate, close-knit unbelief, or a loose-knit indifference which is as impenetrable? Beware that you resist not the Spirit of God!

## THE CONVICTING FACTS

‘Of sin, because they believe not on Me; Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.’—[JOHN xvi. 9-11](#).

Our Lord has just been telling His disciples how He will equip them, as His champions, for their conflict with the world. A divine Spirit is coming to them who will work in them and through them; and by their simple and unlettered testimony will ‘convict,’ or convince, the mass of ungodly men of error and crime in regard to these three things—sin, righteousness, and judgment.

He now advances to tell them that this threefold conviction which they, as counsel for the prosecution, will establish as against the world at the bar, will be based upon three facts: first, a truth of experience; second, a truth of history; third, a truth of revelation, all three facts having reference to Jesus Christ and His relation to men.

Now these three facts are—the world’s unbelief; Christ’s ascension and session at the right hand of God; and the ‘judgment of the prince of this world.’ If we remember that what our Lord is here speaking about is the work of a divine Spirit through the ministration of believing men, then Pentecost with its thousands ‘pricked to the heart,’ and the Roman ruler who trembled, as the prisoner ‘reasoned of righteousness and judgment to come,’ are illustrations of the way in which the humble disciples towered above the pride and strength of the world, and from criminals at its bar became its accusers.

These three facts are the staple and the strength of the Christian ministry. These three facts are misapprehended, and have failed to produce their right impression, unless they have driven home to our consciences and understandings the triple conviction of my text. And so I come to you with the simple questions which are all-important for each of us: Have you looked these three facts in the face—unbelief, the ascended Christ, a judged prince of the world, and have you learned their meaning as it bears on your own character and religious life?

I. The first point here is the rejection of Jesus Christ as the climax of the world’s sin.

Strange words! They are in some respects the most striking instance of that gigantic self-assertion of our Lord, of which we have had occasion to see so many examples in these valedictory discourses. The world is full of all unrighteousness and wickedness, lust and immorality, intemperance, cruelty, hatred; all manner of buzzing evils that stink and sting around us. But Jesus Christ passes them all by and points to a mere negative thing, to an inward thing, to the attitude of men towards Himself; and He says, ‘If you want to know what sin is, look at that!’ *There* is the worst of all sins. There is a typical instance of what sin is, in which, as in some anatomical preparation, you may see all its fibres straightened out

and made visible. Look at that if you want to know what the world is, and what the world's sin is.

Some of us do not think that it is sin at all; and tell us that man is no more responsible for his belief than he is for the colour of his hair, and suchlike talk. Well, let me put a very plain question: What is it that a man turns away from when he turns away from Jesus Christ? The plainest, the loveliest, the loftiest, the perfectest revelation of God in His beauty and completeness that ever dawned, or ever will dawn upon creation. He rejects that. Anything more? Yes! He turns away from the loveliest human life that ever was, or will be, lived. Anything more? Yes! He turns away from a miracle of self-sacrificing love, which endured the Cross for enemies, and willingly embraced agony and shame and death for the sake of those who inflicted them upon Him. Anything more? Yes! He turns away from hands laden with, and offering him, the most precious and needful blessings that a poor soul on earth can desire or expect.

And if this be true, if unbelief in Jesus Christ be indeed all this that I have sketched out, another question arises, What does such an attitude and act indicate as to the rejector? He stands in the presence of the loveliest revelation of the divine nature and heart, and he sees no light in it. Why, but because he has blinded his eyes and cannot behold? He is incapable of seeing 'God manifest in the flesh,' because he 'loves the darkness rather than the light.' He turns away from the revelation of the loveliest and most self-sacrificing love. Why, but because he bears in himself a heart cased with brass and triple steel of selfishness, against the manifestation of love? He turns away from the offered hands heaped with the blessings that he needs. Why, but because he does not care for the gifts that are offered? Forgiveness, cleansing, purity a heaven which consists in the perfecting of all these, have no attractions for him. The fugitive Israelites in the wilderness said, 'We do not want your light, tasteless manna. It may do very well for angels, but we have been accustomed to garlic and onions down in Egypt. They smell strong, and there is some taste in *them*. Give us *them*.' And so some of you say, 'The offer of pardon is of no use to me, for I am not troubled with my sin. The offer of purity has no attraction to me, for I rather like the dirt and wallowing in it. The offer of a heaven of your sort is but a dreary prospect to me. And so I turn away from the hands that offer precious things.' The man who is blind to the God that beams, lambent and loving, upon him in the face of Jesus Christ—the man who has no stirrings of responsive gratitude for the great outpouring of love upon the Cross—the man who does not care for anything that Jesus Christ can give him, surely, in turning away, commits a real sin.

I do not deny, of course, that there may be intellectual difficulties cropping up in connection with the acceptance of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, but as, on the one hand, I am free to admit that many a man may be putting a true trust in Christ which is joined with a very hesitant grasp of some of the things which, to me, are the very essence and heart of the Gospel; so, on the other side, I would have you remember that there is ne-

cessarily a moral quality in our attitude to all moral and religious truth; and that sin does not cease to be sin because its doer is a thinker or has systematised his rejection into a creed. Though it is not for us to measure motives and to peer into hearts, at the bottom there lies what Christ Himself put His finger on: 'Ye *will* not come to me that ye might have life.'

Then, still further, let me remind you that our Lord here presents this fact of man's unbelief as being an instance in which we may see what the real nature of sin is. To use learned language, it is a 'typical' sin. In all other acts of sin you get the poison manipulated into various forms, associated with other elements, disguised more or less. But here, because it is purely an inward act having relation to Jesus Christ, and to God manifested in Him, and not done at the bidding of the animal nature, or of any of the other strong temptations and impulses which hurry men into gross and coarse forms of manifest transgression, you get sin in its essence. Belief in Christ is the surrender of myself. Sin is living to myself rather than to God. And there you touch the bottom. All those different kinds of sin, however unlike they may be to one another—the lust of the sensualist, the craft of the cheat, the lie of the deceitful, the passion of the unregulated man, the avarice of the miser—all of them have this one common root, a diseased and bloated regard to self. The definition of sin is,—living to myself and making myself my own centre. The definition of faith is,—making Christ my centre and living for Him. Therefore, if you want to know what is the sinfulness of sin, there it is. And if I may use such a word in such a connection, it is all packed away in its *purest* form in the act of rejecting that Lord.

Brother, it is no exaggeration to say that, when you have summoned up before you the ugliest forms of man's sins that you can fancy, this one overtops them all, because it presents in the simplest form the mother-tincture of all sins, which, variously coloured and perfumed and combined, makes the evil of them all. A heap of rotting, poisonous matter is offensive to many senses, but the colourless, scentless, tasteless drop has the poison in its most virulent form, and is not a bit less virulent, though it has been learnedly distilled and christened with a scientific name, and put into a dainty jewelled flask. 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.' I lay that upon the hearts and consciences of some of my present hearers as the key to their rejection or disregard of Christ and His salvation.

II. Now, secondly, notice the ascension of Jesus Christ as the pledge and the channel of the world's righteousness—'Because I go to the Father, and ye see Me no more.'

He speaks as if the process of departure were already commenced. It had three stages—death, resurrection, ascension; but these three are all parts of the one departure. And so He says: 'Because, in the future, when ye go forth to preach in My name, I shall be there with the Father, having finished the work for which He sent Me; therefore you will convince the world of righteousness.'

Now let me put that briefly in two forms. First of all, the fact of an ascended Christ is the guarantee and proof of His own complete fulfilment of the ideal of a righteous man. Or to put it into simpler words, suppose Jesus Christ is dead; suppose that He never rose from the grave; suppose that His bones mouldered in some sepulchre; suppose that there had been no ascension—would it be possible to believe that He was other than an ordinary man? And would it be possible to believe that, however beautiful these familiar records of His life, and however lovely the character which they reveal, there was really in Him no sin at all? A dead Christ means a Christ who, like the rest of us, had His limitations and His faults. But, on the other hand, if it be true that He sprang from the grave because ‘it was not possible that He should be holden of it,’ and because in His nature there was no proclivity to death, since there had been no indulgence in sin; and if it be true that He ascended up on high because that was His native sphere, and He rose to it as naturally as the water in the valley will rise to the height of the hill from which it has descended, then we can see that God has set His seal upon that life by that resurrection and ascension; and as we gaze on Him swept up heavenward by His own calm power, a light falls backward upon all His earthly life, upon His claims to purity, and to union with the Father, and we say, ‘Surely this was a perfectly righteous Man.’

And further let me remind you that with the supernatural facts of our Lord’s resurrection and ascension stands or falls the possibility of His communicating any of His righteousness to us sinful men. If there be no such possibility, what does Jesus Christ’s beauty of character matter to me? Nothing! I shall have to stumble on as best I can, sometimes ashamed and rebuked, sometimes stimulated and sometimes reduced to despair, by looking at the record of His life. If He be lying dead in a forgotten grave, and hath not ‘ascended up on high,’ then there can come from His history and past nothing other in kind, though, perhaps, a little more in degree, than comes from the history and the past of the beautiful and white souls that have sometimes lived in the world. He is a saint like them, He is a teacher like them, He is a prophet like some of them, and we have but to try our best to copy that marble purity and white righteousness. But if He hath ascended up on high, and sits there, wielding the forces of the universe, as we believe He does, then to Him belongs the divine prerogative of imparting His nature and His character to them that love Him. Then His righteousness is not a solitary, uncommunicative perfectness for Himself, but like a sun in the heavens, which streams out vivifying and enlightening rays to all that seek His face. If it be true that Christ has risen, then it is also true that you and I, convicted of sin, and learning our weakness and our faults, may come to Him, and by the exercise of that simple and yet omnipotent act of faith, may ally our incompleteness with His perfectness, our sin with His righteousness, our emptiness with His fullness, and may have all the grace and the beauty of Jesus Christ passing over into us to be the Spirit of life in us, ‘making us free from the law of sin and

death.' If Christ be risen, His righteousness may be the world's; if Christ be not risen, His righteousness is useless to any but to Himself.

My brother, wed yourself to that dear Lord by faith in Him, and His righteousness will become yours, and you will be 'found in Him without spot and blameless,' clothed with white raiment like His own, and sharing in the Throne which belongs to the righteous Christ.

III. Lastly, notice the judgment of the world's prince as the prophecy of the judgment of the world.

We are here upon ground which is only made known to us by the revelation of Scripture. We began with a fact of man's experience; we passed on to a fact of history; now we have a fact certified to us only on Christ's authority.

The world *has* a prince. That ill-omened and chaotic agglomeration of diverse forms of evil has yet a kind of anarchic order in it, and, like the fabled serpent's locks on the Gorgon head, they intertwine and sting one another, and yet they are a unity. We hear very little about 'the prince of the world' in Scripture. Mercifully the existence of such a being is not plainly revealed until the fact of Christ's victory over him is revealed. But however ludicrous mediaeval and vulgar superstitions may have made the notion, and however incredible the tremendous figure painted by the great Puritan poet has proved to be, there is nothing ridiculous, and nothing that we have the right to say is incredible, in the plain declarations that came from Christ's lips over and over again, that the world, the aggregate of ungodly men, *has* a prince.

And then my text tells us that that prince is 'judged.' The Cross did that, as Jesus Christ over and over again indicates, sometimes in plain words, as 'Now is the judgment of this world,' 'Now is the prince of this world cast out'; sometimes in metaphor, as 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven,' 'First bind the strong man and then spoil his house.' We do not know how far-reaching the influences of the Cross may be, and what they may have done in those dark regions, but we know that since that Cross, the power of evil in the world has been broken in its centre, that God has been disclosed, that new forces have been lodged in the heart of humanity, which only need to be developed in order to overcome the evil. We know that since that auspicious day when 'He spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly and leading them in triumph,' even when He was nailed upon the Cross, the history of the world has been the judgment of the world. Hoary iniquities have toppled into the ceaseless washing sea of divine love which has struck against their bases. Ancient evils have vanished, and more are on the point of vanishing. A loftier morality, a higher notion of righteousness, a deeper conception of sin, new hopes for the world and for men, have dawned upon mankind; and the prince of the world is led bound, as it were, at the victorious chariot wheels. The central fortress has been captured, and the rest is an affair of outposts.



My text has for its last word this—the prince’s judgment prophesies the world’s future judgment. The process which began when Jesus Christ died has for its consummation the divine condemnation of all the evil that still afflicts humanity, and its deprivation of authority and power to injure. A final judgment will come, and that it will is manifested by the fact that Christ, when He came in the form of a servant and died upon the Cross, judged the prince. When He comes in the form of a King on the great White Throne He will judge the world which He has delivered from its prince.

That thought, my brother, ought to be a hope to us all. Are you glad when you think that there is a day of judgment coming? Does your heart leap up when you realise the fact that the righteousness, which is in the heavens, is sure to conquer and coerce and secure under the hatches the sin that is riding rampant through the world? It was a joy and a hope to men who did not know half as much of the divine love and the divine righteousness as we do. They called upon the rocks and the hills to rejoice, and the trees of the forest to clap their hands before the Lord, ‘for He cometh to judge the world.’ Does your heart throb a glad Amen to that?

It ought to be a hope; it is a fear; and there are some of us who do not like to have the conviction driven home to us, that the end of the strife between sin and righteousness is that Jesus Christ shall judge the world and take unto Himself His eternal kingdom.

But, my friends, hope or fear, it is a fact, as certain in the future, as the Cross is sure in the past, or the Throne in the present. Let me ask you this question, the question which Christ has sent all His servants to ask—Have you loathed your sin? have you opened your heart to Christ’s righteousness? If you have, when men’s hearts are failing them for fear, and they ‘call on the rocks and the hills to cover them from the face of Him that sitteth upon the Throne,’ you will ‘have a song as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept,’ and lift up your heads, ‘for your redemption draweth nigh.’ ‘Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment.’

## THE GUIDE INTO ALL TRUTH

‘I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you.’—[JOHN xvi. 12-15](#).

This is our Lord’s last expansion, in these discourses, of the great promise of the Comforter which has appeared so often in them. First, He was spoken of simply as dwelling in Christ’s servants, without any more special designation of His work than was involved in the name. Then, His aid was promised, to remind the Apostles of the facts of Christ’s life, especially of His words; and so the inspiration and authority of the four Gospels were certified for us. Then He was further promised as the witness in the disciples to Jesus Christ. And, finally, in the immediately preceding context, we have His office of ‘convincing,’ or convicting, ‘the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.’ And now we come to that gracious and gentle work which that divine Spirit is declared by Christ to do, not only for that little group gathered round Him then, but for all those who trust themselves to His guidance. He is to be the ‘Spirit of truth’ to all the ages, who in simple verity will help true hearts to know and love the truth. There are three things in the words before us—first, the avowed incompleteness of Christ’s own teaching; second, the completeness of the truth into which the Spirit of truth guides; and, last, the unity of these two.

I. First, then, we have here the avowed incompleteness of Christ’s own teaching.

‘I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.’ Now in an earlier portion of these great discourses, we have our Lord asserting that ‘*all* things whatsoever He had heard of the Father He had made known’ unto His servants. How do these two representations harmonise? Is it possible to make them agree? Surely, yes. There is a difference between the germ and the unfolded flower. There is a difference between principles and the complete development of these. I suppose you may say that all Euclid is in the axioms and definitions. I suppose you may also say that when you have learned the axioms and definitions, there are many things yet to be said, of which you have not grown to the apprehension. And so our Lord, as far as His frankness was concerned, and as far as the fundamental and seminal principles of all religious truth were concerned, had even then declared all that He had heard of the Father. But yet, in so far as the unfolding of these was concerned, the tracing of their consequences, the exhibition of their harmonies, the weaving of them into an ordered whole in which a man’s understanding could lodge, there were many things yet to be said, which that handful of men were not able to bear. And so our Lord Himself here declares that His words spoken on earth are not His completed revelation.

Of course we find in them, as I believe, hints profound and pregnant, which only need to be unfolded and smoothed out, as it were, and their depths fathomed, in order to lead to all that is worthy of being called Christian truth. But upon many points we cannot but contrast the desultory, brief, obscure references which came from the Master's lips with the more systematised, full, and accurate teaching which came from the servants. The great crucial instance of all is the comparative reticence which our Lord observed in reference to His sacrificial death, and the atoning character of His sufferings for the world. I do not admit that the silence of the Gospels upon that subject is fairly represented when it is said to be absolute. I believe that that silence has been exaggerated by those who have no desire to accept that teaching. But the distinction is plain and obvious, not to be ignored, rather to be marked as being fruitful of blessed teaching, between the way in which Christ speaks about His Cross, and the way in which the Apostles speak about it after Pentecost.

What then? My text gives us the reason. 'You cannot bear them now.' Now the word rendered 'bear' here does not mean 'bear' in the sense of endure, or tolerate, or suffer, but 'bear' in the sense of carry. And the metaphor is that of some weight—it may be gold, but still it is a weight—laid upon a man whose muscles are not strong enough to sustain it. It crushes rather than gladdens. So because they had not strength enough to carry, had not capacity to receive, our Lord was lovingly reticent.

There is a great principle involved in this saying—that revelation is measured by the moral and spiritual capacities of the men who receive it. The light is graduated for the diseased eye. A wise oculist does not flood that eye with full sunshine, but he puts on veils and bandages, and closes the shutters, and lets a stray beam, ever growing as the curve is perfected, fall upon it. So from the beginning until the end of the process of revelation there was a correspondence between men's capacity to receive the light and the light that was granted; and the faithful use of the less made them capable of receiving the greater, and as soon as they were capable of receiving it, it came. 'To him that hath shall be given.' In His love, then, Christ did not load these men with principles that they could not carry, nor feed them with 'strong meat' instead of 'milk,' until they were able to bear it. Revelation is progressive, and Christ is reticent, from regard to the feebleness of His listeners.

Now that same principle is true in a modified form about us. How many things there are which we sometimes feel we should like to know, that God has not told us, because we have not yet grown up to the point at which we could apprehend them! Compassed with these veils of flesh and weakness, groping amidst the shadows of time, bewildered by the cross-lights that fall upon us from so many surrounding objects, we have not yet eyes able to behold the ineffable glory. He has many things to say to us about that blessed future, and that strange and awful life into which we are to step when we leave this poor world, but 'ye cannot bear them now.' Let us wait with patience until we are ready for the illumination. For two things go to make revelation, the light that reveals and the eye that beholds.

Now one remark before I go further. People tell us, 'Your modern theology is not in the Gospels.' And they say to us, as if they had administered a knockdown blow, 'We stick by Jesus, not Paul.' Well, as I said, I do not admit that there is no 'Pauline' teaching in the Gospels, but I do confess there is not much. And I say, 'What then?' Why, this, then—it is exactly what we were to expect; and people who reject the apostolic form of Christian teaching because it is not found in the Gospels are flying in the face of Christ's own teaching. You say you will take His words as the only source of religious truth. You are going clean contrary to His own words in saying so. Remember that He proclaimed their incompleteness, and referred us, for the fuller knowledge of the truth of God, to a subsequent Teacher.

II. So, secondly, mark here the completeness of the truth into which the Spirit guides.

I must trouble you with just a word or two of remark as to the language of our text. Note the personality, designation, and office of this new Teacher. 'He,' not '*it*,' He, is the Spirit of truth whose characteristic and weapon is truth. 'He will guide you'—suggesting a loving hand put out to lead; suggesting the graciousness, the gentleness, the gradualness of the teaching. 'Into all truth'—that is no promise of omniscience, but it is the assurance of gradual and growing acquaintance with the spiritual and moral truth which is revealed, such as may be fitly paralleled by the metaphor of men passing into some broad land, of which there is much still to be possessed and explored. Not to-day, nor to-morrow, will all the truth belong to those whom the Spirit guides; but if they are true to His guidance, 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant,' and the land will all be traversed at the last. 'He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear that shall He speak.' Mark the parallel between the relation of the Spirit-Teacher to Jesus, and the relation of Jesus to the Father. Of Him, too, it is said by Himself, 'All things whatsoever I have heard of the Father I have declared unto you.' The mark of Satan is, 'He speaketh of his own'; the mark of the divine Teacher is, 'He speaketh not of Himself, but whatsoever things,' in all their variety, in their continuity, in their completeness, 'He shall hear,'—where? yonder in the depths of the Godhead—'whatsoever things He shall hear there,' He shall show to you, and especially, 'He will show you the things that are to come.' These Apostles were living in a revolutionary time. Men's hearts were 'failing them for fear of the things that were coming on the earth.' Step by step they would be taught the evolving glory of that kingdom which they were to be the instruments in founding; and step by step there would be spread out before them the vision of the future and all the wonder that should be, the world that was to come, the new constitution which Christ was to establish.

Now, if that be the interpretation, however inadequate, of these great and wonderful words, there are but two things needful to say about them. One is that this promise of a complete guidance into truth applies in a peculiar and unique fashion to the original hearers of it. I ventured to say that one of the other promises of the Spirit, which I quoted in my introductory remarks, was the certificate to us of the inspiration and reliableness of these

Four Gospels. And I now remark that in these words, in their plain and unmistakable meaning, there lie involved the inspiration and authority of the Apostles as teachers of religious truth. Here we have the guarantee for the authority over our faith, of the words which came from these men, and from the other who was added to their number on the Damascus road. They were guided ‘into *all* the truth,’ and so our task is to receive the truth into which they were guided.

The Acts of the Apostles is the best commentary on these words of my text. There you see how these men rose at once into a new region; how the truths about their Master which had been bewildering puzzles to them flashed into light; how the Cross, which had baffled and dispersed them, became at once the centre of union for themselves and for the world; how the obscure became lucid, and Christ’s death and the resurrection stood forth to them as the great central facts of the world’s salvation. In the book of the Apocalypse we have part of the fulfilment of this closing promise: ‘He will show you things to come’; when the Seer was ‘in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day,’ and the heavens were opened, and the history of the Church (whether in chronological order, or in the exhibition of symbols of the great forces which shall be arrayed for and against it, over and over again, to the end of time, does not at present matter), was spread before Him as a scroll.

Now, dear friends, this great principle of my text has a modified application also to us all. For that divine Spirit is given to each of us if we will use Him, is given to any and every man who desires Him, does dwell in Christian hearts, though, alas! so many of us are so little conscious of Him, and does teach us the truth which Christ Himself left incomplete.

Only let me make one remark here. We do not stand on the same level as these men who clustered round Christ on His road to Gethsemane, and received the first fruits of the promise—the Spirit. They, taught by that divine Guide and by experience, were led into the deeper apprehension of the words and the deeds, of the life and the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord. We, taught by that same Spirit, are led into a deeper apprehension of the words which they spake, both in recording and interpreting the facts of Christ’s life and death.

And so we come sharp up to this, ‘If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I speak unto him are the commandments of the Lord.’ That is how an Apostle put his relation to the other possessors of the divine Spirit. And you and I have to take this as the criterion of all true possession of the Spirit of God, that it bows in humble submission to the authoritative teaching of this book.

III. Lastly, we have here our Lord pointing out the unity of these two.

In the verse on which I have just been commenting He says nothing about Himself, and it might easily appear to the listeners as if these two sources of truth, His own incomplete teaching, and the full teaching of the divine Spirit, were independent of, if not opposed to, one another. So in the last words of our text He shows us the blending of the two streams, the union of the two beams.

‘He shall glorify Me.’ Think of a *man* saying that! The Spirit who will come from God and ‘guide men into all truth’ has for His distinctive office the glorifying of Jesus Christ. So fair is He, so good, so radiant, that to make Him known is to glorify Him. The glorifying of Christ is the ultimate and adequate purpose of everything that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has done, because the glorifying of Christ is the glorifying of God, and the blessing of the eyes that behold His glory.

‘For He shall take of Mine, and show it unto you.’ All which that divine Spirit brings is Christ’s. So, then, there is no new revelation, only the interpretation of the revelation. The text is given, and its last word was spoken, when ‘the cloud received Him out of their sight,’ and henceforward all is commentary. The Spirit takes of Christ’s; applies the principles, unfolds the deep meaning of words and deeds, and especially the meaning of the mystery of the Cradle, and the tragedy of the Cross, and the mystery of the Ascension, as declaring that Christ is the Son of God, the Sacrifice for the world. Christ said, ‘I am the Truth.’ Therefore, when He promises, ‘He will guide you into all the truth,’ we may fairly conclude that ‘the truth’ into which the Spirit guides is the personal Christ. It is the whole Christ, the whole truth, that we are to receive from that divine Teacher; growing up day by day into the capacity to grasp Christ more firmly, to understand Him better, and by love and trust and obedience to make Him more entirely our own. We are like the first settlers upon some great island-continent. There is a little fringe of population round the coast, but away in the interior are leagues of virgin forests and fertile plains stretching to the horizon, and snow-capped summits piercing the clouds, on which no foot has ever trod. ‘He will guide you into all truth’; through the length and breadth of the boundless land, the person and the work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

‘All things that the Father hath are Mine, therefore said I that He shall take of Mine and show it unto you.’ What awful words! A divine, teaching Spirit can only teach concerning God. Christ here explains the paradox of His words preceding, in which, if He were but human, He seems to have given that teaching Spirit an unworthy office, by explaining that whatsoever is His is God’s, and whatsoever is God’s is His.

My brother! do you believe that? Is that what you think about Jesus Christ? He puts out here an unpretentious hand, and grasps all the constellated glories of the divine Nature, and says, ‘They are Mine’; and the Father looks down from heaven and says, ‘Son! Thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is Thine.’ Do you answer, ‘Amen! I believe it?’

Here are three lessons from these great words which I leave with you without attempting to unfold them. One is, Believe a great deal more definitely in, and seek a great deal more consciously and earnestly, and use a great deal more diligently and honestly, that divine Spirit who is given to us all. I fear me that over very large tracts of professing Christendom to-day men stand up with very faltering lips and confess, ‘I believe in the Holy Ghost.’ Hence comes much of the weakness of our modern Christianity, of the worldliness of professing

Christians, 'and when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have need that one teach them again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.' 'Quench not, grieve not, despise not the Holy Spirit.'

Another lesson is, Use the Book that He uses—else you will not grow, and He will have no means of contact with you.

And the last is, Try the spirits. If anything calling itself Christian teaching comes to you and does not glorify Christ, it is self-condemned. For none can exalt Him highly enough, and no teaching can present Him too exclusively and urgently as the sole Salvation and Life of the whole earth, And if it be, as my text tells us, that the great teaching Spirit is to come, who is to 'guide us into all truth,' and therein is to glorify Christ, and to show us the things that are His, then it is also true, 'Hereby know we the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of Antichrist.'

## CHRIST'S 'LITTLE WHILES'

'A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again a little while, and ye shall see Me?'—[JOHN xvi. 16-19](#).

A superficial glance at the former part of these verses may fail to detect their connection with the great preceding promise of the Spirit who is to guide the disciples 'into all truth.' They appear to stand quite isolated and apart from that. But a little thought will bring out an obvious connection. The first words of our text are really the climax and crown of the promise of the Spirit; for that Spirit is to 'guide into all the truth' by declaring to the disciples the things that are Christ's, and in consequence of that ministration, they are to be able to see their unseen Lord. So this is the loftiest thought of what the divine Spirit does for the Christian heart, that it shows Him a visible though absent Christ.

Then we have in the subsequent part of our text the blundering of the bewildered disciples and the patient answer of the long-suffering Teacher. So that there are these three points to take up: the times of disappearance and of sight; the bewildered disciples; and the patient Teacher.

I. First of all, then, note the deep teaching of our Lord here, about the times of disappearance and of Sight.

The words are plain enough; the difficulty lies in the determination of the periods to which they refer. He tells us that, after a brief interval from the time at which He was speaking, there would come a short parenthesis during which He was not to be seen; and that upon that would follow a period of which no end is hinted at, during which He is to be seen. The two words employed in the two consecutive clauses, for 'sight,' are not the same, and so they naturally suggest some difference in the manner of vision.

But the question arises, Where are the limits of these times of which the Lord speaks? Now it is quite clear, I suppose, that the first of the 'little whiles' is the few hours that intervened between His speaking and the Cross. And it is equally clear that His death and burial began, at all events, the period during which they were not to see Him. But where does the second period begin, during which they are to see Him? Is it at His resurrection or at His ascension, when the process of 'going to the Father' was completed in all its stages; or at Pentecost, when the Spirit, by whose ministration He was to be made visible, was poured out? The answer is, perhaps, not to be restricted to any one of these periods; but I think if we consider that all disciples, in all ages, have a portion in all the rest of these great discourses,



and if we note the absence of any hint that the promised seeing of Christ was ever to terminate, and if we mark the diversity of words under which the two manners of vision are described, and, above all, if we note the close connection of these words with those which precede, we shall come to the conclusion that the full realisation of this great promise of a visible Christ did not begin until that time when the Spirit, poured out, opened the eyes of His servants, and 'they saw His glory.' But however we settle the minor question of the chronology of these periods, the great truth shines out here that, through all the stretch of the ages, true hearts may truly see the true Christ.

If we might venture to suppose that in our text the second of the periods to which He refers, when they did not see Him, was not coterminous with, but preceded, the second 'little while,' all would be clear. Then the first 'little while' would be the few hours before the Cross. 'Ye shall not see Me' would refer to the days in which He lay in the tomb. 'Again, a little while' would point to that strange transitional period between His death and His ascension, in which the disciples had neither the close intercourse of earlier days nor the spiritual communion of later ones. And the final period, 'Ye shall see Me,' would cover the whole course of the centuries till He comes again.

However that may be, and I only offer it as a possible suggestion, the thing that we want to fasten upon for ourselves is this—we all, if we will, may have a vision of Christ as close, as real, as firmly certifying us of His reality, and making as vivid an impression upon us, as if He stood there, visible to our senses. And so, 'by this vision splendid' we may 'be everywhere attended,' and whithersoever we go, have burning before us the light of His countenance, in the sunshine of which we shall walk.

Brother! that is personal Christianity—to see Jesus Christ, and to live with the thrilling consciousness, printed deep and abiding upon our spirits, that, in very deed, He is by our sides. O how that conviction would make life strong and calm and noble and blessed! How it would lift us up above temptation! 'He endured as seeing Him who is Invisible.' What should terrify us if Christ stood before us? What should charm us if we saw Him? Competing glories and attractions would fade before His presence, as a dim candle dies at noon. It would make all life full of a blessed companionship. Who could be solitary if he saw Christ? or feel that life was dreary if that Friend was by his side? It would fill our hearts with joy and strength, and make us evermore blessed by the light of His countenance.

And how are we to get that vision? Remember the connection of my text. It is because there is a divine Spirit to show men the things that are Christ's that therefore, unseen, He is visible to the eye of faith. And therefore the shortest and directest road to the vision of Jesus is the submitting of heart and mind and spirit to the teaching of that divine Spirit, who uses the record of the Scriptures as the means by which He makes Jesus Christ known to us.

But besides this waiting upon that divine Teacher, let me remind you that there are conditions of discipline which must be fulfilled upon our parts, if any clear vision of Jesus Christ is to bless us pilgrims in this lonely world. And the first of these conditions is—If you want to see Jesus Christ, think about Him. Occupy your minds with Him. If men in the city walk the pavements with their eyes fixed upon the gutters, what does it matter though all the glories of a sunset are dyeing the western sky? They will see none of them; and if Christ stood beside you, closer to you than any other, if your eyes were fixed upon the trivialities of this poor present, you would not see Him. If you honestly want to see Christ, meditate upon Him.

And if you want to see Him, shut out competing objects, and the dazzling cross-lights that come in and hide Him from us. There must be a 'looking *off* unto Jesus.' There must be a rigid limitation, if not excision, of other objects, if we are to grasp Him. If we would see, and have our hearts filled with, the calm sublimity of the solemn, white wedge that lifts itself into the far-off blue, we must not let our gaze stop on the busy life of the valleys or the green slopes of the lower Alps, but must lift it and keep it fixed aloft. Meditate upon Him, and shut out other things.

If you want to see Christ, do His will. One act of obedience has more power to clear a man's eyes than hours of idle contemplation; and one act of disobedience has more power to dim his eyes than anything besides. It is in the dusty common road that He draws near to us, and the experience of those disciples that journeyed to Emmaus may be ours. He meets us in the way, and makes 'our hearts burn within us.' The experience of the dying martyr outside the city gate may be ours. Sorrows and trials will rend the heavens if they be rightly borne, and so we shall see Christ 'standing at the right hand of God.' Rebellious tears blind our eyes, as Mary's did, so that she did not know the Master and took Him for 'the gardener.' Submissive tears purge the eyes and wash them clean to see His face. To do His will is the sovereign method for beholding His countenance.

Brethren, is this our experience? You professing Christians, do you see Christ? Are your eyes fixed upon Him? Do you go through life with Him consciously nearer to you than any beside? Is He closer than the intrusive insignificances of this fleeting present? Have you Him as your continual Companion? Oh! when we contrast the difference between the largeness of this promise—a promise of a thrilling consciousness of His presence, of a vivid perception of His character, of an unwavering certitude of His reality—and the fly-away glimpses and wandering sight, and faint, far-off views, as of a planet weltering amid clouds, which the most of Christian men have of Christ, what shame should cover our faces, and how we should feel that if we have not the fulfilment, it is our own fault! Blessed they of whom it is true that they see 'no man any more save Jesus only!' and to whom all sorrow, joy, care, anxiety, work, and repose are but the means of revealing that sweet and all-sufficient Presence! 'I have set the Lord always before me, therefore I shall not be moved.'

II. Now notice, secondly, these bewildered disciples.

We find, in the early portion of these discourses, that twice they ventured to interrupt our Lord with more or less relevant questions, but as the wonderful words flowed on, they seem to have been awed into silence; and our Lord Himself almost complains of them that 'None of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?' The inexhaustible truths that He had spoken seem to have gone clear over their heads, but the verbal repetition of the 'little whiles,' and the recurring ring of the sentences, seem to have struck upon their ears. So passing by all the great words, they fasten upon this minor thing, and whisper among themselves, perhaps lagging behind on the road, as to what He means by these 'little whiles.' The Revised Version is probably correct, or at least it has strong manuscript authority in its favour, in omitting the clause in our Lord's words, 'Because I go to the Father.' The disciples seem to have quoted, not from the preceding verse, but from a verse a little before that in the context, where He said that 'the Spirit will convince the world of righteousness because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more.' The contradiction seems to strike them.

These disciples in their bewilderment seem to me to represent some very common faults which we all commit in our dealing with the Lord's words, and to one or two of these I turn for a moment.

Note this to begin with, how they pass by the greater truths in order to fasten upon a smaller outstanding difficulty. They have no questions to ask about the gifts of the Spirit, nor about the unity of Christ and His disciples as represented in the vine and the branches, nor about what He tells them of the love that 'lays down its life for its friends.' But when He comes into the region of chronology, they are all agog to know the 'when' about which He is so enigmatically speaking.

Now is not that exactly like us, and does not the Christianity of this day very much want the hint to pay most attention to the greatest truths, and let the little difficulties fall into their subordinate place? The central truths of Christianity are the incarnation and atonement of Jesus Christ. And yet outside questions, altogether subordinate and, in comparison with this, unimportant, are filling the attention and the thoughts of people at present to such an extent that there is great danger of the central truth of all being either passed by, or the reception of it being suspended on the clearing up of smaller questions.

The truth that Christ is the Son of God, who has died for our salvation, is the heart of the Gospel. And why should we make our faith in that, and our living by it, contingent on the clearing up of certain external and secondary questions; chronological, historical, critical, philological, scientific, and the like? And why should men be so occupied in jangling about the latter as that the towering supremacy, the absolute independence, of the former should be lost sight of? What would you think of a man in a fire who, when they brought the fire-escape to him, said, 'I decline to trust myself to it, until you first of all explain to me the principles of its construction; and, secondly, tell me all about who made it; and, thirdly, in-

form me where all the materials of which it is made came from?' But that is very much what a number of people are doing to-day in reference to 'the Gospel of our salvation,' when they demand that the small questions—on which the central verity does not at all depend—shall be answered and settled before they cast themselves upon that.

Another of the blunders of these disciples, in which they show themselves as our brethren, is that they fling up the attempt to apprehend the obscurity in a very swift despair. 'We cannot tell what He saith, and we are not going to try any more. It is all cloud-land and chaos together.'

Intellectual indolence, spiritual carelessness, deal thus with outstanding difficulties, abandoning precipitately the attempt to grasp them or that which lies behind them. And yet although there are no gratuitous obscurities in Christ's teaching, He said a great many things which could not possibly be understood at the time, in order that the disciples might stretch up towards what was above them, and, by stretching up, might grow. I do not think that it is good to break down the children's bread too small. A wise teacher will now and then blend with the utmost simplicity something that is just a little in advance of the capacity of the listener, and so encourage a little hand to stretch itself out, and the arm to grow because it is stretched. If there are no difficulties there is no effort, and if there is no effort there is no growth. Difficulties are there in order that we may grapple with them, and truth is sometimes hidden in a well in order that we may have the blessing of the search, and that the truth found after the search may be more precious. The tropics, with their easy, luxuriant growth, where the footfall turns up the warm soil, grow languid men, and our less smiling latitude grows strenuous ones. Thank God that everything is not easy, even in that which is meant for the revelation of all truth to all men! Instead of turning tail at the first fence, let us learn that it will do us good to climb, and that the fence is there in order to draw forth our effort.

There is another point in which these bewildered disciples are uncommonly like the rest of us; and that is that they have no patience to wait for time and growth to solve the difficulty. They want to know all about it now, or not at all. If they would wait for six weeks they would understand, as they did. Pentecost explained it all. We, too, are often in a hurry. There is nothing that the ordinary mind, and often the educated mind, detests so much as uncertainty, and being consciously baffled by some outstanding difficulty. And in order to escape that uneasiness, men are dogmatical when they should be doubtful, and positively asserting when it would be a great deal more for the health of their souls and of their listeners to say, 'Well, really I do not know, and I am content to wait.' So, on both sides of great controversies, you get men who will not be content to let things wait, for all must be made clear and plain to-day.

Ah, brethren! for ourselves, for our own intellectual difficulties, and for the difficulties of the world, there is nothing like time and patience. The mysteries that used to plague us

when we were boys melted away when we grew up. And many questions which trouble me to-day, and through which I cannot find my way, if I lay them aside, and go about my ordinary duties, and come back to them to-morrow with a fresh eye and an unwearied brain, will have straightened themselves out and become clear. We grow into our best and deepest convictions, we are not dragged into them by any force of logic. So for our own sorrows, questions, pains, griefs, and for all the riddle of this painful world,

‘Take it on trust a little while,  
Thou soon shalt read the mystery right,  
In the full sunshine of His smile.’

III. Lastly, and very briefly, a word about the patient Teacher.

‘Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him.’ He knows all our difficulties and perplexities. Perhaps it is His supernatural knowledge that is indicated in the words before us, or perhaps it is merely that He saw them whispering amongst themselves and so inferred their wish. Be that as it may, we may take the comfort that we have to do with a Teacher who accurately understands how much we understand and where we grope, and will shape His teaching according to our necessities.

He had not a word of rebuke for the slowness of their apprehension. He might well have said to them, ‘O fools and slow of heart to believe!’ But that word was not addressed to them then, though two of them deserved it and got it, after events had thrown light on His teaching. He never rebukes us for either our stupidity or for our carelessness, but ‘has long patience’ with us.

He does give them a kind of rebuke. ‘Do ye inquire *among yourselves?*’ That is a hopeful source to go to for knowledge. Why did they not ask Him, instead of whispering and muttering there behind Him, as if two people equally ignorant could help each other to knowledge? Inquiry ‘among yourselves’ is folly; to ask Him is wisdom. We can do much for one another, but the deepest riddles and mysteries can only be wisely dealt with in one way. Take them to Him, tell Him about them. Told to Him, they often dwindle. They become smaller when they are looked at beside Him, and He will help us to understand as much as may be understood, and patiently to wait and leave the residue unsolved, until the time shall come when ‘we shall know even as we are known.’

In the context here, Jesus Christ does not explain to the disciples the precise point that troubled them. Olivet and Pentecost were to do that; but He gives them what will tide them over the time until the explanation shall come, in triumphant hopes of a joy and peace that are drawing near.

And so there is a great deal in all our lives, in His dealings with us, in His revelation of Himself to us, that must remain mysterious and unintelligible. But if we will keep close to

Him, and speak plainly to Him in prayer and communion about our difficulties, He will send us triumphant hope and large confidence of a coming joy, that will float us over the bar and make us feel that the burden is no longer painful to carry. Much that must remain dark through life will be lightened when we get yonder; for the vision here is not perfect, and the knowledge here is as imperfect as the vision.

Dear friends! the one question for us all is, Do our eyes fix and fasten on that dear Lord, and is it the description of our own whole lives, that we see Him and walk with Him? Oh! if so, then life will be blessed, and death itself will be but as 'a little while' when we 'shall not see Him,' and then we shall open our eyes and behold Him close at hand, whom we saw from afar, and with wandering eyes, amidst the mists and illusions of earth. To see Him as He became for our sakes is heaven on earth. To see Him as He is will be the heaven of heaven, and before that Face, 'as the sun shining in His strength,' all sorrows, difficulties, and mysteries will melt as morning mists.

## SORROW TURNED INTO JOY

‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now, therefore, have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.’—[JOHN xvi. 20-22](#).

These words, to which we have come in the ordinary course of our exposition, make an appropriate text for Easter Sunday. For their one theme is the joy which began upon that day, and was continued in increasing measure as the possession of Christ’s servants after Pentecost. Our Lord promises that the momentary sadness and pain shall be turned into a swift and continual joy. He pledges His word for that, and bids us believe it on His bare word. He illustrates it by that tender and beautiful image which, in the pains and bliss of motherhood, finds an analogy for the pains and bliss of the disciples, inasmuch as, in both cases, pain leads directly to blessedness in which it is forgotten. And He crowns His great promises by explaining to us what is the deepest foundation of our truest gladness, ‘I will see you again,’ and by declaring that such a joy is independent of all foes and all externals, ‘and your joy no man taketh from you.’

There are, then, two or three aspects of the Christian life as a glad life which are set before us in these words, and to which I ask your attention.

I. There is, first, the promise of a joy which is a transformed sorrow.

‘Your sorrow shall be turned into joy,’ not merely that the one emotion is substituted for the other, but that the one emotion, as it were, becomes the other. This can only mean that *that*, which was the cause of the one, reverses its action and becomes the cause of the opposite. Of course the historical and immediate fulfilment of these words lies in the double result of Christ’s Cross upon His servants. For part of three dreary days it was the occasion of their sorrow, their panic, their despair; and then, all at once, when with a bound the mighty fact of the resurrection dawned upon them, that which had been the occasion for their deep grief, for their apparently hopeless despair, suddenly became the occasion for a rapture beyond their dreams, and a joy which would never pass. The Cross of Christ, which for some few hours was pain, and all but ruin, has ever since been the centre of the deepest gladness and confidence of a thousand generations.

I do not need to remind you, I suppose, of the value, as a piece of evidence of the historical veracity of the Gospel story, of this sudden change and complete revolution in the sentiments and emotions of that handful of disciples. What was it that lifted them out of the pit? What was it that revolutionised in a moment their notions of the Cross and of its bearing upon them? What was it that changed downhearted, despondent, and all but apostate, dis-

ciples into heroes and martyrs? It was the one fact which Christendom commemorates to-day: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was the element, added to the dark potion, which changed it all in a moment into golden flashing light. The resurrection was what made the death of Christ no longer the occasion for the dispersion of His disciples, but bound them to Him with a closer bond. And I venture to say that, unless the first disciples were lunatics, there is no explanation of the changes through which they passed in some eight-and-forty hours, except the supernatural and miraculous fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That set a light to the thick column of smoke, and made it blaze up a 'pillar of fire.' That changed sorrow into joy. The same death which, before the resurrection, drew a pall of darkness over the heavens, and draped the earth in mourning, by reason of that resurrection which swept away the cloud and brought out the sunshine, became the source of joy. A dead Christ was the Church's despair; a dead and risen Christ is the Church's triumph, because He is 'the Christ that died. . . and is alive for evermore.'

But, more generally, let me remind you how this very same principle, which applies directly and historically to the resurrection of our Lord, may be legitimately expanded so as to cover the whole ground of devout men's sorrows and calamities. Sorrow is the first stage, of which the second and completed stage is transformation into joy. Every thundercloud has a rainbow lying in its depths when the sun smites upon it. Our purest and noblest joys are transformed sorrows. The sorrow of contrite hearts becomes the gladness of pardoned children; the sorrow of bereaved, empty hearts may become the gladness of hearts filled with God; and every grief that stoops upon our path may be, and will be, if we keep near that dear Lord, changed into its own opposite, and become the source of blessedness else unattainable. Every stroke of the bright, sharp ploughshare that goes through the fallow ground, and every dark winter's day of pulverising frost and lashing tempest and howling wind, are represented in the broad acres, waving with the golden grain. All your griefs and mine, brother, if we carry them to the Master, will flash up into gladness and be "turned into joy."

II. Still further, another aspect here of the glad life of the true Christian is, that it is a joy founded upon the consciousness that Christ's eye is upon us.

'I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice.' In other parts of these closing discourses the form of the promise is the converse of this, as for instance—'Yet a little while, and ye shall see *Me*.' Here Christ lays hold of the thought by the other handle, and says, '*I* will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.' Now these two forms of putting the same mutual relationship, of course, agree, in that they both of them suggest, as the true foundation of the blessedness which they promise, the fact of communion with a present Lord. But they differ from one another in colouring, and in the emphasis which they place upon the two parts of that communion. '*Ye* shall see *Me*' fixes attention upon us and our perception of Him. '*I* will see you' fixes attention rather upon Him and His beholding of us. '*Ye* shall see



Me' speaks of our going out after Him and being satisfied in Him. 'I will see you' speaks of His perfect knowledge, of His loving care, of His tender, compassionate, complacent, ever-watchful eye resting upon us, in order that He may communicate to us all needful good.

And so it requires a loving heart on our part, in order to find joy in such a promise. 'His eyes are as a flame of fire,' and He sees all men; but unless our hearts cleave to Him and we know ourselves to be knit to Him by the tender bond of love from Him, accepted and treasured in our souls, then 'I will see you again' is a threat and not a promise. It depends upon the relation which we bear to Him, whether it is blessedness or misery to think that He whose flaming eye reads all men's sins and pierces through all hypocrisies and veils has it fixed upon us. The sevenfold utterance of His words to the Asiatic churches-the last recorded words of Jesus Christ-begins with 'I know thy works.' It was no joy to the lukewarm professors at Laodicea, nor to the church at Ephesus which had lost the freshness of its early love, that the Master knew them; but to the faithful souls in Philadelphia, and to the few in Sardis, who 'had not defiled their garments,' it was blessedness and life to feel that they walked in the sunshine of His face.

Is there any joy to us in the thought that the Lord Christ sees us? Oh! if our hearts are really His, if our lives are as truly built on Him as our profession of being Christians alleges that they are, then all that we need for the satisfaction of our nature, for the supply of our various necessities, or as an armour against temptation, and an amulet against sorrow, will be given to us, in the belief that His eye is fixed upon us. *There* is the foundation of the truest joy for men. 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time when their corn and their wine abound.' One look *towards* Christ will more than repay and abolish earth's sorrow. One look *from* Christ will fill our hearts with sunshine. All tears are dried on eyes that meet His. Loving hearts find their heaven in looking into one another's faces, and if Christ be our love, our deepest and purest joys will be found in His glance and our answering gaze.

If one could anyhow take a bit of the Arctic world and float it down into the tropics, the ice would all melt, and the white dreariness would disappear, and a new splendour of colour and of light would clothe the ground, and an unwonted vegetation would spring up where barrenness had been. And if you and I will only float our lives southward beneath the direct vertical rays of that great 'Sun of Righteousness,' then all the dreary winter and ice of our sorrows will melt, and joy will spring. Brother! the Christian life is a glad life, because Christ, the infinite and incarnate Lover of our souls, looks upon the heart that loves and trusts Him.

III. Still further, note how our Lord here sets forth His disciples' joy as beyond the reach of violence and independent of externals.

‘No man taketh it from you.’ Of course, that refers primarily to the opposition and actual hostility of the persecuting world, which that handful of frightened men were very soon to face; and our Lord assures them here that, whatsoever the power of the devil working through the world may be able to filch away from them, it cannot filch away the joy that He gives. But we may extend the meaning beyond that reference.

Much of our joy, of course, depends upon our fellows, and disappears when they fade away from our sight and we struggle along in a solitude, made the more dreary because of remembered companionship. And much of our joy depends upon the goodwill and help of our fellows, and they can snatch away all that so depends. They can hedge up our road and make it uncomfortable and sad for us in many ways, but no man but myself can put a roof over my head to shut me out from God and Christ; and as long as I have a clear sky overhead, it matters very little how high may be the walls that foes or hostile circumstances pile around me, and how close they may press upon me. And much of our joy necessarily depends upon and fluctuates with external circumstances of a hundred different kinds, as we all only too well know. But we do not need to have all our joy fed from these surface springs. We may dig deeper down if we like. If we are Christians, we have, like some beleaguered garrison in a fortress, a well in the courtyard that nobody can get at, and which never can run dry. ‘Your joy no man taketh from you.’

As long as we have Christ, we cannot be desolate. If He and I were alone in the universe, or, paradoxical as it may sound, if He and I were alone, and the universe were not, I should have all that I needed and my joy would be full, if I loved Him as I ought to do.

So, my brother! let us see to it that we dig deep enough for the foundation of our blessedness, and that it is on Christ and nothing less infinite, less eternal, less unchangeable, that we repose for the inward blessedness which nothing outside of us can touch. That is the blessedness which we may all possess, ‘For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us’ from the eye and the heart of the risen Christ who lives for us. But remember, though externals have no power to rob us of our joy, they have a very formidable power to interfere with the cultivation of that faith, which is the essential condition of our joy. They cannot force us away from Christ, but they may tempt us away. The sunshine did for the traveller in the old fable what the storm could not do; and the world may cause you to think so much about it that you forget your Master. Its joys may compel Him to hide His face, and may so fill your eyes that you do not care to look at His face; and so the sweet bond may be broken, and the consciousness of a living, loving Jesus may fade, and become filmy and unsubstantial, and occasional and interrupted. Do you see to it that what the world cannot do by violence and directly, it does not do by its harlot kisses and its false promises, tempting you away from the paths where alone you can meet your Master.

IV. Lastly, note that this life of joy, which our Lord here speaks of, is made certain by the promise of a faithful Christ.

‘Verily, verily, I say unto you,’—He was accustomed to use that impressive and solemn formula, when He was about to speak words beyond the reach of human wisdom to discover, or of prime importance for men to accept and believe. He tells these men, who had nothing but His bare word to rely upon, that the astonishing thing which He is going to promise them will certainly come to pass. He would encourage them to rest an unfaltering confidence, for the brief parenthesis of sorrow, upon His faithful promise of joy. He puts His own character, so to speak, in pawn. His words are precisely equivalent in meaning to the solemn Old Testament words which are represented as being the oath of God, ‘As I live saith the Lord,’ ‘You may be as sure of this thing as you are of My divine existence, for all My divine Being is pledged to you to bring it about.’ ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you,’ ‘You may be as sure of this thing as you are of Me, for all that I am is pledged to fulfil the words of My lips.’

So Christ puts His whole truthfulness at stake, as it were; and if any man who has ever loved Jesus Christ and trusted Him aright has not found this ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory,’ then Jesus Christ has said the thing that is not.

Then why is it that so many professing Christians have such joyless lives as they have? Simply because they do not keep the conditions. If we will love Him so as to set our hearts upon Him, if we will desire Him as our chief good, if we will keep our eyes fixed upon Him, then, as sure as He is living and is the Truth, He will flood our hearts with blessedness, and His joy will pour into our souls as the flashing tide rushes into some muddy and melancholy harbour, and sets everything dancing that was lying stranded on the slime. If, my brother, you, a professing Christian, know but little of this joy, why, then, it is *your* fault, and not *His*. The joyless lives of so many who say that they are His disciples cast no shadow of suspicion upon His veracity, but they do cast a very deep shadow of doubt upon their profession of faith in Him.

Is your religion joyful? Is your joy religious? The two questions go together. And if we cannot answer these questions in the light of God’s eye as we ought to do, let these great promises and my text prick us into holier living, into more consistent Christian character, and a closer walk with our Master and Lord.

The out-and-out Christian is a joyful Christian. The half-and-half Christian is the kind of Christian that a great many of you are—little acquainted with ‘the joy of the Lord.’ Why should we live half way up the hill and swathed in mists, when we might have an unclouded sky and a visible sun over our heads, if we would only climb higher and walk in the light of His face?

## **'IN THAT DAY'**

'And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.'—[JOHN xvi. 23, 24](#).

Our Lord here sums up the prerogatives and privileges of His servants in the day that was about to dawn and to last till He came again. There is nothing absolutely new in the words; substantially the promises contained in them have appeared in former parts of these discourses under somewhat different aspects and connections. But our Lord brings them together here, in this condensed repetition, in order that the scattered rays, being thus focussed, may have more power to illuminate with certitude, and to warm into hope. 'Ye shall ask Me nothing. . . . Ask and ye shall receive. . . . Your joy shall be full.' These are the jewels which He sets in a cluster, the juxtaposition making each brighter, and gives to us for a parting keepsake.

Now it is to be noticed that the two askings which are spoken of here are expressed by different words in the Greek. Our English word 'ask' means two things, either to question or to request; to ask in the sense of interrogating, in order to get information and teaching, or in the sense of beseeching, in order to get gifts. In the former sense the word is employed in the first clause of my text, with distinct reference to the disciples' desire, a moment or two before, to ask Him a very foolish question; and in the second sense it is employed in the central portion of my text.

So, then, there are three things here as the marks of the Christian life all through the ages: the cessation of the ignorant questions addressed to a present Christ; the satisfaction of desires; and the perfecting of joy. These are the characteristics of a true Christian life. My brother, are they in any degree the characteristics of yours?

I. Note then, first, the end of questionings.

'In that day ye shall ask Me nothing,' and do not you think that when the disciples heard that, they would be tempted to say, 'Then what in all the world are we to do?' To them the thought that He was not to be at their sides any longer, for them to go to with their difficulties, must have seemed despair rather than advance; but in Christ's eyes it was progress. He tells them and us that we gain by losing Him, and are better off than they were, precisely because He does not any longer stand at our sides for us to question. It is better for a boy to puzzle out the meaning of a Latin book by his own brains and the help of a dictionary than it is lazily to use an interlinear translation. And, though we do not always feel it, and are often tempted to think how blessed it would be if we had an infallible Teacher visible here at our sides, it is a great deal better for us that we have not, and it is a step in advance that He has gone away. Many eager and honest Christian souls, hungering after certainty and rest, have cast themselves in these latter days into the arms of an infallible Church. I doubt whether

any such questioning mind has found what it sought; and I am sure that it has taken a step downwards, in passing from the spiritual guidance realised by our own honest industry and earnest use of the materials supplied to us in Christ's word, to any external authority which comes to us to save us the trouble of thinking, and to confirm to us truth which we have not made our own by search and effort. We gain by losing the visible Christ; and He was proclaiming progress and not retrogression, when He said: 'In that day ye shall ask Me no more questions.'

For what have we instead? We have two things: a completed revelation, and an inward Teacher.

We have a completed revelation. Great and wonderful and unspeakably precious as were and are the words of Jesus Christ, His deeds are far more. The death of Christ has told us things that Christ before His death could not tell. The resurrection of Christ has cast light upon all the darkest places of man's destiny which Christ, before His resurrection, could not by any words so illuminate. The ascension of Christ has opened doors for thought, for faith, for hope, which were fast closed, notwithstanding all His teachings, until He had burst them asunder and passed to His throne. And the facts which are substituted for the bodily presence of Jesus with His disciples tell us a great deal more than they could ever have drawn from Him by questionings, however persistent and however wisely directed. We have a completed revelation, and therefore we need 'ask Him nothing.'

And we have a divine Spirit that will come to us if we will, and teach us by means of blessing the exercise of our own faculties, and guiding us, not, indeed, into the uniform perception of the intellectual aspects of Christian truth, but into the apprehension and the loving possession, as a power in our lives, of all the truth that we need to mould our characters and to raise us to the likeness of Himself.

Only, brother! let us remember what such a method of teaching demands from us. It needs that we honestly use the revelation that is given us; it needs that we loyally, lovingly, trustfully, submit ourselves to the teaching of that Spirit who will dwell in us; it needs that we bring our lives up to the height of our present knowledge, and make everything that we know a factor in shaping what we do and what we are. If thus we will to do His will, 'we shall know of the doctrine'; if thus we yield ourselves to the divine Spirit, we shall be taught the practical bearings of all essential truth; and if thus we ponder the facts and principles that are enshrined in Christ's life, and the Apostolic commentary on them, as preserved for us in the Scripture, we shall not need to envy those that could go to Him with their questions, for *He* will come to us with His all-satisfying answers.

Ah! but you say experience does not verify these promises. Look at a divided Christendom; look at my own difficulties of knowing what I am to believe and to think. Well, as for a divided Christendom, saintly souls are all of one Church, and however they may formulate the intellectual aspects of their creed, when they come to pray, they say the same things.

Roman Catholic and Protestant, and Quaker and Churchman, and Calvinist and Arminian, and Greek and Latin Christians—all contribute to the hymn-book of every sect; and we all sing their songs. So the divisions are like the surface cracks on a dry field, and a few inches down there is continuity. As for the difficulty of knowing what I am to believe and think about controverted questions, no doubt there will remain many gaps in the circle of our knowledge; no doubt there will be much left obscure and unanswered; but if we will keep ourselves near the Master, and use honestly and diligently the helps that He gives us—the outward help in the Word, and the inward help in His teaching Spirit—we shall not ‘walk in darkness,’ but shall have light enough given to be to us ‘the Light of Life.’

Brother, keep close to Christ, and Christ—present though absent— will teach you.

II. Secondly, satisfied desires.

This second great promise of my text, introduced again by the solemn affirmation, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you,’ substantially appeared in a former part of these discourses with a very significant difference. ‘Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name that will I do.’ ‘If ye shall ask anything in My name I will do it.’ There Christ presented Himself as the Answerer of the petitions, because His more immediate purpose was to set forth His going to the Father as His elevation to a yet loftier position. Here, on the other hand, He sets forth the Father as the Answerer of the petitions, because His purpose is to point away from undue dependence on His own corporeal presence. But the fact that He thus, as occasion requires, substitutes the one form of speech for the other, and indifferently represents the same actions as being done by Himself and by the Father in heaven, carries with it large teachings which I do not dwell upon now. Only I would ask you to consider how much is involved in that fact, that, as a matter of course, and without explanation of the difference, our Lord alternates the two forms, and sometimes says, ‘I will do it,’ and sometimes says, ‘The Father will do it.’ Does it not point to that great and blessed truth, ‘Whatsoever thing the Father doeth, that also doeth the Son likewise?’

But passing from that, let me ask you to note very carefully the limitation, which is here given to the broad universality of the declaration that desires shall be satisfied. ‘If ye shall ask anything in My name’; there is the definition of Christian prayer. And what does it mean? Is a prayer, which from the beginning to the end is reeking with self-will, hallowed because we say, as a kind of charm at the end of it, ‘For Christ’s sake. Amen’? Is *that* praying in Christ’s name? Surely not! What is the ‘name’ of Christ? His whole revealed character. So these disciples could not pray in His name ‘hitherto,’ because His character was not all revealed. Therefore, to pray in His name is to pray, recognising what He is, as revealed in His life and death and resurrection and ascension, and to base all our dependence of acceptance of our prayers upon that revealed character. Is that all? Are any kind of wishes, which are presented in dependence upon Christ as our only Hope and Channel of divine blessing, certain to be fulfilled? Certainly not. To pray ‘in My name’ means yet more than that. It

means not only to pray in dependence upon Christ as our only Ground of hope and Source of acceptance and God's only Channel of blessing, but it means exactly what the same phrase means when it is applied to us. If I say that I am doing something in your name, that means on your behalf, as your representative, as your organ, and to express your mind and will. And if we pray in Christ's name, that implies, not only our dependence upon His merit and work, but also the harmony of our wills with His will, and that our requests are not merely the hot products of our own selfishness, but are the calm issues of communion with Him. *Thus* to pray requires the suppression of self. Heathen prayer, if there be such a thing, is the violent effort to make God will what I wish. Christian prayer is the submissive effort to make my wish what God wills, and that is to pray in Christ's name.

My brother! do we construct our prayers thus? Do we try to bring our desires into harmony with Him, before we venture to express them? Do we go to His footstool to pour out petulant, blind, passionate, un-sanctified wishes after questionable and contingent good, or do we wait until He fills our spirits with longings after what it must be His desire to give, and then breathe out those desires caught from His own heart, and echoing His own will? Ah! The discipline that is wanted to make men pray in Christ's name is little understood by multitudes amongst us.

Notice how certain such prayer is of being answered. Of course, if it is in harmony with the will of God, it is sure not to be offered in vain. Our Revised Version makes a slight alteration in the order of the words in the first clause of this promise by reading, 'If ye ask anything of the Father He will give it you *in My name.*' God's gifts come down through the same channel through which our prayer goes up. We ask in the name of Christ, and get our answers in the name of Christ.

But, whether that be the true collocation of ideas or not, mark the plain principle here, that only desires which are in harmony with the divine will are sure of being satisfied. What is a bad thing for a child cannot be a good thing for a man. What is a foolish and wicked thing for a father down here to do cannot be a kind and a wise thing for the Father in the heavens to do. If you wish to spoil your child you say, 'What do you want, my dear? tell me and you shall have it.' And if God were saying anything like that to us, through the lips of Jesus Christ His Son, in the text, it would be no blessing, but a curse. He knows a great deal better what is good for us; and so He says: 'Bring your wishes into line with My purpose, and then you will get them'; 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and He will give thee the desires of thine heart.' If you want God most you will be sure to get Him; if your heart's desires are after Him, your heart's desires will be satisfied. 'The young lions do roar and suffer hunger.' That is the world's way of getting good; fighting and striving and snarling, and forcibly seeking to grasp, and there is hunger after all. There is a better way than that. Instead of striving and struggling to snatch and to keep a perishable and questionable portion, let us

wait upon God and quiet our hearts, stilling them into the temper of communion and conformity with Him, and we shall not ask in vain.

He who prays in Christ's name must pray Christ's prayer, 'Not My will, but Thine be done.' And then, though many wishes may be unanswered, and many weak petitions unfulfilled, and many desires unsatisfied, the essential spirit of the prayer will be answered, and, His will being done in us and on us, our wishes will acquiesce in it and desire nothing besides. To him who can thus pray in Christ's name in the deepest sense, and after Christ's pattern, every door in God's treasure-house flies open, and he may take as much of the treasure as he desires. The Master bends lovingly over such a soul, and looks him in the eyes, and with outstretched hand says, 'What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'

III. Lastly, the perfect joy which follows upon these two.

'That your joy may be fulfilled.' Again we have a recurrence of a promise that has appeared in another connection in an earlier part of this discourse; but the connection here is worthy of notice. The promise is of joy that comes from the satisfaction of meek desires in unison with Christ's will. Is it possible then, that, amidst all the ups and downs, the changes and the sorrows of this fluctuating, tempest-tossed life of ours we may have a deep and stable joy? 'That your joy may be full,' says my text, or 'fulfilled,' like some jewelled, golden cup charged to the very brim with rich and quickening wine, so that there is no room for a drop more. Can it be that ever, in this world, men shall be happy up to the very limits of their capacity? Was anybody ever so blessed that he could not be more so? Was your cup ever so full that there was no room for another drop in it? Jesus Christ says that it may be so, and He tells us how it may be so. Bring your desires into harmony with God's, and you will have none unsatisfied amongst them; and so you will be blessed to the full; and though sorrow comes, as of course it will come, still you may be blessed. There is no contradiction between the presence of this deep, central joy and a surface and circumference of sorrow. Rather we need the surrounding sorrow, to concentrate, and so to intensify, the central joy in God. There are some flowers which only blow in the night; and white blossoms are visible with startling plainness in the twilight, when all the flaunting purples and reds are hid. We do not know the depth, the preciousness, the power of the 'joy of the Lord,' until we have felt it shining in our hearts in the midst of the thick darkness of earthly sorrow, and bringing life into the very death of our human delights. It may be ours on the conditions that my text describes.

My dear friends! there are only two courses before us. Either we must have a life with superficial, transitory, incomplete gladness, and an aching centre of vacuity and pain, or we may have a life which, in its outward aspects and superficial appearance, has much about it that is sad and trying, but down in the heart of it is calm and joyful. Which of the two do you deem best, a superficial gladness and a rooted sorrow, or a superficial sorrow and a



central joy? 'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.' But, on the other hand, the 'ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'

## THE JOYS OF 'THAT DAY'

'These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in My Name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.'—[JOHN xvi. 25-27](#).

The stream which we have been tracking for so long in these discourses has now nearly reached its close. Our Lord, in these all but final words, sums up the great salient features which He has already more than once specified, of the time when His followers shall live with an absent and yet present Christ. He reiterates here substantially just what He has been saying before, but in somewhat different connection, and with some slight expansion. And this reiteration of the glad features of the day which was about to dawn suggests how much the disciples needed, and how much we need, to have repeated over and over again the blessed and profound lessons of these words.

What a sublime self-repression there was in the Master! Not one word escapes from His lips of the personal pain and agony into which He had to plunge and be baptized, before that day could dawn. All that was crushed down and kept back, and He only speaks to the disciples and to us of the joy that comes to them, and not at all of the bitter sorrow by which it is bought. There are set forth in these words, as it seems to me, especially three characteristics which belong to the whole period between the ascension of Jesus Christ and His coming again for judgment. It is a day of continual and clearer teaching by Him. It is a day of desires in His name. It is a day of filial experience of a Father's love. These are the characteristics of the Christian period, and they ought to be the characteristics of our individual Christian life. My brother! are they the characteristics of yours?

Let us note them in order.

I. First, our Lord tells us that the whole period of the Christian life upon earth is to be a period of continuous and clearer teaching by Himself.

'Hitherto I have spoken to you in proverbs,' or parables. The word means, not only a comparison or parable, but also, and perhaps primarily, a mysterious and enigmatical saying. The reference is, of course, directly to the immediately preceding thoughts, in which His departure and the sorrow that accompanied it and was to merge into joy, were described under that touching figure of the woman in travail. But the reference must be extended very much farther than that. It includes not only this discourse, but the whole of His teaching by word whilst He was here upon earth.

Now the first thing that strikes me here is this strange fact. Here is a man who knew Himself to be within four-and-twenty hours of His death, and knew that scarcely another word of instruction was to come from His lips upon earth, calmly asserting that, for all the

subsequent ages of the world's history, He is to continue its Teacher. We know how the wisest and profoundest of earthly teachers have their lips sealed by death, so as that no counsel can come from them any more, and their disciples long in vain for responses from the silenced oracle, which is dumb whatever new problems may arise. But Jesus Christ calmly poses before the world as not having His teaching activity in the slightest degree suspended by that fact which puts a conclusive and complete close to all other teachers' words. Rather He says that after death He will, more clearly than in life, be the Teacher of the world.

What does He mean by that? Well, remember first of all the facts which followed this saying—the Cross, the Grave, Olivet, the Heavens, the Throne. These were still in the future when He spoke. And have not these—the bitter passion, the supernatural resurrection, the triumphant ascension, and the everlasting session of the Son at the right hand of God—taught the whole world the meaning of the Father's name, and the love of the Father's heart, and the power of the Father's Son, as nothing else, not even the sweetest and tenderest of His utterances, could have taught them? When, then, He declares the continuance of His teaching functions unbroken through death and beyond it, He refers partly to the future facts of His earthly manifestation, and still more does He refer to that continuous teaching which, by that divine Spirit whom He sends, is granted to every believing soul all through the ages.

This great truth, which recurs over and over again in these discourses of our Lord, is far too much dropped out of the consciousness and creeds of the modern Christian Church. We call ourselves Christ's disciples. If there be disciples, there must be a Master. His teaching is by no means merely the effect of the recorded facts and utterances of the Lord, preserved here in the Book for us, and to be pondered upon by ourselves, but it is also the hourly communication, to waiting hearts and souls that keep themselves near the Lord, of deeper insight into His will, of larger views of His purposes, of a firmer grasp of the contents of Scripture, and a more complete subjection of the whole nature to the truth as it is in Jesus. Christian men and women! do you know anything about what it is to learn of Christ in the sense that He Himself, and no poor human voice like mine, nor even merely the records of His past words and deeds as garnered in these Gospels and expounded by His Apostles, is the source of your growing knowledge of Him? If we would keep our hearts and minds clearer than we do of the babble of earthly voices, and be more loyal and humble and constant and patient in our sitting on the benches in Christ's school till the Master Himself came to give us His lessons, these great words of my text would not, as they so often do in the mass of professing Christians, lack the verification of experience and the assurance that it is so with us. Have you sat in Christ's school, and do you know the secret and illuminative whispers of His teaching? If not, there is something wrong in your Christian character, and something insincere in your Christian profession.

Notice, still further, that our Lord here ranks that subsequent teaching before all that He said upon earth, great and precious as it was. Now I do not mean for one moment to allege that fresh communications of truth, uncontained in Scripture, are given to us in the age-long and continuous teaching of Jesus Christ. That I do not suppose to be the meaning of the great promises before us, for the facts of revelation were finished when He ascended, and the inspired commentary upon the facts of revelation was completed with these writings which follow the Gospels in our New Testament. But Christ's teaching brings us up to the understanding of the facts and of the commentary upon them which Scripture contains, so that what was parable or proverb, dimly apprehended, mysterious and enigmatical when it was spoken, and what remains mysterious and enigmatical to us until we grow up to it, gradually becomes full of significance and weighty with a plain and certain meaning. This is the teaching which goes on through the ages—the lifting of His children to the level of apprehending more and more of the inexhaustible and manifold wisdom which is stored for us in this Book. The mine has been worked on the surface, but the deeper it goes the richer is the lode; and no ages will exhaust the treasures that are hid in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He uses the new problems, the new difficulties, the new circumstances of each successive age, and of each individual Christian, in order to evolve from His word larger lessons, and to make the earlier lessons more fully and deeply understood. And this generation, with all its new problems, with all its uneasiness about social questions, with all its new attitude to many ancient truths, will find that Jesus Christ is, as He has been to all past generations,—the answer to all its doubts, using even these doubts as a means of evolving the deeper harmonies of His Word, and of unveiling in the ancient truth more than former generations have seen in it. 'Brethren, I write unto you no new commandment. Again, a new commandment I write unto you.' The inexhaustible freshness of the old word taught us anew, with deeper significance and larger applications, by the everlasting Teacher of the Church, is the hope that shines through these words. I commend to you, dear brethren, the one simple, personal question, Have I submitted myself to that Teacher, and said to men and systems and preachers and books and magazines, and all the rest of the noisy and clamorous tongues that bewilder under pretence of enlightening this generation—have I said to them all, 'Hold your peace! and let me, in the silence of my waiting soul, hear the Teacher Himself speak to me. Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth. Teach me Thy way and lead me, for Thou art my Master, and I the humblest of Thy scholars?'

II. In the next place, another of the glad features of this dawning day is that it is to be a day of desires based upon Christ, and Christlike.

'In that day ye shall ask in My name.' Our translators have wisely put a colon at the end of that clause, in order that we may not hurry over it too quickly in haste to get to the next one. For there is a substantial blessing and privilege wrapped up in it. Our Lord has just been saying the same thing in the previous verses, but He repeats it here in order to emphasise

it, and to set it by the subsequent words in a somewhat different light. But I dwell upon it for a very simple, practical purpose. I have already explained in former sermons the full, deep meaning of that phrase, 'asking in Christ's name,' and have suggested to you that it implies two things—the one, that our desires should all be based upon His great work as the only ground of our acceptance with God; and the other, that our desires should all be such as represent His heart and His mind. When we 'ask in His name' we ask, first, for His sake, and, second, as in His person. And such desires, resting their hopes of answer solely upon His mighty sacrifice and all-sufficient merit, and shaped accurately and fully after the pattern of the wishes that are dear to His heart, are to be the prerogative and the joy of His servants, in the new 'day' that is about to dawn.

Note how beautifully this thought, of wishes moulded into conformity with Jesus Christ, and offered in reliance upon His great sacrifice, follows upon that other thought, 'I will tell you plainly of the Father.' The Master's voice speaks, revealing the paternal heart, the scholar's voice answers with desires kindled by the revelation. Longings and aspirations humbly offered for His sake, and after the pattern of His own, are our true response to His teaching voice. As the astronomer, the more powerful his telescope, though it may resolve some of the nebulae that resisted feebler instruments, only has his bounds of vision enlarged as he looks through it, and sees yet other and mightier star-clouds lying mysterious beyond its ken—so each new influx and tidal wave of knowledge of the Father, which Christ gives to His waiting child, leads on to enlarged desires, to longings to press still further into the unexplored mysteries of that magnificent and boundless land, and to nestle still closer into the infinite heart of God. He declares to us the Father, and the answer of the child to the declaration of the Father is the cry, 'Abba! Father! show me yet more of Thy heart.' Thus aspiration and fruition, longing and satisfaction in unsatiated and inexhaustible and unwearying alternation, are the two blessed poles between which the life of a Christian may revolve in smoothness and music.

My friend! is that anything like the transcript of our experience, that the more we know of God, the more we long to know of, and to possess, Him? and the more we long to know of, and to possess, Him, the more full, gracious, confidential, tender, and continuous are the teachings of our Master? Is not this a far higher level of Christian life than that we live upon? And why so? Is Christ's word faithless? Hath He forgotten to be gracious? Was this promise of His idle wind? Or is it that you and I have never grasped the fulness of privileges that He bestows upon us?

III. Note, lastly, that that day is to be a day of filial experience of a Father's love.

'I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.' Jesus Christ does not deny His intercession. He simply does not bring it into evidence here. To deny it would have been impossible, for soon afterwards we find Him saying, 'I pray for them which Thou

hast given Me, for they are Thine.' But He does not emphasise it here, in order that He may emphasise another blessed source of solace—viz., that to those who listen to the Master's teaching, and have their desires moulded into harmony with His, and their wishes and hopes all based upon His sacrifice and work, the divine Father's love directly flows. There is no need of any intercession to turn Him to be merciful. Men sometimes caricature the thought of the intercession of Christ, as if it meant that He, by His prayer, bent the reluctant will of the Father in heaven. All such horrible misconceptions Christ sweeps out of the field here, even whilst there remains, in the fact that the prayers of which He is speaking are offered in His name, the substance and reality of all that we mean by the intercession of Jesus Christ.

And now note that God loves the men who love Jesus Christ. So completely does the Father identify Himself with the Son, that love to Christ is love to Him, and brings the blessed answer of His love to us. Whosoever loves Christ loves God.

Whosoever loves Christ must do so, believing that He 'came forth from God.' There are the two characteristics of a Christian disciple,—faith in the divine mission of the Son, and love that flows from faith. Now, of course, it does not follow from the words before us, that this divine love which comes down upon the heart which loves Christ is the original and first flow of that love towards that heart. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' Christ is not here tracking the stream to its source, but is pointing to it midway in its flow. If you want to go up to the fountain-head you have to go up to the divine Father's heart, who loved when there was no love in us; and, because He loved, sent the Son. First comes the unmotivated, spontaneous, self-originated, undeserved, infinite love of God to sinners and aliens and enemies; then the Cross and the mission of Jesus Christ; then the faith in His divine mission; then the love which is the child of faith, as it grasps the Cross and recognises the love that lies behind it; and then, after that, the special, tender, and paternal love of God falling upon the hearts that love Him in His Son. There is nothing here in the slightest degree to conflict with the grand universal truth that God loves enemies and sinners and aliens. But there is the truth, as precious as the other, that they who have 'known and believed the love that God hath to us' live under the selectest influences of His loving heart, and have a place in its tenderness which it is impossible that any should have who do not so love. And that sweet commerce of a divine love answering a human, which itself is the answer to a prior divine love, brings with it the firm confidence that prayers in His name shall not be prayers in vain.

So, dear friends, growing knowledge, an ever-present Teacher, the peace of calm desires built upon Christ's Cross and fashioned after Christ's Spirit, and the assurance in my quiet and filial heart that my Father in the heavens loves me, and will neither give me 'serpents' when I ask for them, thinking them to be 'fishes,' nor refuse 'bread' when I ask for it—these things ought to mark the lives of all professing Christians. Are they our experience? If not,

why are they not, but because we do not believe that 'Thou art come forth from God,' nor love Thee as we ought?

## 'FROM' AND 'TO'

'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.'—[JOHN xvi. 28](#).

These majestic and strange words are the proper close of our Lord's discourse, what follows being rather a reply to the disciples' exclamation. There is nothing absolutely new in them, but what is new is the completeness and the brevity with which they cover the whole ground of His being, work, and glory. They fall into two halves, each consisting of two clauses; the former half describing our Lord's *descent*, the latter His *ascent*. In each half the two clauses deal with the same fact, considered from the two opposite ends as it were—the point of departure and the point of arrival. 'I came forth *from* the Father, and am come *into* the world: again I leave the world and go to the Father.' But the first point of departure is the last point of arrival, and the end comes round to the beginning. Our Lord's earthly life is, as it were, a jewel enclosed within the flashing gold of His eternal dwelling with God.

So I think we shall best apprehend the scope, and appropriate to ourselves the blessing and power of these words, if we deal with the four points to which they call our attention—the dwelling with the Father; the voluntary coming to the earth; the voluntary departure from the earth; and, once more, the dwelling with the Father. We must grasp them all if we would know the whole Christ and all that He is able to do and to be to us and to the world. So, then, I deal simply with these four points.

I. Note then, first, the dwelling with the Father.

If we adopt the most probable reading of the first clause of my text, it is even more forcible than in our version: 'I came forth out of the Father.' Such an egress implies a being in the Father in a sense ineffable for our words, and transcending our thoughts. It implies a far deeper and closer relation than even that of juxtaposition, companionship, or outward presence.

Now, in these great words there is involved obviously, to begin with, that, during His earthly life, our Lord bore about with Him the remembrance and consciousness of an individual existence prior to His life on earth. I need not remind you how frequently such hints drop from His lips—'Before Abraham was, I am,' and the like. But beyond that solemn thought of a remembered previous existence there is this other one—that the words are the assertion by Christ Himself of a previous, deep, mysterious, ineffable union with the Father. On such a subject wisdom and reverence bid us speak only as we hear; but I cannot refrain from emphasising the fact that, if this fourth Gospel be a genuine record of the teaching of Jesus Christ—and, if it is not, what genius was he who wrote it?—if it be a genuine record of the teaching of Jesus Christ, then nothing is more plain than that over and over again, in all sorts of ways, by implication and by direct statement, to all sorts of audiences, friends and foes, He reiterated this tremendous claim to have 'dwelt in the bosom of the Father,'



long before He lay on the breast of Mary. What did He mean when He said, 'No man hath ascended up into heaven save He which came down from heaven'? What did He mean when He said, 'What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before'? What did He mean when He said, 'I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me'? And what did He mean when, in the midst of the solemnities of that last prayer, He said, 'Glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was'?

Dear friends! it seems to me that if we know anything about Jesus Christ, we know that. If we cannot believe that He thus spoke, we know nothing about Him on which we can rely. And so, without venturing to enlarge at all upon these solemn words, I leave this with you as a plain fact, that the meekest, lowliest, and most sane and wise of religious teachers made deliberately over and over again this claim, which is either absolutely true, and lifts Him into the region of the Deity, or else is fatal to His pretensions to be either meek or modest, or wise or sane, or a religious teacher to whom it is worth our while to listen.

II. Note, secondly, the voluntary coming into the world.

'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world.' We all talk in a loose way about men coming into the world when they are born; but the weight of these words and the solemnity of the occasion on which they were spoken, and the purpose for which they were spoken—viz., to comfort and to illuminate these disciples—forbid us to see such a mere platitude as that in them. There would have been no consolation in them unless they meant something a great deal more than the undeniable fact that Jesus Christ was born, and the melancholy fact that Jesus Christ was about to die.

'I am come into the world.' There has been a Man who chose to be born. There has been a Man who appeared here, not 'of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,' but by His own free choice. He willed to take upon Him the form of humanity. Now the voluntariness of the entrance of Jesus Christ into the conditions of our human life is all-important for us, for it underlies the whole value of that life and its whole power to be blessing and good to us. It underlies, for instance, the personal sinlessness of Jesus Christ, and hence His power to bring a new beginning of pure and perfect life into the midst of humanity. All the rest of mankind, knit together by that mysterious bond of natural descent which only now for the first time is beginning to receive its due attention on the part of men of science, by heredity have the taint upon them. And if Jesus Christ is only one of the series, then there is no deliverance in Him, for there is no sinlessness in that life. However fair its record may seem on the surface, there is beneath, somewhere or other, the leprosy that infects us all. Unless He came in another fashion from all the rest of us, He came with the same sin as all the rest of us, and He is no deliverer from sin. Rather He is one of the series who, like the melancholy captives on the road to Siberia, each carries a link of the hopeless chain that binds them all together. But, if it be true that of His own will He took to Himself humanity, and was born

as the Scripture tells us He was born, His birth being His 'coming' and not His being brought, then, being free from taint, He can deliver us from taint, and, Himself unbound by the chain, He can break it from off our necks. The stream is fouled from its source downwards, and flows on, every successive drop participant of the primeval pollution. But, down from the white snows of the eternal hills of God, there comes into it an affluent which has no stain on its pure waters, and so can purge that into which it enters. Jesus Christ willed to be born, and to plant a new beginning of holy life in the very heart of humanity which henceforth should work as leaven.

Let me remind you, too, that this voluntary assumption of our nature is all-important to us, for unless we preserve it clear to our minds and hearts, the power to sway our affections is struck away from Jesus Christ. Unless He voluntarily took upon Himself the nature which He meant to redeem, why should I be thankful to Him for what He did, and what right has He to claim my love? But if He willingly came down amongst us, and 'to this end was born, and for this cause,' of His own loving heart, 'came into the world,' then I am knit to Him by cords that cannot be broken. One thing only saves for Jesus Christ the unbounded and perpetual love of mankind, and that is, that from His own infinite and perpetual love He came into the world. We talk about kings leaving their palaces and putting on the rags of the beggar, and learning 'love in huts where poor men lie,' and making experience of the conditions of their lowliest subjects. But here is a fact, infinitely beyond all these legends. It is set forth for us in a touching fashion, in the incident that almost immediately preceded these parting words of our Lord, when 'Jesus, knowing that He came forth from God, laid aside His garments and took a towel, and girded Himself,' and washed the foul feet of these travel-stained men. That was a parable of the Incarnation. The consciousness of His divine origin was ever with Him, and that consciousness led Him to lay aside the garments of His majesty, and to gird Himself with the towel of service. That He had a body round which to wrap it was more humiliation than that He wrapped it round the body which He took. And we may learn there what it is that gives Him His supreme right to our devotion and our surrender—viz., that, 'being in the form of God, He thought not equality with God a thing to be covetously retained, but made Himself of no reputation, and was found in fashion as a Man.'

III. Note the voluntary leaving the world.

The stages of that departure are not distinguished. They are threefold in fact—the death, the resurrection, the ascension, and in all three we have the majestic, spontaneous energy of Christ as their cause.

There was a voluntary death, I have so often had occasion to insist upon that, in the course of these sermons, that I do not need to dwell upon it now. Let me remind you only how distinctly and in what various forms that thought is presented to us in the Scriptures. We have our Lord's own words about His having 'power to lay down His life.' We have in

the story of the Passion hints that seem to suggest that His relation to death, to which He is about to bow His head, was altogether different from that of ours. For instance, we read: 'Into Thy hands I commend My Spirit'; and 'He gave up the Spirit.' We have hints of a similar nature in the very swiftness of His death and unexpected brevity of His suffering, to be accounted for by no natural result of the physical process of crucifixion. The fact is that Jesus Christ is the Lord of death, and was so even when He seemed to be its Servant, and that He never showed Himself more completely the Prince of Life and the Conqueror of Death than when He gave up His life and died, not because He must, but because He would. There is a scene in a modern book of fiction of a man sitting on a rock and the ocean stretching round him. It reaches high upon his breast, but it threatens not his life, till he, sitting there in his calm, bows his head beneath the wave and lets it roll over him. So Christ willed to die, and died because He willed.

There was also a voluntary resurrection by His own power; for although Scripture sometimes represents His rising again from the dead as being the Father's attestation of the Son's finished work, it also represents it as being, in accordance with His own claim of 'power to lay down My life, and to take it again,' the Son's triumphant egress from the prison into which, for the moment, He willed to pass. Jesus 'was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,' but also Jesus rose from the dead by His own power.

There was also a voluntary ascension to the heavens. There was no need for Elijah's chariot of fire. There was no need for a whirlwind to sweep a mortal to the sky. There was no need for any external vehicle or agency whatsoever. No angels bore Him up upon their wings. But, the cords of duty which bound Him to earth being cut, He rose to His own native sphere; and, if one might so say, the natural forces of His supernatural life bore Him, by inverted gravitation, upward to the place which was His own. He ascended by His own inherent power.

Thus, by a voluntary death, He became the Sacrifice for our sins; by the might of His self-effected resurrection He proclaimed Himself the Lord of death and the resurrection for all that trust Him; and by ascending up on high He draws our hearts' desires after Him, so that we, too, as we see Him lost from our sight, behind the bright Shekinah cloud that stooped to conceal the last stages of His ascension from our view, may return to our lowly work 'with great joy,' and 'set our affection on things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.'

IV. So, lastly, we have here the dwelling again with the Father.

But that final dwelling with God is not wholly identical with the initial one. The earthly life was no mere parenthesis, and He who returned to the Throne carried with Him the manhood which He had assumed, and bore it thither into the glory in which the Word had dwelt from the beginning. And this is the true consolation which Christ offered to these His weeping servants, and which He still offers to us His waiting children, that now the manhood

of Jesus Christ is exalted to participation in the divine glory, and dwells there in the calm, invisible sweetness and solemnity of fellowship with the Father.

If that be so, it is no mere abstract dogma of theology, but it touches our daily life at all points, and is essential to the fullness of our satisfaction and our rest in Christ.

'We see not all things put under Him, but we see Jesus.' Our Brother is elevated to the Throne, and, if I might so say, He makes the fortunes of the family, and none of them will be poor as long as He is so rich. He sends us from the far-off land where He is gone precious gifts of its produce, and He will send for us to share His throne one day.

Christ's ascension to the Father is the elevation of our best and dearest Friend to the Throne of the Universe, and the hands that were pierced for us on the Cross hold the helm and sway the sceptre of Creation, and therefore we may calmly meet all events.

The elevation of Jesus Christ to the Throne fills Heaven for our faith, our imagination, and our hearts. How different it is to look up into those awful abysses, and to wonder where, amidst their crushing infinitude, the spirits of dear ones that are gone are wandering, if they are at all; and to look up and to think 'My Christ hath passed through the Heavens,' and is somewhere with a true Body, and with Him all that loved Him. Without an ascended Christ we recoil from the cold splendours of an unknown Heaven, as a rustic might from the unintelligible magnificence of a palace. But if we believe that He is 'at the right hand of God,' then the far-off becomes near, and the vague becomes definite, and the unsubstantial becomes solid, and what was a fear becomes a joy, and we can trust ourselves and the dear dead in His hands, knowing that where He is they are, and that in Him they and we have all that we need.

So, dear friends! it all comes to this—make sure that you have hold of the whole Christ for yourselves. His earthly life is little without the celestial halo that rings it round. His life is nothing without His death. His death without His resurrection and ascension maybe a little more pathetic than millions of other deaths, but is nothing, really, to us. And the life and death and resurrection are not apprehended in their fullest power until they are set between the eternal glory before and the eternal glory after.

These four facts—the dwelling in the Father; the voluntary coming to earth; the voluntary leaving earth; and, again, the dwelling with the Father—are the walls of the strong fortress into which we may flee and be safe. With them it 'stands four square to every wind that blows.' Strike away one of them, and it totters into ruin. Make the whole Christ your Christ; for nothing less than the whole Christ, 'conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, . . . crucified, dead, and buried, . . . ascended into Heaven, and sitting at the right hand of God,' is strong enough to help your infirmities, vast enough to satisfy your desires, loving enough to love you as you need, or able to deliver you from your sins, and to lift you to the glories of His own Throne.

## GLAD CONFESSION AND SAD WARNING

'His disciples said unto Jesus, Lo! now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee: by this we believe that Thou earnest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.'—[JOHN xvi. 29-32](#).

The first words of these wonderful discourses were, 'Let not your heart be troubled.' They struck the key-note of the whole. The aim of all was to bring peace and confidence unto the disciples' spirits. And this joyful burst of confession which wells up so spontaneously and irrepressibly from their hearts, shows that the aim has been reached. For a moment sorrow, bewilderment, dullness of apprehension, had all passed away, and the foolish questioners and non-receptive listeners had been lifted into a higher region, and possessed insight, courage, confidence. The last sublime utterance of our Lord had gathered all the scattered rays into a beam so bright that the blindest could not but see, and the coldest could not but be warmed.

But yet the calm, clear eye of Christ sees something not wholly satisfactory in this outpouring of the disciples' confidence. He does not reject their imperfect faith, but He warns them, as if seeing the impending hour of denial which was so terribly to contradict the rapture of that moment. And then, with most pathetic suddenness, He passes from them to Himself; and in a singularly blended utterance lets us get a glimpse into His deep solitude and the companions that shared it.

My words now make no attempt at anything more than is involved in following the course of thought in the words before us.

### I. Note the disciples' joyful confession.

Their words are permeated throughout with allusions to the previous promises and sayings of our Lord, and the very allusions show how shallow was their understanding of what they thought so plain. He had said to them that, in that coming day which was so near its dawn, He would speak to them 'no more in proverbs, but show them plainly of the Father'; and they answer, with a kind of rapture of astonishment, that the promised day has come already, and that even now He is speaking to them 'plainly,' and without mysterious sayings. Did they understand His words when they thought them so plain? 'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world? Again I leave the world and go unto the Father,' that summary statement of the central mysteries of Christianity, which the generations have found to be inexhaustible, and which to so many minds has been absolutely incredible, seemed to the shallow apprehension of these disciples to be sun-clear. If they had understood what He meant, could they have spoken thus, or have left Him so soon?

They begin with what they believed to be a fact, His clear utterance. Then follows a conviction which has allusion to His previous words. 'Now', say they, 'we know that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee.' He had said to them, 'In that day ye shall ask Me nothing'; and from the fact that he had interpreted their unspoken words, and had anticipated their desire to ask what they durst not ask, they draw, and rightly draw, the conclusion of His divine Omniscience. They think that therein, in His answer to their question before it is asked, is the fulfilment of that great promise. Was that all that He meant? Certainly not. Did He merely mean to say, 'You will ask Me nothing, because I shall know what you want to know, without your asking'? No! But He meant, 'Ye shall ask Me nothing, because in that day you will have with you an illuminating Spirit who will solve all your difficulties.' So, again, a shallow interpretation empties the words which they accept of their deepest and most precious meaning.

And then they take yet a further step. First, they begin with a fact; then from that they infer a conviction; and now, upon the basis of the inferred conviction, they rear a faith, 'We believe that Thou camest forth from God.' But what they meant by 'coming forth from God' fell far short of the greatness of what He meant by the declaration, and they stand, in this final, articulate confession of their faith, but a little in advance of Nicodemus the Rabbi, and behind Peter the Apostle when he said: 'Thou art the Son of the living God.'

So their confession is a strangely mingled warp and woof of insight and of ignorance. And they may stand for us both as examples to teach us what we ought to be, and as beacons teaching us what we should not be.

Let me note just one or two lessons drawn from the disciples' demeanour and confession.

The first remark that I would make is that here we learn what it is that gives life to a creed—experience. These men had, over and over again, in our Lord's earlier utterances, heard the declaration that 'He came forth from God'; and in a sort of fashion they believed it. But, as so many of our convictions do, it lay dormant and half dead in their souls. But now, rightly or wrongly, experience had brought them into contact, as they thought, with a manifest proof of His divine Omniscience, and the torpid conviction flashed all up at once into vitality. The smouldering fire of a mere piece of abstract belief was kindled at once into a glow that shed warmth through their whole hearts; and although they had professed to believe long ago that He came from God, now, for the first time, they grasp it as a living reality. Why? Because experience had taught it to them. It is the only teacher that teaches us the articles of our creed in a way worth learning them. Every one of us carries professed beliefs, which lie there inoperative, bedridden, in the hospital and dormitory of our souls, until some great necessity or sudden circumstance comes that flings a beam of light upon them, and then they start and waken. We do not know the use of the sword until we are in battle. Until the shipwreck comes, no man puts on the lifebelt in his cabin. Every one of us has large tracts of Christian truth which we think we most surely believe, but which need

experience to quicken them, and need us to grow up into the possession of them. Of all our teachers who turn beliefs assented to into beliefs really believed none is so mighty as Sorrow; for that makes a man lay a firm hold on the deep things of God's Word.

Then another lesson that I draw from this glad confession is—the bold avowal that always accompanies certitude. These men's stammering tongues are loosed. They have a fact to base themselves upon. They have a piece of assured knowledge inferred from the fact. They have a faith built upon the certitude of what they know. Having this, out it all comes in a gush. No man that believes with all his heart can help speaking. You silent Christians are so, because you do not more than half grasp the truth that you say you hold. 'Thy word, when shut up in my bones, was like a fire'; and it ate its way through all the dead matter that enclosed it, until at last it flamed out heaven high. Can you say, 'We know and we believe,' with unfaltering confidence? Not 'we argue'; not 'we humbly venture to think that on the whole'; not 'we are inclined rather to believe'; but 'we know—that Thou knowest all things, and that Thou hast come from God.' Seek for that blessed certitude of knowledge, based upon the facts of individual experience, which 'makes the tongue of the dumb sing,' and changes all the deadness of an outward profession of Christianity into a living, rejoicing power.

Then, further, I draw this lesson. Take care of indolently supposing that you understand the depths of God's truth. These Apostles fancied that they had grasped the whole meaning of the Master's words, and were glad in them. They fed on them, and got something out of them; but how far they were from the true perception of their meaning! This generation abhors mystery, and demands that the deepest truths of the highest subject, which is religion, shall be so broken down into mincemeat that the 'man in the street' can understand them in the intervals of reading the newspaper. There are only too many of us who are disposed to grasp at the most superficial interpretation of Christian truth, and lazily to rest ourselves in that. A creed which has no depth in it is like a picture which has no distance. It is flat and unnatural, and self-condemned by the very fact. It is better that we should feel that the smallest word that comes from God is like some little leaf of a water plant on the surface of a pond; if you lift that you draw a whole trail after it, and nobody knows how far off and how deep down are the roots. It is better that we should feel how Infinity and Eternity press in upon us on all sides, and should take as ours the temper that recognises that till the end we are but learners, seeing 'in a glass, in a riddle,' and therefore patiently waiting for light and strenuously striving to stretch our souls to the width of the infinite truth of God.

II. So, then, look, in the second place, at the sad questions and forebodings of the Master.

'Do ye now believe?' That does not cast doubt on the reality of their faith so much as on its permanence and power. 'Behold the hour cometh that ye shall be scattered'—as He had told them a little while before in the upper room, like a flock when the shepherd is stricken down—'every man to his own.' He does not reject their imperfect homage, though

He discerns so clearly its imperfection and its transiency, but sadly warns them to beware of the fleeting nature of their present emotion; and would seek to prepare them, by the knowledge, for the terrible storm that is going to break upon them.

So let us learn two or three simple lessons. One is that the dear Lord accepts imperfect surrender, ignorant faith and love, of which He knows that it will soon turn to denial. Oh! if He did not, what would become of us all? We reject half hearts; we will not have a friendship on which we cannot rely. The sweetness of vows is all sucked out of them to our apprehension, if we have reason to believe that they will be falsified in an hour. But the patient Master was willing to put up with what you and I will not put up with; and to accept what we reject; and be pleased that they gave Him even that. His 'charity suffereth long, and is kind.' Let us not be afraid to bring even imperfect consecration—

'A little faith all undisproved'—  
to His merciful feet.

Then another lesson is the need for Christian men sedulously to search and make sure that their inward life corresponds with their words and professions. I wonder how many thousands of people will stand up this day and say, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ His only Son,' whose words would stick in their throats if that question of the Master's was put to them, 'Do ye now believe?' And I wonder how many of us are the fools of our own verbal acknowledgments of Christ. Self-examination is not altogether a wholesome exercise, and it may easily be carried too far, to the destruction of the spontaneity and the gladness of the Christian life. A man may set his pulse going irregularly by simply concentrating his attention upon it, and there may be self-examination of the wrong sort, which does harm rather than good. But, on the other hand, we all need to verify our position, lest our outward life should fatally slip away from correspondence with our inward. Our words and acts of Christian profession and service are like bank notes. What will be the end if there is a whole ream of such going up and down the world, and no balance of bullion in the cellars to meet them? Nothing but bankruptcy. Do you see to it that your reserve of gold, deep down in your hearts, always leaves a margin beyond the notes in circulation issued by you. And in the midst of your professions hear the Master saying, 'Do ye now believe?'

Another lesson that I draw is, trust no emotions, no religious experiences, but only Him to whom they turn.

These men were perfectly sincere, and there was a glow of gladness in their hearts, and a real though imperfect faith when they spoke. In an hours time where were they?

We often deal far too hard measure to these poor disciples, in our estimate of their conduct at that critical moment. We talk about them as cowards. Well, they were better and they were worse than cowards; for their courage failed second, but their faith had failed first. The Cross made them dastards because it destroyed their confidence in Jesus Christ.



‘We trusted.’ Ah! what a world of sorrow there is in those two final letters of that word! ‘We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel.’ But they do not trust it any more, and so why should they put themselves in peril for One on whom their faith can no longer build?

Would we have been any better if we had been there? Suppose you had stood afar off and seen Jesus die on the cross, would your faith have lived? Do we not know what it is to be a great deal more exuberant in our professions of faith—and real faith it is, no doubt—in some quiet hour when we are with Him by ourselves, than when swords are flashing and we are in the presence of His antagonists? Do we not know what it is to grasp conviction at one moment, and the next to find it gone like a handful of mist from our clutch? Is our Christian life always lived upon one high uniform level? Have we no experience of hours of exhaustion coming after deep religious emotion? ‘Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone’; there will not be many stones flung if that law be applied. Let us all, recognising our own weakness, trust to nothing, either in our convictions or our emotions, but only to Him, and cry, ‘Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe!’

III. Lastly, note the lonely Christ and His companion.

‘Ye shall leave Me alone’; there is sadness, though it be calm, in that clause, and then, I suppose, there was a moment’s pause before the quiet voice began again: ‘And yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me.’ There are two currents there, both calm; but the one bright and the other dark.

Jesus was the loneliest man that ever lived. All other forms of human solitude were concentrated in His. He knew the pain of unappreciated aims, unaccepted love, unbelieving teachings, a heart thrown back upon itself. No man understood Him, no man knew Him, no man deeply and thoroughly loved Him or sympathised with Him, and He dwelt apart. He felt the pain of solitude more sharply than sinful men do. Perfect purity is keenly susceptible; a heart fully charged with love is wounded sore when the love is thrown back, and all the more sorely the more unselfish it is.

Solitude was no small part of the pain of Christ’s passion. Remember the pitiful appeal in Gethsemane, ‘Tarry ye here and watch with Me!’ Remember the threefold vain return to the sleepers in the hope of finding some sympathy from them. Remember the emphasis with which, more than once in His life, He foretold the loneliness of His death. And then let us understand how the bitterness of the cup that He drank had for not the least bitter of its ingredients the sense that He drank it alone.

Now, dear friends! some of us, no doubt, have to live outwardly solitary lives. We all of us live alone after all fellowship and communion. Physicists tell us that in the most solid bodies the atoms do not touch. Hearts come closer than atoms, but yet, after all, we die alone, and in the depths of our souls we all live alone. So let us be thankful that the Master knows the bitterness of solitude, and has Himself trod that path.

Then we have here the calm consciousness of unbroken communion. Jesus Christ's sense of union with the Father was deep, close, constant, in manner and measure altogether transcending any experience of ours. But still He sets before us a pattern of what we should aim at in these great words. They show the path of comfort for every lonely heart. 'I am not alone, for the Father is with Me.' If earth be dark, let us look to Heaven. If the world with its millions seems to have no friend in it for us, let us turn to Him who never leaves us. If dear ones are torn from our grasp, let us grasp God. Solitude is bitter; but, like other bitters, it is a tonic. It is not all loss if the trees which with their leafy beauty shut out the sky from us are felled, and so we see the blue.

Christ's company is to us what the Father's fellowship was to Christ. He has borne solitude that He might be the companion of all the lonely, and the same voice which said, 'Ye shall leave Me alone,' said also, 'I am with you always, even to the end of the world.'

But that communion of Christ with the Father was broken, in that awful hour when He cried: 'My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' We tread there on the verge of mysteries, beyond our comprehension; but this we know—that it was our sin and the world's, made His by His willing identifying of Himself with us, which built up that black wall of separation. That hour of utter desolation, forsaken by God, deserted by men, was the hour of the world's redemption. And Jesus Christ was forsaken by God and deserted by men, that you and I might never be either the one or the other, but might find in His sweet and constant companionship at once the society of man and the presence of God.

## PEACE AND VICTORY

‘These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’—[JOHN xvi. 33](#).

So end these wonderful discourses, and so ends our Lord’s teaching before His passion. He gathers up in one mighty word the total intention of these sweet and deep sayings which we have so long been pondering together. He sketches in broad outline the continual characteristics of the disciples’ life, and closes all with the strangest shout of victory, even at the moment when He seems most utterly defeated.

We shall, I think, best lay on our hearts and minds the spirit and purpose of these words if we simply follow their course, and look at the three things which Christ emphasises here: the inward peace which is His purpose for us; the outward tribulation which is our certain fate; and the courageous confidence which Christ’s victory for us gives.

I. Note, then, first, the inward peace.

‘These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace.’ Peace is not lethargy; and it is very remarkable to notice how, in immediate connection with this great promise, there occur words which suggest its opposite—tribulation and battle. ‘In the world ye have tribulation.’ ‘I have overcome’—that means a fight. These are to go side by side with the peace that He promises. The two conditions belong to two different spheres. The Christian life bifurcates, as it were, into a double root, and moves in two realms—‘in Me’ and ‘in the world’ And the predicates and characteristics of these two lives are, in a large measure, diametrically opposite. So here, without any contradiction, our Lord brackets together these two opposite conditions as both pertaining to the life of a devout soul. He promises a peace which co-exists with tribulation and disturbance, a peace which is realised in and through conflict and struggle. The tree will stand, with its deep roots and its firm bole, unmoved, though wildest winds may toss its branches and scatter its leaves. In the fortress, beleaguered by the sternest foes, there may be, right in the very centre of the citadel, a quiet oratory through whose thick walls the noise of battle and the shout of victory or defeat can never penetrate. So we may live in a centre of rest, however wild may be the uproar in the circumference. ‘In Me. . . peace,’ that is the innermost life. ‘In the world. . . tribulation,’ that is only the surface.

But, then, note that this peace, which exists with, and is realised through, tribulation and strife, depends upon certain conditions. Our Lord does not say, ‘Ye have peace,’ but ‘These things I have spoken that you may have it.’ It is a possibility; and He lays down distinctly and plainly here the twofold set of conditions, in fulfilment of which a Christian disciple may dwell secure and still, in the midst of all confusion. Note, then, these two.

It is peace, if we have it at all, in Him. Now you remember how emphatically and loftily, as one of the very key-notes of these discourses, our Lord has spoken to us, in them, of

‘dwelling in Him’ as the prerogative and the duty of every Christian. We are in Him as in an atmosphere. In Him our true lives are rooted as a tree in the soil. We are in Him as a branch in the vine, in Him as the members in a body, in Him as the residents in a house. We are in Him by simple faith, by the trust that rests all upon Him, by the love that finds all in Him, by the obedience that does all for Him. And it is only when we are ‘in Christ’ that we rest, and realise peace. All else brings distraction. Even delights trouble. The world may give excitement, the world may give vulgar and fleeting joys, the world may give stimulus to much that is good and true in us, but there is only one thing that gives peace, and that is that our hearts should dwell in the Fortress, and should ever be surrounded by Jesus Christ. Brother! let nothing tempt us down from the heights, and out from the citadel where alone we are at rest; but in the midst of all the pressing duties, the absorbing cares, the carking anxieties, the seducing temptations of the world, and in the presence of all the necessity for noble conflict which the world brings to every man that is not its slave, let us try to keep the roots of our lives in contact with that soil from which they draw all their nourishment, and to wrap ourselves round with the life of Jesus Christ, which shall make an impenetrable shield between us and ‘the fiery darts of the wicked.’ Keep on the lee side of the breakwater and your little cock-boat will ride out the gale. Keep Christ between you and the hurtling storm, and there will be a quiet place below the wall where you may rest, hearing not the loud winds when they call. ‘These things have I spoken that in Me ye might have peace.’

But there is another condition. Christ speaks the great words which have been occupying us so long, that they may bring to us peace. I need not do more than remind you, in a sentence, of the contents of these wonderful discourses. Think of how they have spoken to us of our Brother’s ascension to Heaven to prepare a place for us; of His coming again to receive us to Himself; of His presence with us in His absence; of His indwelling in us and ours in Him; of His gift to us of a divine Spirit. If we believed all these things; if we realised them and lived in the faith of them; if we meditated upon them in the midst of our daily duties; and if they were real to us, and not mere words written down in a Book, how should anything be able to disturb us, or to shake our settled confidence? Cleave to the words of the Master, and let them pour into your hearts the quietness and confidence which nothing else can give. And then, whatsoever storms may be around, the heart will be at rest. We find peace nowhere else but where Mary found her repose, and could shake off care and ‘trouble about many things,’ sitting at the feet of Jesus, wrapt in His love and listening to His word.

II. Then note, secondly, the outward tribulation which is the certain fate of His followers.

Of course there is a very sad and true sense in which the warning, ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation,’ applies to all men. Pain and sickness, loss and death, the monotony of hard, continuous, unwelcome toil, hopes blighted or disappointed even in their fruition, and all the other ‘ills that flesh is heir to,’ afflict us all. But our Lord is not speaking here

about the troubles that befall men as men, nor about the chastisement that befalls them as sinners, nor about the evils which dog them because they are mortal or because they are bad, but of the yet more mysterious sorrows which fall upon them because they are good, 'In the world ye have tribulation,' is the proper rendering and reading. It had already begun, and it was to be the standing condition and certain fate of all that followed Him.

I have already said that the Christian life moves in two spheres, and hence there must necessarily be antagonism and conflict. Whoever realises the inward life in Christ will more or less, and sooner or later, find himself coming into hostile collision with lives which only move on the surface and belong to the world. If you and I are Christians after the pattern of Jesus Christ, then we dwell in the midst of an order of things which is not constituted on or for the principles that regulate our lives and the objects at which we aim. And hence, in that fundamental discordance between the Christian life and society as it is constituted, there must always be, if there be honesty and consistency on the side of the Christian man, more or less of collision between him and it. All that you regard as axiomatic the world regards as folly, if you take Christ for your Teacher. All that you labour to secure the world does not care to possess, if you have Him for your aim. All that you live to seek it has abandoned; all that you desire to obey it will not even consult, if you are taking Christ and His law for your rule. And therefore there must come, sooner or later, and more or less intensely in all Christian lives, opposition and tribulation. You cannot get away from the necessity, so it is as well to face it.

No doubt the form of antagonism varies. No doubt the more the world is penetrated by Christian principles divorced from their root and source, the less vehement and painful will the collision be. But there is the gulf, and there it will remain, until the world is a Church. No doubt some portion of the battlements of organised Christianity has tumbled into the ditch, and made it a little less deep. Christians have dropped their standard far too much, and so the antagonism is not so plain as it ought to be, and as it used to be, and as, some day, it will be. But there it is, and if you are going to live out and out like a Christian man, you will get the old sneers flung at you. You will be 'crotchety,' 'impracticable,' 'spoiling sport,' 'not to be dealt with,' 'a wet blanket,' 'pharisaical,' 'bigoted,' and all the rest of the pretty words which have been so frequently used about the men that try to live like Jesus Christ. Never mind! 'In the world ye have tribulation.' 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus,' the branding-iron which tells to whom the slave belongs. And if it is His initials that I carry I may be proud of the marks.

But at any rate there will be antagonism. You young men in your warehouses, you men that go on 'Change', we people that live by our pens or our tongues, and find ourselves in opposition to much of the tendencies of the present day—we have all, in our several ways, to bear the cross. Do not let us be ashamed of it, and, above all, do not let us, for the sake of easing our shoulders, be unfaithful to our Master. 'In the world ye have tribulation'; and

the Christian man's peace has to be like the rainbow that lives above the cataract—still and radiant, whilst it shines above the hell of white waters that are tortured below.

III. Lastly, notice the courageous confidence which comes from the Lord's victory.

'Be of good cheer!' It is the old commandment that rang out to Joshua when, on the departure of Moses, the conduct of the war fell into his less experienced hands: 'Be strong, and of a good courage; only be thou strong and very courageous.' So says the Captain of salvation, leaving His soldiers to face the current of the heady fight in the field. Like some leader who has climbed the ramparts, or hewed his way through the broken ranks of the enemies, and rings out the voice of encouragement and call to his followers, our Captain sets before us His own example: 'I have overcome the world,' He said that the day before Calvary. If that was victory, what would defeat have been?

Notice, then, how our Lord's life was a true battle. The world tried to draw Him away from God by appealing to things desirable to sense, as in the wilderness; or to things dreadful to sense, as on the cross; and both the one and the other form of temptation He faced and conquered. It was no shadow fight which evoked this paean of victory from His lips. The reality of His conflict is somewhat concealed from us by reason of its calm and the completeness of His conquest. We do not appreciate the force that drives a planet upon its path because it is calm and continuous and silent, but the power that kept Jesus Christ continually faithful to His Father, continually sure of that Father's presence, continually averse to all self-will and selfish living, was a power mightier than all others that have been manifested in the history of humanity. The Captain of our salvation has really fought the fight before us.

But mark, again, that our Lord's life is the type of all victorious life. The world conquers me when it draws me away from God, when it makes me its slave, when it coaxes me to trust it, and urges to despair if I lose it. The world conquers me when it comes between me and God, when it fills my desires, when it absorbs my energies, when it blinds my eyes to the things unseen and eternal. I conquer the world when I put my foot upon its temptations, when I crush it down, when I shake off its bonds, and when nothing that time and sense, with their delights or their dreadfuls, can bring, prevents me from cleaving to my Father with all my heart, and from living as His child here. Whoso thus coerces Time and Sense to be the servants of his filial love has conquered them both, and whoso lets them draw him away from God is beaten, however successful he may dream himself to be and men may call him.

My friends! there is a lesson for Manchester people. Jesus Christ was not a very successful man according to the standard of Market Street and the Exchange. He made but a poor thing of the world, and He was going to be martyred on the cross the day after He said these words. And yet that was victory. Ay! Many a man beaten down in the struggle of daily life,

and making very little of it, according to our vulgar estimate, is the true conqueror. Success means making the world a stepping-stone to God.

Still further, note our share in the Master's victory—'I have overcome the world. Be ye of good cheer.' That seems an irrelevant way of arguing. What does it matter to me though He has overcome? So much the better for Him; but what good is it to me?

It may aid us somewhat to more strenuous fighting, if we know that a brother has fought and conquered, and I do not under-estimate the blessing and the benefit of the life of Jesus Christ, as recorded in these Scriptures, even from that, as I conceive it, miserably inadequate and imperfect point of view. But the victory of Jesus Christ is of extremely little practical use to me, if all the use of it is to show me how to fight. Ah! you must go a deal deeper than that. 'I have overcome the world, and I will come and put My overcoming Spirit into your weakness, and fill you with My own victorious life, and make your hands strong to war and your fingers to fight; and be in you the conquering and omnipotent Power.'

My friends! Jesus Christ's victory is ours, and we are victors in it, because He is more than the pattern of brave warfare, He is even the Son of God, who gave Himself for us, and gives Himself to us, and dwells in us our Strength and our Righteousness.

Lastly, remember that the condition of that victory's being ours is the simple act of reliance upon Him and upon it. The man who goes into the battle as that little army of the Hebrews did against the wide-stretching hosts of the enemy, saying, 'O Lord! we know not what to do, but our eyes are up unto Thee,' will come out 'more than conqueror through Him that loved him.' For 'this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

## THE INTERCESSOR

‘These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee: As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent. I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was. I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me, are of Thee. For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth. As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.’—[JOHN xvii. 1-19](#).

We may well despair of doing justice to the deep thoughts of this prayer, which volumes would not exhaust. Who is worthy to speak or to write about such sacred words? Perhaps we may best gain some glimpses of their great and holy sublimity by trying to gather their teaching round the centres of the three petitions, ‘glorify’ ([vs. 1, 5](#)), ‘keep’ ([v. 11](#)), and ‘sanctify’ ([v. 17](#)).

I. In [verses 1-5](#), Jesus prays for Himself, that He may be restored to His pre-incarnate glory; but yet the prayer desires not so much that glory as affecting Himself, as His being fitted thereby for completing His work of manifesting the Father. There are three main points in these verses—the petition, its purpose, and its grounds.

As to the first, the repetition of the request in [verses 1 and 5](#) is significant, especially if we note that in the former the language is impersonal, ‘Thy Son,’ and continues so till [verse](#)



4, where 'I' and 'Me' appear. In [verses 1-3](#), then, the prayer rests upon the ideal relations of Father and Son, realised in Jesus, while in [verses 4 and 5](#) the personal element is emphatically presented. The two petitions are in their scope identical. The 'glorifying' in the former is more fully explained in the latter as being that which He possessed in that ineffable fellowship with the Father, not merely before incarnation, but before creation. In His manhood He possessed and manifested the 'glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'; but that glory, lustrous though it was, was pale, and humiliation compared with the light inaccessible, which shone around the Eternal Word in the bosom of the Father. Yet He who prayed was the same Person who had walked in that light before time was, and now in human flesh asked for what no mere manhood could bear. The first form of the petition implies that such a partaking in the uncreated glory of the Father is the natural prerogative of One who is 'the Son,' while the second implies that it is the appropriate recompense of the earthly life and character of the man Jesus.

The petition not only reveals the conscious divinity of the Son, but also His willing acceptance of the Cross; for the glorifying sought is that reached through death, resurrection, and ascension, and that introductory clause, 'the hour is come,' points to the impending sufferings as the first step in the answer to the petition. The Crucifixion is always thus treated in this Gospel, as being both the lowest humiliation and the 'lifting up' of the Son; and here He is reaching out His hand, as it were, to draw His sufferings nearer. So willingly and desiringly did this Isaac climb the mount of sacrifice. Both elements of the great saying in the Epistle to the Hebrews are here: 'For the joy that was set before Him, [He] endured the Cross.'

The purpose of the petition is to be noted; namely, the Son's glorifying of the Father. No taint of selfishness corrupted His prayer. Not for Himself, but for men, did He desire His glory. He sought return to that serene and lofty seat, and the elevation of His limited manhood to the throne, not because He was wearied of earth or impatient of weakness, sorrows, or limitations, but that He might more fully manifest by that Glory, the Father's name. To make the Father known is to make the Father glorious; for He is all fair and lovely. That revelation of divine perfection, majesty, and sweetness was the end of Christ's earthly life, and is the end of His heavenly divine activity. He needs to reassume the prerogatives of which He needed to divest Himself, and both necessities have one end. He had to lay aside His garments and assume the form of a servant, that He might make God known; but, that revelation being complete, He must take His garments and sit down again, before He can go on to tell all the meaning of what He has 'done unto us.'

The ground of the petition is twofold. [Verses 2 and 3](#) represent the glory sought for, as the completion of the Son's mission and task. Already He had been endowed with 'authority over all flesh,' for the purpose of bestowing eternal life; and that eternal life stands in the knowledge of God, which is the same as the knowledge of Christ. The present gift to the

Son and its purpose are thus precisely parallel with the further gift desired, and that is the necessary carrying out of this. The authority and office of the incarnate Christ demand the glory of, and consequent further manifestation by, the glorified Christ. The life which He comes to give is a life which flows from the revelation that He makes of the Father, received, not as mere intellectual knowledge, but as loving acquaintance.

The second ground for the petition is in [verse 4](#), the actual perfect fulfilment by the Son of that mission. What untroubled consciousness of sinless obedience and transparent shining through His life of the Father's likeness and will He must have had, who could thus assert His complete realisation of that Father's revealing purpose, as the ground of His deserving and desiring participation in the divine glory! Surely such words are either the acme of self-righteousness or the self-revealing speech of the Son of God.

II. With [verse 6](#) we pass to the more immediate reference to the disciples, and the context from thence to [verse 15](#) may be regarded as all clustered round the second petition 'keep' ([v. 11](#)). That central request is preceded and followed by considerations of the disciples' relation to Christ and to the world, which may be regarded as its grounds. The whole context preceding the petition may be summed up in two grounds for the prayer—the former set forth at length, and the latter summarily; the one being the genuine, though incomplete discipleship of the men for whom Christ prays ([vs. 6-10](#)), and the latter their desolate condition without Jesus ([v. 11](#)).

It is beautiful to see how our Lord here credits the disciples with genuine grasp, both in heart and head, of His teaching. He had shortly before had to say, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?' and soon 'they all forsook Him and fled.' But beneath misconception and inadequate apprehension there lived faith and love; and He saw 'the full corn in the ear,' when only the green 'blade' was visible, pushing itself above the surface. We may take comfort from this generous estimate of imperfect disciples. If He did not tend, instead of quenching, 'dimly burning wicks,' where would He have 'lights in the world?'

[Verse 6](#) lays down the beginning of discipleship as threefold: Christ's act in revealing; the Father's, in giving men to Jesus; and men's, in keeping the Father's word. 'Thy word' is the whole revelation by Christ, which is, as this Gospel so often repeats, not His own, but the Father's. These three facts underlying discipleship are pleas for the petition to follow; for unless the feeble disciples are 'kept' in the name, as in a fortress, Christ's work of revelation is neutralised, the Father's gift to Him made of none effect, and the incipient disciples will not 'keep' His word. The plea is, in effect, 'Forsake not the works of thine own hands'; and, like all Christ's prayers, it has a promise in its depths, since God does not begin what He will not finish; and it has a warning, too, that we cannot keep ourselves unless a stronger Hand keeps us.

Verses 7 and 8 carry on the portraiture of discipleship, and thence draw fresh pleas. The blessed result of accepting Christ's revelation is a knowledge, built on happy experience, and, like the acquaintance of heart with heart, issuing in the firm conviction that Christ's words and deeds are from God. Why does He say, 'All things whatsoever Thou hast given,' instead of simply 'that I have' or 'declare'? Probably it is the natural expression of His consciousness, the lowly utterance of His obedience, claiming nothing as His own, and yet claiming all, while the subsequent clause 'are of Thee' expresses the disciples' conviction. In like fashion our Lord, in verse 8, declares that His words, in their manifoldness (contrast v. 6, 'Thy word'), were all received by Him from the Father, and accepted by the disciples, with the result that they came, as before, to 'know' by inward acquaintance with Him as a person, and so to have the divinity of His Person certified by experience, and further came to 'believe' that God had sent Him, which was a conviction arrived at by faith. So knowledge, which is personal experience and acquaintance, and faith, which rises to the heights of the Father's purpose, come from the humble acceptance of the Christ declaring the Father's name. First faith, then knowledge, and then a fuller faith built on it, and that faith in its turn passing into knowledge (v. 25)—these are the blessings belonging to the growth of true discipleship, and are discerned by the loving eye of Jesus in very imperfect followers.

In verse 9 Jesus assumes the great office of Intercessor. 'I pray for them' is not so much prayer as His solemn presentation of Himself before the Father as the High-priest of His people. It marks an epoch in His work. The task of bringing God to man is substantially complete. That of bringing men by supplication to God is now to begin. It is the revelation of the permanent office of the departed Lord. Moses on the Mount holds up the rod, and Israel prevails (Exod. xvii. 9). The limitation of this prayer to the disciples applies only to the special occasion, and has no bearing on the sweep of His redeeming purpose or the desires of His all-pitying heart. The reasons for His intercession follow in verses 9-11a. The disciples are the Father's, and continue so even when 'given' to Christ, in accordance with the community of possession, which oneness of nature and perfectness of love establish between the Father and the Son. God cannot but care for those who are His. The Son cannot but pray for those who are His. Their having recognised Him for what He was binds Him to pray for them. He is glorified in disciples, and if we show forth His character, He will be our Advocate. The last reason for His prayer is the loneliness of the disciples and their exposure in the world without Him. His departure impelled Him to Intercede, both as being a leaving them defenceless and as being an entrance into the heavenly state of communion with the Father.

In the petition itself (v. 11b), observe the invocation 'Holy Father!' with special reference to the prayer for preservation from the corruption of the world. God's holiness is the pledge that He will make us holy, since He is 'Father' as well. Observe the substance of the request, that the disciples should be kept, as in a fortress, within the enclosing circle of the name

which God has given to Jesus. The name is the manifestation of the divine nature. It was given to Jesus, inasmuch as He, 'the Word,' had from the beginning the office of revealing God; and that which was spoken of the Angel of the Covenant is true in highest reality of Jesus: 'My name is in Him.' 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe.'

Observe the issue of this keeping; namely, the unity of believers. The depths of that saying are beyond us, but we can at least see thus far—that the true bond of unity is the name in which all who are one are kept; that the pattern of the true unity of believers is the ineffable union of Father and Son, which is oneness of will and nature, along with distinctness of persons; and that therefore this purpose goes far deeper than outward unity of organisation.

Then follow other pleas, which are principally drawn from Christ's relation to the disciples, now ending; whereas the former ones were chiefly deduced from the disciples' relation to Him. He can no more do what He has done, and commits it to the Father. Happy we if we can leave our unfinished tasks to be taken up by God, and trust those whom we leave undefended to be shielded by Him! 'I kept' is, in the Greek, expressive of continuous, repeated action, while 'I guarded' gives the single issue of the many acts of keeping. Jesus keeps His disciples now as He did then, by sedulous, patient, reiterated acts, so that they are safe from evil. But note where He kept them—'in Thy name.' That is our place of safety, a sure defence and inexpugnable fortress. One, indeed, was lost; but that was not any slur on Christ's keeping, but resulted from his own evil nature, as being 'a son of loss' (if we may so preserve the affinity of the words in the Greek), and from the divine decree from of old. Sharply defined and closely united are the two apparent contradictories of man's free choice of destruction and God's foreknowledge. Christ saw them in harmony, and we shall do so one day.

Then the flow of the prayer recurs to former thoughts. Going away so soon, He yearned to leave them sharers of His own emotions in the prospect of His departure to the Father, and therefore He had admitted them (and us) to hear this sacred outpouring of His desires. If we laid to heart the blessed revelations of this disclosure of Christ's heart, and followed Him with faithful gaze as He ascends to the Father, and realised our share in that triumph, our empty vessels would be filled by some of that same joy which was His. Earthly joy can never be full; Christian joy should never be anything less than full.

Then follows a final glance at the disciples' relation to the world, to which they are alien because they are of kindred to Him. This is the ground for the repetition of the prayer 'keep', with the difference that formerly it was 'keep in Thy name,' and now it is 'from the evil.' It is good to gaze first on our defence, the 'munitions of rocks' where we lie safely, and then we can venture to face the thought of 'the evil,' from which that keeps us, whether it be personal or abstract.

III. [Verses 16-19](#) give the final petition for the immediate circle of disciples, with its grounds. The position of alienation from the world, in which the disciples stand by reason of their assimilation to Jesus, is repeated here. It was the reason for the former prayer, 'keep'; it is the reason for the new petition, 'sanctify.' Keeping comes first, and then sanctifying, or consecration. Security from evil is given that we may be wholly devoted to the service of God. The evil in the world is the great hindrance to that. The likeness to Jesus is the great ground of hope that we shall be truly consecrated. We are kept 'in the name'; we are consecrated 'in the truth,' which is the revelation made by Jesus, and in a very deep sense is Himself. That truth is, as it were, the element in which the believer lives, and by abiding in which his real consecration is possible.

Christ's prayer for us should be our aim and deepest desire for ourselves, and His declaration of the condition of its fulfilment should prescribe our firm adhesion to, and constant abiding in, the truth as revealed and embodied in Him, as the only means by which we can attain the consecration which is at once, as the closing verses of the passage tell us, the means by which we may fulfil the purpose for which we are sent into the world, and the path on which we reach complete assimilation to His perfect self-surrender. All Christians are sent into the world by Jesus, as Jesus was sent by the Father. We have the charge to glorify Him. We have the presence of the Sender with us, the sent. We are inspired with His Spirit. We cannot do His work without that entire consecration which shall copy His devotion to the Father and eager swiftness to do His will. How can such ennobling and exalted consecration be ours? There is but one way. He has 'consecrated Himself,' and by union with Him through faith, our selfishness may be subdued, and the Spirit of Christ may dwell in our hearts, to make us 'living sacrifices, consecrated and acceptable to God.' Then shall we be truly 'consecrated,' and then only, when we can say, 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' That is the end of Christ's consecration of Himself—the prayer which He prayed for His disciples—and should be the aim which every disciple earnestly pursues.

## **'THE LORD THEE KEEPS'**

'... They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.'—**JOHN xvii. 14-16.**

We have here a petition imbedded in a reiterated statement of the disciples' isolated position when left in a hostile world without Christ's sheltering presence. We cannot fathom the depth of the mystery of the praying Christ, but we may be sure of this, that His prayers were always in harmony with the Father's will, were, in fact, the expression of that will, and were therefore promises and prophecies. What He prays the Father for His disciples He gives to His disciples. Once only had He to say, 'If it be possible'; at all other times He prayed as sure that 'Thou hearest Me always,' and in this very prayer He speaks in a tone of strange authority, when He prays for all believers in future ages, and says: 'I will that, where I am, they also may be with Me.' In this High-priestly prayer, offered when Gethsemane was almost in sight, and the Judgment Hall and Calvary were near, our Lord's tender interest in His disciples fills His mind, and even in its earlier portion, which is in form a series of petitions for Himself, it is in essence a prayer for them, whilst this central section which concerns the Apostles, and the closing section which casts the mantle of His love and care over all who hereafter shall 'believe on Me through their word,' witnesses to the sublime completeness of His self-oblivion. Gethsemane heard His prayer for Himself; here He prays for His people, and the calm serenity and confident assurance of this prayer, set against the agitation of that other, receives and gives emphasis by the contrast.

Our text falls into two parts, the enclosing circle of the repeated statement of the disciples' isolation in an alien world, and the enclosed jewel of the all-sufficient prayer which guarantees their protection. We shall best make its comfort and cheer our own by dealing with these two successively.

### I. The disciples' isolation.

Of course we are to interpret the 'world' here in accordance with the ethical usage of that term in this Gospel, according to which it means the aggregate of mankind considered as apart from and alien to God. It is roughly equivalent to the modern phrase, 'society.'

With that order of things Christ's real followers are not in accord.

That want of accord depends upon their accord with Jesus.

Every Christian has the 'mind of Christ' in him, in the measure of his Christianity. 'It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master' But Christian discipleship has a better guarantee for the assimilation of the disciple to his Lord than the ordinary forms of the relation of teacher and taught ever present. There is a participation in the Master's life, an implantation in the scholar's spirit of the Teacher's Spirit. 'Christ in us' is not only 'the hope

of glory,' but the power which makes possible and actual the present possession of a life kindred with, because derived from, and essentially one with, His life.

They whose spirits are touched by the indwelling Christ to the 'fine issues' of sympathy with the law of His earthly life cannot but live in the world as aliens, and wander amid its pitfalls with 'blank misgivings' and a chill sense that this is not their rest. They are knit to One whose 'meat and drink' was to do the will of the Father in heaven, who 'pleased not Himself,' whose life was all one long service and sacrifice for men, whose joys were not fed by earthly possessions or delights. How should they have a sense of community of aims with grovelling hearts that cling to wealth or ambition, that are not at peace with God, and have no holdfasts beyond this 'bank and shoal of time'? A man who has drunk into the spirit of Christ's life is thereby necessarily thrown out of gear with the world.

Happy is he if his union with Jesus is so deep and close that it is but deepened by his experience of the lack of sympathy between the world and himself! Happy if his consciousness of not being 'of the world' but quickens his desire to help the world and glorify his Lord, by bringing His all-sufficiency into its emptiness, and leading it, too, to discern His sweetness and beauty!

But how little the life of the average Christian corresponds to this reiterated utterance of our Lord! Who of us dare venture to take it on our lips and to say that we are 'not of the world even as He is not of the world'? Is not our relation to that world of which Jesus here speaks a contrast rather than a parallel to His? The 'prince of this world' had nothing in Christ, as He himself declared, but He has much in each of us. There are stored up heaps of combustibles in every one of us which catch fire only too swiftly, and burn but too fiercely, when the 'fiery darts of the wicked' fall among them. Instead of an instinctive recoil from the view of life characteristic of 'the world,' we must confess, if we are honest, that it draws us strongly, and many of us are quite at home with it. Why is this but because we do not habitually live near enough to our Lord to drink in His Spirit? The measure of our discord with the world is the measure of our accord with our Saviour. It is in the degree in which we possess His life that we come to be aliens here, and it is in the degree in which we keep in touch with Jesus, and keep our hearts wide open for the entrance of His Spirit, that we possess His life. A worldly Christian—no uncommon character—is a Christian who has all but shut himself off from the life which Christ breathes into the expectant soul.

## II. The disciples' guarded security.

Jesus encloses His prayer between the two parts of that repeated statement of the disciples' isolation. It is like some lovely, peaceful plain circled by grim mountains. The isolation is a necessary consequence of the disciples' previous union with Him. It involves much that is painful to the unrenewed part of their natures, but their Lord's prayer is more than enough for their security and peace.

'I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world.' They are in it by God's appointment for great purposes, affecting their own characters and affecting the world, with which Christ will not interfere. It is their training ground, their school. The sense of belonging to another order is to be intensified by their experiences in it, and these are to make more vivid the hopes that yearn towards the true home, and to develop the 'wrestling thews that throw the world.' The discipline of life is too precious to be tampered with even by a Saviour's prayer, and He loves His people too wisely to seek to shelter them from its roughness, and to procure for them exemption which would impoverish their characters.

So let us learn the lesson and shape our desires after the pattern of our Lord's prayer for us, nor blindly seek for that ease which He would not ask for us. False asceticism that shrinks from contact with an alien world, weak running from trials and temptations, selfish desires for exemption from sorrows, are all rebuked by this prayer. Christ's relation to the world is our pattern, and we are not to seek for pillows in an order of things where He 'had not where to lay His head.'

But He does ask for His people that they may be kept 'from evil,' or from 'the evil One.' That prayer is, as we have said, a promise and a prophecy. But the fulfilment of it in each individual disciple hinges on the disciple's keeping himself in touch with Jesus, whereby the 'much virtue' of His prayer will encompass him and keep him safe. We do not discuss the alternative renderings, according to one of which 'the evil' is impersonal, and according to the other of which it is concentrated in the personal 'prince of this world.' In either case, it is 'the evil' against which the disciples are to be guarded, whether it has a personal source or not.

Here, in Christ's intercession, is the firm ground of our confidence that we may be 'more than conquerors' in the life-long fight which we have to wage. The sweet strong old psalm is valid in its assurances to-day for every soul which puts itself under the shadow of Christ's protecting intercession: 'The Lord shall keep thee from all evil, He shall keep thy soul.' We have not 'to lift up our eyes unto the hills,' for 'vainly is help hoped for from the multitude of the mountains,' but 'Our help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth.' Therefore we may dwell at peace in the midst of an alien world, having the Father for our Keeper, and the Son, who overcame the world, for our Intercessor, our Pattern and our Hope.

The parallel between Christ and His people applies to their relations to the present order of things: 'They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.' It applies to their mission here: 'As Thou didst send Me into the world, even so sent I them into the world.' It applies to the future: 'I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee,' and in that 'coming' lies the guarantee that His servants will, each in his due time, come out from this alien world and pass into the state which is home, because He is there. The prayer that they might be kept from the evil, while remaining in the scene where evil is rampant,



is crowned by the prayer: 'I will that, where I am, they also may be with Me, that they may behold My glory.'

## THE HIGH PRIEST'S PRAYER

'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou givest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.'—[JOHN xvii. 20-26.](#)

The remainder of this prayer reaches out to all generations of believers to the end. We may incidentally note that it shows that Jesus did not anticipate a speedy end of the history of the world or the Church; and also that it breathes but one desire, that for the Church's unity, as though He saw what would be its greatest peril. Characteristic, too, of the idealism of this Gospel is it that there is no name for that future community. It is not called 'church,' or 'congregation,' or the like—it is 'them also that believe on Me through their word,' a great spiritual community, held together by common faith in Him whom the Apostles preached. Is not that still the best definition of Christians, and does not such a conception of it correspond better to its true nature than the formal abstraction, 'the Church'?

We can but touch in the most inadequate fashion the profound words of this section of the prayer which would take volumes to expound fitly. We note that it contains four periods, in each of which something is asked or stated, and then a purpose to be attained by the petition or statement is set forth.

First comes the prayer for unity and what the answer to it will effect ([v. 21](#)). Now in this verse the unity of believers is principally regarded as resulting from the inclusion, if we may so say, of them all in the ineffable union of the Father and the Son. Jesus prays that 'they may all be one,' and also 'that they also may be in us' (Rev. Ver.). And their unity is no mere matter of formal external organisation nor of unanimity of creed, or the like, but it is a deep, vital unity. The pattern of it is the unity of the Father and the Son, and the power that brings it about is the abiding of all believers 'in us.' The result of such a manifestation in the world of a multitude of men, in all of whom one life evidently moves, fusing their individualities while retaining their personalities, will be the world's conviction of the divine mission of Jesus. The world was beginning to feel its convictions moving slowly in that direction, when it exclaimed: 'Behold how these Christians love one another!' The alienation of Christians

has given barbs and feathers to its arrows of scorn. But it is 'the unity of the Spirit,' not that of a, great corporation, that Christ's prayer desires.

The petitions for what would be given to believers passes for a moment into a statement of what Jesus had already given to them. He had begun the unifying gift, and that made a plea for its perfecting. The 'glory' which He had given to these poor bewildered Galileans was but in a rudimentary stage; but still, wherever there is faith in Him, there is some communication of His life and Spirit, and some of that veiled and yet radiant glory, 'full of grace and truth,' which shone through the covering when the Incarnate Word 'became flesh.' It is the Christ-given Christ-likeness in each which knits believers into one. It is Christ in us and we in Christ that fuses us into one, and thereby makes each perfect. And such flashing back of the light of Jesus from a million separate crystals, all glowing with one light and made one in the light, would flash on darkest eyes the lustre of the conviction that God sent Christ, and that God's love enfolded those Christlike souls even as it enfolded Him.

Again (v. 24) comes a petition with its result. And here there is no mention of the effect of the answer on the world. For the moment the thoughts of isolation in, and a message to, the world fade away. The partially-possessed 'glory' seems to have led on Christ's thoughts to the calm home of perfection waiting for Him who was 'not of the world' and was sent into it, and for the humble ones who had taken Him for Lord. 'I will that'—that is a strange tone for a prayer. What consciousness on Christ's part does it involve? The disciples are not now called 'them that should believe on Me,' but 'that which Thou hast given Me,' the individuals melt into the great whole. They are Christ's, not merely by their faith or man's preaching, but by the Father's gift. And the fact of that gift is used as a plea with Him, to 'perfect that which concerneth' them, and to complete the unity of believers with Jesus by bringing them to be 'with Him' in His triumphant session at the right hand. To 'behold' will be the same as to share His glory, not only that which we beheld when He tabernacled among us, but that which He had in the pouring out on Him of God's love 'before the foundation of the world.' Our dim eyes cannot follow the happy souls as they are lost in the blaze, but we know that they walk in light and are like Him, for they 'see Him as He is.'

The last statement (vs. 25, 26) is not petition but vow, and, to our ears, promise. The contrast of the world and believers appears for the last time. What made the world a 'world' was its not knowing God; what made believers isolated in, and having an errand to, the world, was that they 'knew' (not merely 'believed,' but knew by experience) that Jesus had been sent from God to make known His name. All our knowledge of God comes through Him; it is for us to recognise His divine mission, and then He will unveil, more and more, with blessed continuity of increasing knowledge, the Name, and with growing knowledge of it growing measures of God's love will be in us, and Jesus Himself will 'dwell in our hearts by faith' more completely and more blessedly through an eternity of wider knowledge and more fervent love.

## THE FOLDED FLOCK

‘I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory.’—[JOHN xvii. 24](#).

This wonderful prayer is (a) for Jesus Himself, (b) for the Apostles, (c) for the whole Church on earth and in heaven.

### I. The prayer.

‘I will’ has a strange ring of authority. It is the expression of His love to men, and of His longing for their presence with Him in His glory. Not till they are with Him there, shall He ‘see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.’

We have here a glimpse of the blessed state of the dead in Christ.

(a) Local presence with Christ. His glorified body is somewhere. The value of this thought is that it gives solidity to our ideas of a future life. There they are. We need not dwell on the metaphysical difficulties about locality for disembodied spirits.

If a spirit can be localised in a body, I suppose it can be localised without a body; but passing by all that, we have the hope held out here of a real local presence with the glorified humanity of our Lord. We speak of the dead as gone from us, and we have that idea far more vividly in our minds than that of their having gone to Him. We speak of the ‘departed,’ but we do not think of them as ‘arrived.’ We look down to the narrow grave, but we forget ‘He is not here, He is risen. Why seek ye the living among the dead?’ Ah! if we could only bring home to our hearts the solid prose of the conviction that where Christ is there His servants are, and that not in the diffused ubiquity of His Divine Omnipresence, it would go far to remove the darkness and vague mist which wrap the future, and to set it as it really is before us, as a solid definite reality. We see the sails glide away out into the west as the sun goes down, and we think of them as tossing on a midnight sea, an unfathomable waste. Try to think of them more truly. As in that old miracle, He comes to them walking on the water in the night watch, and if at first they are terrified, His voice brings back hope to the heart that is beginning to stand still, and immediately they are at the land whither they go. Now, as they sink from our sight, they are in port, sails furled and anchor dropped, and green fields round them, even while we watch the sinking masts, and cannot yet rightly tell whether the fading sail has faded wholly.

### (b) Communion with Christ.

Our Lord says not only ‘that where I am, they also may be,’ but adds ‘with Me.’ That is not a superfluous addition, but emphasises the thought of a communion which is more intimate and blessed than local presence alone would be.

The communion here is real but imperfect. It is perfected there on our part by the dropping away of flesh and sin, by change of circumstances, by emancipation from cares

and toils necessary here, by the development of new powers and surroundings, and on His side by new manifestations.

(c) Vision of His glory.

The crown of this utterance of Christ's will is 'that they may behold My glory.' In an earlier part of this prayer our Lord had spoken of the 'glory which I had with Thee before the world was.' But probably the glory 'given' is not that of essential Divinity, but that of His mediatorial work. To His people 'with Him where He is,' are imparted fuller views of Christ as Saviour, deeper notions of His work, clearer perception of His rule in providence and nature. This is the loftiest employment of the spirits who are perfected and lapped in 'pleasures for evermore' by their union with the glorified Jesus.

Surely this is grander than all metaphorical pictures of heaven.

II. The incipient fulfilment now going on.

The prayer has been in process of fulfilment ever since. The dead in Christ have entered on its answer now.

We need not discuss difficulties about the 'intermediate state,' for this at all events is true, that to be 'absent from the body' is to be 'present with the Lord.'

A Christian death is an answer to this prayer. True, for Christians as for all, the physical necessity is an imperative law. True, the punitive aspect of death is retained for them. But yet the law is wielded by Christ, and while death remains, its whole aspect is changed. So we may think of those who have departed in His faith and fear as gone in answer to this prayer.

How beautiful that is! Slowly, one by one, they are gathered in, as the stars one by one light up. Place after place is filled.

Thus through the ages the prayer works on, and our dear ones have gone from us, but they have gone to Him. We weep, but they rejoice. To us their departure is the result of an iron law, of a penal necessity, of some secondary cause; but to them it is seen to be the answer to His mighty prayer. They hear His voice and follow Him when He says, 'Come up hither.'

III. The final fulfilment still future.

The prayer looks forward to a perfect fulfilment. His prayer cannot be vain.

(a) Perfect in degree.

(b) Perfect in extent, when all shall be gathered together and the 'whole family' shall be 'in heaven,' and Christ's own word receives its crowning realisation, that 'of all whom the Father hath given Him He has lost nothing.'

And these are not some handful picked out by a decree which we can neither fathom nor alter, but Christ is given to us all, and if we choose to take Him, then for us He has ascended; and as we watch Him going up the voice comes to us: 'I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.'

## CHRIST'S SUMMARY OF HIS WORK

'I have declared onto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.'—[JOHN xvii. 26](#).

This is the solemn and calm close of Christ's great High-priestly prayer; the very last words that He spoke before Gethsemane and His passion. In it He sums up both the purpose of His life and the petitions of His prayer, and presents the perfect fulfilment of the former as the ground on which He asks the fulfilment of the latter. There is a singular correspondence and contrast between these last words to God and the last words to the disciples, which immediately preceded them. These were, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' In both He sums up His life, in both He is unconscious of flaw, imperfection, or limitation; in both He shares His own possessions among His followers. But His words to men carry a trace of His own conflict and a foreboding of theirs. For Him life had been, and for them it was to be, tribulation and a battle, and the highest thing that He could promise them was victory won by conflict. But from the serene elevation of the prayer all such thoughts disappear. Unbroken calm lies over it. His life has been one continual manifestation of the name of God; and the portion that He promises to His followers is not victory won by strife, but the participation with Himself in the love of God.

Both views are true—true to His experience, true to ours. The difference between them lies in the elevation of the beholder's eye. Looked at on the outward side, His life and ours must be always a battle and often a sorrow. Looked at from within, His life was an unbroken abiding in the love of God, and a continual impartation of the name of God, and our lives may be an ever growing knowledge of God, leading to and being a fuller and fuller possession of His love, and of a present Christ. So let us ponder these deep words: our Lord's own summing up of His work and aims; His statement of what we may hope to attain; and the path by which we may attain it. I shall best bring out the whole fullness of their meaning if I simply follow them word by word.

I. Note, first, the backward look of the revealing Son.

'I have declared Thy name.'

The first thing that strikes one about these words is their boldness. Remember that they are spoken to God, at the close of a life the heights and depths of which they sum up. They are an appeal to God's righteous judgment of the whole character of the career. Do they breathe the tone that we might expect? Surely the prophet or teacher who has most earnestly tried to make himself a mirror, without spot to darken and without dint to distort the divine ray, will be the first to feel, as he looks back, the imperfections of his repetition of his message. But Jesus Christ, when He looks back over His life, has no flaw, limitation, incompleteness, to record or to confess. As always so here, He is absolutely unconscious of anything in the

nature of weakness, error, or sin. As when He looked back upon His life as a conflict, He had no defeats to remember with shame, so here, when He looks upon it as the revelation of God He feels that everything which He has received of the Father He has made known unto men.

And the strange thing is that we admit the claim, and have become so accustomed to regard it as being perfectly legitimate that we forget how enormous it is. He takes an attitude here which in any other man would be repulsive, but in Him is supremely natural. We criticise other people, we outgrow their teachings, we see where their doctrines have deviated from truth by excess or defect, or disproportion; but when He says 'I have declared Thy name,' we feel that He says nothing more than the simple facts of His life vindicate and confirm.

Not less remarkable is the implication in these words, not only of the completeness of His message, but of the fullness of His knowledge of God, and its entirely underived nature. So He claims for Himself an altogether special and unique position here: He has learned God from none; He teaches God to all. 'That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.'

Looking a little more closely at these words before us, we have here Christ's own account of His whole life. The meaning of it all is the revelation of the heart of God. Not by words, of course; not by words only, but far more by deeds. And I would have you ask yourselves this question—If the deeds of a man are a declaration of the name of God, what sort of a man is He who thus declares Him? Must we not feel that if these words, or anything like them, really came from the lips of Jesus Christ, we are here in the presence of something other than a holy life of a simple humanity, which might help men to climb to the apprehension of a God who was perfect love; and that when He says 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' we stand before 'God manifest in the flesh.'

What is that name of God which the revealing Son declares? Not the mere syllables by which we call Him, but the manifested character of the Father. That one name, in the narrower sense of the word, carries the whole revelation that Jesus Christ has to make; for it speaks of tenderness, of kindred, of paternal care, of the transmission of a nature, of the embrace of a divine love. And it delivers men from all their creeping dreads, from all their dark peradventures, from all their stinging fears, from all the paralysing uncertainties which, like clouds, always misty and often thunder-bearing, have shut out the sight of the divine face. If this Christ, in His weakness and humanity, with pity welling from His eyes, and making music of His voice, with the swift help streaming from His fingers-tips to every pain and weariness, and the gracious righteousness that drew little children and did not repel publicans and harlots, is our best image of God, then love is the centre of divinity, and all the rest that we call God is but circumference and fringe of that central brightness.

‘So through the thunder comes a human voice Saying, “O heart I made! a heart beats here.”’

He has declared God’s name, His last best name of Love.

Need I dwell for one moment on the fact that that name is only declared by this Son? There is no need to deny the presence of manifold other precious sources in men’s experience and lives from which something may be inferred of what God truly is. But all these, rich and manifold as they are, fall into nothingness before the life of Jesus Christ, considered as the making visible of God. For all the rest are partial and incomplete. ‘At sundry times and in divers manners’ God flung forth syllables of the name, and ‘fragments of that mighty voice came rolling down the wind.’ But in Jesus Christ the whole name, in all its syllables, is spoken. Other sources of knowledge are ambiguous, and need the interpretation of Christ’s life and Cross ere they can be construed into a harmonious whole. Life, nature, our inmost being, history, all these sources speak with two voices; and it is only when we hear the deep note that underlies them in the word of Christ that their discord becomes a harmony. Other sources lack authority. They come at the most with a ‘may be.’ He comes with a ‘Verily, verily.’ Other sources speak to the understanding, or the conscience, or to fear. Christ speaks to the heart. Other sources leave the man who accepts them unaffected. Christ’s message penetrates to the transforming and assimilation of the whole being.

So, dear brethren! for all generations, and for this generation most of all, the plain alternative lies between the declaration of the name of God in Jesus Christ and a godless and orphan world. Modern thought will make short work of all other sources of certitude about the character of God, and will leave men alone in the dark. Christ, the historical fact of the life and death of Jesus Christ, is the sole surviving source of certitude, which is blessedness, as to whether there is a God, and what sort of a God He is.

II. Secondly, note here that strange forward look of the dying Man: ‘I have declared Thy name and will declare it.’

And that was said within eight and forty hours of the Cross, which, if He had been a simple human teacher and martyr, would have ended all His activity in the world. But here He is not merely summing up His life, and laying it aside, writing the last sentence, as it were, which gathers up the whole of the completed book, but He is closing the first volume, and in the act of doing so He stretches out His hand to open the second. ‘I will declare it.’ When? How? Did not earthly life, then, put a stop to this Teacher’s activity? Was there still prophetic function to be done after death had sealed His lips? Certainly.

That anticipation, which at once differentiates Him from all the brood of merely human teachers and prophets, even the highest, does indeed include as future, at the moment when He speaks, the swiftly coming and close Cross; but it goes beyond it. How much of Christendom’s knowledge of God depended upon the Passion, on the threshold of which Christ was standing? He, hanging on the Cross in weakness, and dying there amidst the



darkness that overspread the land, is a strange Revealer of the omnipotent, infinite, ever-blessed God. But Oh! if we strike Gethsemane and Calvary out of Christ's manifestation of the Father, how infinitely poorer are we and the world! 'God commendeth,' (rather 'establisheth,') 'His love toward us in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' And so as we turn ourselves to the little knoll outside the gate, where the Nazarene carpenter hangs faint and dying, we—wonder of Wonders, and yet certainty of certainties!—have to say, 'Lo! this is our God; we have waited for Him.'

But that future revelation extends beyond the Cross, and includes resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, and the whole history of the Church right onwards through the ages. The difference between the two volumes of revelation—that which includes the work of Christ upon earth, and that which includes His revelation from the heavens—is this, that the first volume contains all the facts, and the second volume contains His interpretation and application of the facts in the understandings and hearts of His people. We have no more facts from which to construe God than these which belong to the earthly life of Jesus Christ, and we never shall have, here at all events. But whilst the first volume to the bottom of the last page is finished and tolerates and needs no additions, day by day, moment by moment, epoch by epoch Christ is bringing His people to a fuller understanding of the significance of the first volume, and writing the second more and more upon their hearts.

So we have an ever-living Christ, still the active Teacher of His Church. Times of unsettlement and revolutionary change and the 'shaking of the things that are made,' like the times in which we live, are but times in which the great Teacher is setting some new lesson from the old Book to His slow scholars. There is always a little confusion in the schoolroom when the classes are being rearranged and new books are being put into old hands. The tributary stream, as it rushes in, makes broken water for a moment. Do not let us be afraid when 'the things that can be shaken' shake, but let us see in the shaking the attendant of a new curriculum on which the great Teacher is launching His scholars, and let us learn the new lessons of the old Gospel which He is then teaching.

III. Thirdly, note the participation in the Father's love which is the issue of the knowledge of the Father's name.

Christ says that His end, an end which is surely attained in the declaration of the divine name, is that 'the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them.' We are here touching upon heights too dizzy for free and safe walking, on glories too bright for close and steady gaze. But where Christ has spoken we may reverently follow. Mark, then, that marvellous thought of the identity between the love which was His and the love which is ours. 'From everlasting' that divine love lay on the Eternal Word which in the hoary beginning, before the beginning of creatures, 'was with God, and was God.' The deepest conception that we can form of the divine nature is of a Being who in Himself carries the Subject and the Object of an eternal love, which we speak of in the deep emblem of 'the Word,' and the God with

whom He eternally 'was.' That love lay upon Christ, without limitation, without reservation, without interruption, finding nothing there from which it recoiled, and nothing there which did not respond to it. No mist, no thunderstorm, ever broke that sunshine, no tempest ever swept across that calm. Continuous, full, perfect was the love that knit the Father to the Son, and continuous, full, and perfect was the consciousness of abiding in that love, which lay like light upon the spirit of Him that said 'I delight to do Thy will.' 'The Father hath not left Me alone.'

And all that love Christ gives to us as deep, as continuous, as unreserved. Our consciousness of God's love is meant by Christ to be like His own. Alas! alas! is that our experience, Christian people? The sun always shines on the rainless land of Egypt, except for a month or two in the year. The contrast between the unclouded blue and continuous light and heat there, and our murky skies and humid atmosphere, is like the contrast between our broken and feeble consciousness of the shining of the divine love and the uninterrupted glory of light and joy of communion which poured on Christ's heart. But it is possible for us indefinitely to approximate to such an experience; and the way by which we reach it is that plain and simple one of accepting Christ's declaration of the Father's name.

IV. And so, lastly, notice the indwelling Christ who makes our participation in the divine love possible: 'And I in them.'

One may well say, 'How can it be that love should be transferred? How can it be that the love of God to me shall be identical with the love of God to Christ?' There is only one answer. If Christ dwells in me, then God's love to Him falls upon me by no transference, but by my incorporation into Him. And I would urge that this great truth of the actual indwelling of Christ in the soul is no mere piece of rhetorical exaggeration, nor a wild and enthusiastic way of putting the fact that the influence of His teaching and the beauty of His example can sway us; but it is a plain and absolute truth that the divine Christ can come into and abide in the narrow room of our poor hearts. And if He does this, then 'he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit'; and the Christ in me receives the sunshine of the divine love. That does not destroy, but heightens, my individuality. I am more and not less myself because 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

So, dear brethren! it all comes to this—we may each of us, if we will, have Jesus Christ for Guest and Inhabitant in our hearts. If we have, then, since God loves Him, He must love me who have Him within me, and as long as God loves Christ He cannot cease to love me, nor can I cease to be conscious of His love to me, and whatsoever gifts His love bestows upon Jesus, pass over in measure, and partially, to myself. Thus immortality, heaven, glory, all blessedness in heaven and earth, are the fruit and crystallisation, so to speak, of that oneness with Christ which is possible for us. And the conditions are simply that we shall with joyful trust accept His declaration of the Father's name, and see God manifest in Him; and welcome in our inmost hearts that great Gospel. Then His prayer, and the travail of His

soul, will reach their end even in me, and 'the love wherewith the Father loved the Son shall be in me,' and the Son Himself shall dwell in my heart.

## CHRIST AND HIS CAPTORS

‘As soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked He them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am He: if therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which He spake, Of them which Thou sayest Me have I lost none.’—[JOHN xviii. 6-9](#).

This remarkable incident is narrated by John only. It fits in with the purpose which he himself tells us governed his selection of the incidents which he records. ‘These things are written,’ says he, near the end of the Gospel, ‘that ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life in His name.’ The whole of the peculiarities of the substance of John’s Gospel are to be explained on the two grounds that he was writing a supplement to, and not a substitute for, or a correction of, the Gospels already in existence; and that his special business was to narrate such facts and words as set forth the glory of Christ as ‘the Only Begotten of the Father.’

The incident before us is, as I think, one of these. The Evangelist would have us see in it, as I gather from his manner of narrating it, mainly three things. He emphasises that strange recoil of the would-be captors before Christ’s majestic, calm ‘I am He’; that was a manifestation of Christ’s glory. He emphasises our Lord’s patient standing there, in the midst of the awe-struck crowd, and even inciting them, as it would seem, to do the work for which they had come out; that was a manifestation of the voluntariness of Christ’s sufferings. And He emphasises the self-forgetting care with which at that supreme moment He steps between His faithless, weak friends and danger, with the wonderful words, ‘If ye seek Me, let these go their way’; to the Evangelist that little incident is an illustration, on a very low level, and in regard to a comparatively trivial matter, of the very same principle by which salvation from all evil in time and in eternity, is guaranteed to all that believe on Him:—

I. First, then, consider this remarkable, momentary manifestation of our Lord’s glory.

‘I am He!’ When the Band were thus doubly assured by the traitor’s kiss and by His own confession, why did they not lay hands upon Him? There He stood in the midst of them, alone, defenceless; there was nothing to hinder their binding Him on the spot. Instead of that they recoil, and fall in a huddled heap before Him. Some strange awe and terror, of which they themselves could have given no account, was upon their spirits. How came it about? Many things may have conspired to produce it. I am by no means anxious to insist that this was a miracle. Things of the same sort, though much less in degree, have been often enough seen; when some innocent and illustrious victim has for a moment paralysed the hands of his would-be captors and made them feel, though it were but transiently, ‘how awful goodness is.’ There must have been many in that band who had heard Him, though,

in the uncertain light of quivering moonbeams and smoking torches, they failed to recognise Him till He spoke. There must have been many more who had heard of Him, and many who suspected that they were about to lay hands on a holy man, perhaps on a prophet. There must have been reluctant tools among the inferiors, and no doubt some among the leaders whose consciences needed but a touch to be roused to action. To all, His calmness and dignity would appeal, and the manifest freedom from fear or desire to flee would tend to deepen the strange thoughts which began to stir in their hearts.

But the impression which the narrative seems intended to leave, appears to me to be of something more than this. It looks as if there were something more than human in Christ's look and tone. It may have been the same in kind as the ascendancy which a pure and calm nature has over rude and inferior ones. It may have been the same in kind as has sometimes made the headsman on the scaffold pause before he struck, and has bowed rude gaolers into converts before some grey-haired saint or virgin martyr; yet the difference is so great in degree as practically to become quite another thing. Though I do not want to insist upon any 'miraculous' explanation of the cause of this incident, yet I would ask, May it not be that here we see, perhaps apart from Christ's will altogether, rising up for one moment to the surface, the indwelling majesty which was always there?

We do not know the laws that regulated the dwelling of the Godhead, bodily, within that human frame, but we do know that at one other time there came upon His features a transfiguration, and over His very garments a lustre which was not thrown upon them from without, but rose up from within. And I am inclined to think that here, as there, though under such widely different circumstances and to such various issues, there was for a moment a little rending of the veil of His flesh, and an emission of some flash of the brightness that always tabernacled within Him; and that, therefore, just as Isaiah, when He saw the King in His glory, said, 'Woe is me, for I am undone!' and just as Moses could not look upon the Face, but could only see the back parts, so here the one stray beam of manifest divinity that shot through the crevice, as it were, for an instant, was enough to prostrate with a strange awe even those rude and insensitive men. When He had said 'I am He,' there was something that made them feel, 'This is One before whom violence cowers abashed, and in whose presence impurity has to hide its face.' I do not assert that this is the explanation of that panic terror. I only ask, May it not be?

But whatever we may think was the reason, at all events the incident brings out very strikingly the elevation and dignity of Christ, and the powerful impressions made by His personality, even at such a time of humiliation. This Evangelist is always careful to bring out the glory of Christ, especially when that glory lies side by side with His lowliness. The blending of these two is one of the remarkable features in the New Testament portraiture of Jesus Christ. Wherever in our Lord's life any incident indicates more emphatically than usual the lowliness of His humiliation, there, by the side of it, you get something that indicates

the majesty of His glory. For instance, He is born a weak infant, but angels herald His birth; He lies in a manger, but a star hangs trembling above it, and leads sages from afar, with their myrrh, and incense, and gold. He submits Himself to the baptism of repentance, but the heavens open and a voice proclaims, 'This is My beloved Son!' He sits wearied, on the stone coping of the well, and craves for water from a peasant woman; but He gives her the Water of Life. He lies down and sleeps, from pure exhaustion, in the stern of the little fishing-boat, but He wakes to command the storm, and it is still. He weeps beside the grave, but He flings His voice into its inmost recesses, and the sheeted dead comes forth. He well-nigh faints under the agony in the garden, but an angel from Heaven strengthens Him. He stands a prisoner at a human bar, but He judges and condemns His judges. He dies, and that hour of defeat is His hour of triumph, and the union of shame and glory is most conspicuous in that hour when on the Cross the 'Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.'

This strange blending of opposites—the glory in the lowliness, and the abasement in the glory—is the keynote of this singular event. He will be 'delivered into the hands of men.' Yes; but ere He is delivered He pauses for an instant, and in that instant comes a flash 'above the brightness of the noonday sun' to tell of the hidden glory.

Do not forget that we may well look upon that incident as a prophecy of what shall be. As one of the suggestive, old commentators on this verse says: 'He will say "I am He," again, a third time. What will He do coming to reign, when He did this coming to die? And what will His manifestation be as a Judge when this was the effect of the manifestation as He went to be judged?' 'Every eye shall see Him'; and they that loved not His appearing shall fall before Him when He cometh to be our Judge; and shall call on the rocks and the hills to cover them.

II. There is here, secondly, a manifestation of the voluntariness of our Lord's suffering.

When that terrified mob recoiled from Him, why did He stand there so patiently? The time was propitious for flight, if He had cared to flee. He might have 'passed through the midst of them and gone His way.' as He did once before, if He had chosen. He comes from the garden; there shall be no difficulty in finding Him. He tells who He is; there shall be no need for the traitor's kiss. He lays them low for a moment, but He will not flee. When Peter draws his sword He rebukes his ill-advised appeal to force, and then He holds out His hands and lets them bind Him. It was not their fetters, but the 'cords of love' which held Him prisoner. It was not their power, but His own pity which drew Him to the judgment hall and the Cross.

Let us dwell upon that thought for a moment. The whole story of the Gospels is constructed upon the principle, and illustrates the fact, that our Lord's life, as our Lord's death, was a voluntary surrender of Himself for man's sin, and that nothing led Him to, and fastened Him on, the Cross but His own will. He willed to be born. He 'came into the world' by His own choice. He 'took upon Him the form of a servant.' He 'took part' of the children's 'flesh

and blood.' His birth was His own act, the first of the long series of the acts, by which for the sake of the love which He bore us, He 'humbled Himself.' Step by step He voluntarily journeyed towards the Cross, which stood clear before Him from the very beginning as the necessary end, made necessary by His love.

As we get nearer and nearer to the close of the history, we see more and more distinctly that He willingly went towards the Cross, Take; for instance, the account of the last portion of our Lord's life, and you see in the whole of it a deliberate intention to precipitate the final conflict. Hence the last journey to Jerusalem when 'His face was set,' and His disciples followed Him amazed. Hence the studied publicity of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Hence the studied, growing severity of His rebukes to the priests and rulers. The same impression is given, though in a somewhat different way, by His momentary retreat from the city and by the precautions taken against premature arrest, that He might not die before the Passover. In both the hastening toward the city and in the retreating from it, there is apparent the same design: that He Himself shall lay down His life, and shall determine the how, and the when, and the where as seems good to Him.

If we look at the act of death itself, Jesus did not die because He must. It was not the nails of the Cross, the physical exhaustion, the nervous shock of crucifixion that killed Him. He died because He would. 'I have power to lay down My life,' He said, 'and I have power'—of course—'to take it again.' At that last moment, He was Lord and Master of death when He bowed His head to death, and, if I might so say, He summoned that grim servant with a 'Come!' and he came, and He set him his task with a 'Do this!' and he did it. He was manifested as the Lord of death, having its 'keys' in His hands, when He died upon the Cross.

Now I pray you to ask yourselves the question, if it be true that Christ died because He would, why was it that He would die? If because He chose, what was it that determined His choice? And there are but two answers, which two are one. The divine motive that ruled His life is doubly expressed: 'I must do the will of My Father,' and 'I must save the world.'

The taunt that those Jewish rulers threw at Him had a deeper truth than they dreamed, and was an encomium, and not a taunt. 'He saved others'—yes, and therefore, 'Himself He cannot save.' He cannot, because His choice and will to die are determined by His free love to us and to all the world. His fixed will 'bore His body to the tree,' and His love was the strong spring which kept His will fixed.

You and I have our share in these voluntary sufferings, and our place in that loving heart which underwent them for us. Oh! should not that thought speak to all our hearts, and bind us in grateful service and lifelong surrender to Him who gave Himself for us; and must die because He loved us all so much that He could not leave us unsaved?

III. We have, lastly, here, a symbol, or, perhaps, more accurately, an instance, on a small scale, of Christ's self-sacrificing care for us.

His words: 'If ye seek Me, let these go their way,' sound more like the command of a prince than the intercession of a prisoner. The calm dignity of them strikes one just as much as the perfect self-forgetfulness of them.

It was a very small matter which He was securing thereby. The Apostles would have to die for Him some day, but they were not ready for it yet, and so He casts the shield of His protection round them for a moment, and interposes Himself between them and the band of soldiers in order that their weakness may have a little more time to grow strong. And though it was wrong and cowardly for them to forsake Him and flee, yet these words of my text more than half gave them permission and warrant for their departure: 'Let these go their way.'

Now John did not think that this small deliverance was all that Christ meant by these great words: 'Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none!' He saw that it was one case, a very trifling one, a merely transitory one, yet ruled by the same principles which are at work in the immensely higher region to which the words properly refer. Of course they have their proper fulfilment in the spiritual realm, and are not fulfilled, in the highest sense, till all who have loved and followed Christ are presented faultless before the Father in the home above. But the little incident may be a result of the same cause as the final deliverance is. A dew-drop is shaped by the same laws which mould the mightiest of the planets. The old divines used to say that God was greatest in the smallest things, and the self-sacrificing care of Jesus Christ, as He gives Himself a prisoner that His disciples may go free, comes from the same deep heart of pitying love, which led Him to die, the 'just for the unjust.' It may then well stand for a partial fulfilment of His mighty words, even though these wait for their complete accomplishment till the hour when all the sheep are gathered into the one fold, and no evil beasts, nor weary journeys, nor barren pastures can harass them any more.

This trivial incident, then, becomes an exposition of highest truth. Let us learn from such an use of such an event to look upon all common and transitory circumstances as governed by the same loving hands, and working to the same ends, as the most purely spiritual. The visible is the veil which drapes the invisible, and clings so closely to it as to reveal its outline. The common events of life are all parables to the devout heart, which is the wise heart. They speak mystic meanings to ears that can hear. The redeeming love of Jesus is proclaimed by every mercy which perishes in the using; and all things should tell us of His self-forgetting, self-sacrificing care.

Thus, then, we may see in that picture of our Lord's surrendering Himself that His trembling disciples might go free, an emblem of what He does for us, in regard to all our foes. He stands between us and them, receives their arrows into His own bosom, and says, 'Let these go their way.' God's law comes with its terrors, with its penalties, to us who have broken it a thousand times. The consciousness of guilt and sin threatens us all more or less, and with varying intensity in different minds. The weariness of the world, 'the ills that flesh



is heir to,' the last grim enemy, Death, and that which lies beyond them all, ring you round. My friends! what are you going to do in order to escape from them? You are a sinful man, you have broken God's law. That law goes on crashing its way and crushing down all that is opposed to it. You have a weary life before you, however joyful it may sometimes be. Cares, and troubles, and sorrows, and tears, and losses, and disappointments, and hard duties that you will not be able to perform, and dark days in which you will be able to see but very little light, are all certain to come sooner or later; and the last moment will draw near when the King of Terrors will be at your side; and beyond death there is a life of retribution in which men reap the things that they have sown here. All that is true, much of it is true about you at this moment, and it will all be true some day. In view of that, what are you going to do?

I preach to you a Saviour who has endured all for us. As a mother might fling herself out of the sledge that her child might escape the wolves in full chase, here is One that comes and fronts all your foes, and says to them, 'Let these go their way. Take Me.' 'By His stripes we are healed.' 'On Him was laid the iniquity of us all.'

He died because He chose; He chose because He loved. His love had to die in order that His death might be our life, and that in it we should find our forgiveness and peace. He stands between our foes and us. No evil can strike us unless it strike Him first. He takes into His own heart the sharpest of all the darts which can pierce ours. He has borne the guilt and punishment of a world's sin. These solemn penalties have fallen upon Him that we, trusting in Him, 'may go our way,' and that there may be 'no condemnation' to us if we are in Christ Jesus. And if there be no condemnation, we can stand whatever other blows may fall upon us. They are easier to bear, and their whole character is different, when we know that Christ has borne them already. Two of the three whom Christ protected in the garden died a martyr's death; but do you not think that James bowed his neck to Herod's sword, and Peter let them gird him and lead him to his cross, more joyfully and with a different heart, when they thought of Him that had died before them? The darkest prison cell will not be so very dark if we remember that Christ has been there before us, and death itself will be softened into sleep because our Lord has died. 'If therefore,' says He, to the whole pack of evils baying round us, with their cruel eyes and their hungry mouths, 'ye seek Me, let these go their way.' So, brother, if you will fix your trust, as a poor, sinful soul, on that dear Christ, and get behind Him, and put Him between you and your enemies, then, in time and in eternity, that saying will be fulfilled in you which He spake, 'Of them which Thou gavest Me, have I lost none.'

## JESUS BEFORE CAIAPHAS

‘And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this Man’s disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. The high priest then asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? ask them which heard Me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest Thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me? Now Annas had sent Him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of His disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with Him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.’—[JOHN xviii. 15-27](#).

The last verses of the preceding passage belong properly to this one, for they tell us that Jesus was ‘first’ brought before Annas, a fact which we owe to John only. Annas himself and his five sons held the high-priesthood in succession. To the sons has to be added Caiaphas, who, as we learn from John only, was Annas’ son-in-law, and so one of the family party. That Jesus should have been taken to him, though he held no office at the time, shows who pulled the strings in the Sanhedrim. The reference to Caiaphas in [verse 14](#) seems intended to suggest what sort of a trial might be expected, presided over by such a man. But [verse 15](#) tells us that Jesus entered in, accompanied by ‘another disciple,’ ‘to the court,’ not, as we should have expected, of Annas, but ‘of the high priest,’ who, by the testimony of [verse 13](#), can be no one but Caiaphas. How came that about? Apparently, because Annas had apartments in the high-priest’s official residence. As he obviously exercised the influence through his sons and son-in-law, who successively held the office, it was very natural that he should be a fixture in the palace.

What John’s connection was with this veteran intriguer (assuming that John was that ‘other disciple’) we do not know. Probably it was some family bond that united two such antipathetic natures. At all events, the Apostle’s acquaintance with the judge so far condoned

his discipleship to the criminal, that the doors of the audience chamber were open to him, though he was known as 'one of them.'

So he and poor Peter were parted, and the latter left shivering outside in the grey of the morning. John had not missed him at first, for he would be too much absorbed in watching Jesus to have thoughts to spare for Peter, and would conclude that he was following him; but, when he did miss him, like a brave man he ran the risk of being observed, and went for him. The sharp-witted portress, whose business it was to judge applicants for entrance by a quick glance, at once inferred that Peter 'also' was one of this man's disciples. Her 'also' shows that she knew John to be one; and her 'this man' shows that either she did not know Jesus' name, or thought Him too far beneath her to be named by her! The time during which Peter had been left outside alone, repenting now of, and alarmed for what might happen to him on account of, his ill-aimed blow at Malchus, and feeling the nipping cold, had taken all his courage out of him. The one thing he wished was to slip in unnoticed, and so the first denial came to his lips as rashly as many another word had come in old days. He does not seem to have remained with John, who probably went up to the upper end of the hall, where the examination was going on, while Peter, not having the entree and very much terrified as well as miserable, stayed at the lower end, where the understrappers were making themselves comfortable round a charcoal fire, and paying no attention to the proceedings at the other end. He seemed to be as indifferent as they were, and to be intent only on getting himself warmed. But what surges of emotion would be tossing in his heart, which yet he was trying to hide under the mask of being an unconcerned spectator, like the others!

The examination of our Lord was conducted by 'the high priest,' by which title John must mean Caiaphas, as he has just emphatically noted that he then filled the office. But how is that to be reconciled with the statement that Jesus was taken to Annas? Apparently by supposing that, though Annas was present, Caiaphas was spokesman. But did not a formal trial before Caiaphas follow, and does not John tell us ([verse 24](#)) that, after the first examination, Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas? Yes. And are these things compatible with this account of an examination conducted by the latter? Yes, if we remember that flagrant wresting of justice marked the whole proceedings. The condemnation of Jesus was a judicial murder, in which the highest court of the Jews 'decreed iniquity by a law'; and it was of a piece with all the rest that he, who was to pose as an impartial judge presently, should, in the spirit of a partisan, conduct this preliminary inquiry. Observe that no sentence was pronounced in the case at this stage. This was not a court at all. What was it? An attempt to entrap the prisoner into admissions which might be used against Him in the court to be held presently. The rulers had Jesus in their hands, and they did not know what to do with Him now that they had Him. They were at a loss to know what His indictment was to be. To kill Him was the only thing on which they had made up their minds; the pretext had yet to be found, and so they tried to get Him to say something which would serve their purpose.

‘The high priest therefore asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His teaching’! If they did not know about either, why had they arrested Him? Cunning outwits itself, and falls into the pit it digs for the innocent. Jesus passed by the question as to His disciples unnoticed, and by His calm answer as to His teaching showed that He saw the snare. He reduced Caiaphas and Annas to perpetrating plain injustice, or to letting Him go free. Elementary fair play to a prisoner prescribes that he should be accused of some crime by some one, and not that he should furnish his judges with materials for his own indictment. ‘Why askest thou Me? ask them that have heard Me,’ is unanswerable, except by such an answer as the officious ‘servant’ gave—a blow and a violent speech. But Christ’s words reach far beyond the momentary purpose; they contain a wide truth. His teaching loves the daylight. There are no muttered oracles, no whispered secrets for the initiated, no double voice, one for the multitude, and another for the adepts. All is above-board, and all is spoken ‘openly to the world.’ Christianity has no cliques or coteries, nothing sectional, nothing reserved. It is for mankind, for all mankind, all for mankind. True, there are depths in it; true, the secrets which Jesus can only speak to loving ears in secret are His sweetest words, but they are ‘spoken in the ear’ that they may be ‘proclaimed on the housetops.’

The high-priest is silent, for there was nothing that he could say to so undeniable a demand, and he had no witnesses ready. How many since his day have treated Jesus as he treated Him—condemned Him or rejected Him without reason, and then looked about for reasons to justify their attitude, or even sought to make Him condemn Himself!

An unjust judge breeds insolent underlings, and if everything else fails, blows and foul words cover defeat, and treat calm assertion of right as impertinence to high-placed officials. Caiaphas degraded his own dignity more than any words of a prisoner could degrade it.

Our Lord’s answer ‘reviled not again.’ It is meek in majesty and majestic in meekness. Patient endurance is not forbidden to remonstrate with insolent injustice, if only its remonstrance bears no heat of personal anger in it. But Jesus was not so much vindicating His words to Caiaphas in saying, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil,’ as reiterating the challenge for ‘witnesses.’ He brands the injustice of Caiaphas, while meekly rebuking the brutality of his servant. Master and man were alike in smiting Him for words of which they could not prove the evil.

There was obviously nothing to be gained by further examination. No crime had been alleged, much less established; therefore Jesus ought to have been let go. But Annas treated Him as a criminal, and handed Him over ‘bound,’ to be formally tried before the man who had just been foiled in his attempt to play the inquisitor. What a hideous mockery of legal procedure! How well the pair, father-in-law and son-in-law, understood each other! What a confession of a foregone conclusion, evidence or no evidence, in shackling Jesus as a malefactor! And it was all done in the name of religion! and perhaps the couple of priests did not know that they were hypocrites, but really thought that they were ‘doing God service.’

John's account of Peter's denials rises to a climax of peril and of keenness of suspicion. The unnamed persons who put the second question must have had their suspicions roused by something in his manner as he stood by the glinting fire, perhaps by agitation too great to be concealed. The third question was put by a more dangerous person still, who not only recognised Peter's features as the firelight fitfully showed them, but had a personal ground of hostility in his relationship to Malchus.

John lovingly spares telling of the oaths and curses accompanying the denials, but dares not spare the narration of the fact. It has too precious lessons of humility, of self-distrust, of the possibility of genuine love being overborne by sudden and strong temptation, to be omitted. And the sequel of the denials has yet more precious teaching, which has brought balm to many a contrite heart, conscious of having been untrue to its deepest love. For the sound of the cock-crow, and the look from the Lord as He was led away bound past the place where Peter stood, brought him back to himself, and brought tears to his eyes, which were sweet as well as bitter. On the resurrection morning the risen Lord sent the message of forgiveness and special love to the broken-hearted Apostle, when He said, 'Go, tell My disciples and Peter,' and on that day there was an interview of which Paul knew ([1 Cor. xv. 5](#)), but the details of which were apparently communicated by the Apostle to none of his brethren. The denier who weeps is taken to Christ's heart, and in sacred secrecy has His forgiveness freely given, though, before he can be restored to his public office, he must, by his threefold public avowal of love, efface his threefold denial. We may say, 'Thou knowest that I love thee,' even if we have said, 'I know Him not,' and come nearer to Jesus, by reason of the experience of His pardoning love, than we were before we fell.

## ART THOU A KING?

‘Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this Man? They answered and said unto him, If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spake, signifying what death He should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto Him, Art Thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me: what hast Thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice. Pilate saith unto Him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in Him no fault at all. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this Man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.’—[JOHN xviii. 28-40](#).

John evidently intends to supplement the synoptic Gospels’ account. He tells of Christ’s appearance before Annas, but passes by that before Caiaphas, though he shows his knowledge of it. Similarly he touches lightly on the public hearing before Pilate, but gives us in detail the private conversation in this section, which he alone records. We may suppose that he was present at both the hearing before Annas and the interview within the palace between Jesus and Herod, for he would not be deterred from entering, as the Jews were, and there seems to have been no other impediment in the way. The passage has three stages—the fencing between the Sanhedrists and Pilate, the ‘good confession before Pontius Pilate,’ and the preference of Barabbas to Jesus.

I. The passage of arms between the priests and the governor. ‘It was early,’ probably before 6 A.M. A hurried meeting of the Sanhedrim had condemned Jesus to death, and the next thing was to get the Roman authority to carry out the sentence. The necessity of appeal to it was a bitter pill, but it had to be swallowed, for the right of capital punishment had been withdrawn. A ‘religious’ scruple, too, stood in the way—very characteristic of such formalists. Killing an innocent man would not in the least defile them, or unfit for eating

the passover, but to go into a house that had not been purged of 'leaven,' and was further unclean as the residence of a Gentile, though he was the governor, that would stain their consciences—a singular scale of magnitude, which saw no sin in condemning Jesus, and great sin in going into Pilate's palace! Perhaps some of our conventional sins are of a like sort.

Pilate was, probably, not over-pleased at being roused so early, nor at having to defer to a scruple which would to him look like insolence; and through all his bearing to the Sanhedrim a certain irritation shows itself, which sometimes flashes out in sarcasm, but is for the most part kept down. His first question is, perhaps, not so simple as it looks, for he must have had some previous knowledge of the case, since Roman soldiers had been used for the arrest. But, clearly, those who brought him a prisoner were bound to be the prosecutors.

Whether or not Pilate knew that his question was embarrassing, the rulers felt it so. Why did they not wish to formulate a charge? Partly from pride. They hugged the delusion that their court was competent to condemn, and wanted, as we all often do, to shut their eyes to a plain fact, as if ignoring it annihilated it. Partly because the charge on which they had condemned Jesus—that of blasphemy in calling Himself 'the Son of God'—was not a crime known to Roman law, and to allege it would probably have ended in the whole matter being scornfully dismissed. So they stood on their dignity and tried to bluster. 'We have condemned Him; that is enough. We look to you to carry out the sentence at our bidding.' So the 'ecclesiastical authority' has often said to the 'secular arm' since then, and unfortunately the civil authority has not always been as wise as Pilate was.

He saw an opening to get rid of the whole matter, and with just a faint flavour of irony suggests that, as they have 'a law'—which he, no doubt, thought of as a very barbarous code—they had better go by it, and punish as well as condemn. That sarcastic proposal compelled them to acknowledge their subjection. Pilate had given the reins the least touch, but enough to make them feel the bit; and though it went sore against the grain, they will own their master rather than lose their victim. So their reluctant lips say, 'It is not lawful for us.' Pilate has brought them on their knees at last, and they forget their dignity, and own the truth. Malicious hatred will eat any amount of dirt and humiliation to gain its ends, especially if it calls itself religious zeal.

John sees in the issue of this first round in the duel between Pilate and the rulers the sequence of events which brought about the fulfilment of our Lord's prediction of His crucifixion, since that was not a Jewish mode of execution. This encounter of keen wits becomes tragical and awful when we remember Who it was that these men were wrangling about.

II. We have Jesus and Pilate; the 'good confession,' and the indifferent answer. We must suppose that, unwillingly, the rulers had brought the accusation that Jesus had attempted rebellion against Rome. John omits that, because he takes it for granted that it is known. It

is implied in the conversation which now ensued. We must note as remarkable that Pilate does not conduct his first examination in the presence of the rulers, but has Jesus brought to him in the palace. Perhaps he simply wished to annoy the accusers, but more probably his Roman sense of justice combined with his wish to assert his authority, and perhaps with a suspicion that there was something strange about the whole matter—and not least strange that the Sanhedrim, who were not enthusiastic supporters of Rome, should all at once display such loyalty—to make him wish to have the prisoner by himself, and try to fathom the business. With Roman directness he went straight to the point: ‘Art Thou the King of the Jews, as they have been saying?’ There is emphasis on ‘Thou’—the emphasis which a practical Roman official would be likely to put as he looked at the weak, wearied, evidently poor and helpless man bound before him. There is almost a touch of pity in the question, and certainly the beginning of the conviction that this was not a very formidable rival to Caesar.

The answer to be given depended on the sense in which Pilate asked the question, to bring out which is the object of Christ’s question in reply. If Pilate was asking of himself, then what he meant by ‘a king’ was one of earth’s monarchs after the emperor’s pattern, and the answer would be ‘No.’ If he was repeating a Jewish charge, then, ‘a king’ might mean the prophetic King of Israel, who was no rival of earthly monarchs, and the answer would be ‘Yes,’ but that ‘Yes’ would give Pilate no more reason to crucify Him than the ‘No’ would have given.

Pilate is getting tired of fencing, and impatiently answers, with true Roman contempt for subject-people’s thoughts as well as their weapons. ‘I . . . a Jew?’ is said with a curl of the firm lips. He points to his informants, ‘Thine own nation and the chief priests,’ and does not say that their surrender of a would-be leader in a war of independence struck him as suspicious. But he brushes aside the cobwebs which he felt were being spun round him, and comes to the point, ‘What hast Thou done?’ He is supremely indifferent to ideas and vagaries of enthusiasts. This poor man before him may call Himself anything He chooses, but his only concern is with overt acts. Strange to ask the Prisoner what He had done! It had been well for Pilate if he had held fast by that question, and based his judgment resolutely on its answer! He kept asking it all through the case, he never succeeded in getting an answer; he was convinced that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death, and yet fear, and a wish to curry favour with the rulers, drove him to stain the judge’s robe with innocent blood, from which he vainly sought to cleanse his hands.

Our Lord’s double answer claims a kingdom, but first shows what it is not, and then what it is. It is ‘not of this world,’ though it is in this world, being established and developed here, but having nothing in common with earthly dominions, nor being advanced by their weapons or methods. Pilate could convince himself that this ‘kingdom’ bore no menace to Rome, from the fact that no resistance had been offered to Christ’s capture. But the principle involved in these great words goes far beyond their immediate application. It forbids Christ’s



‘servants’ to assimilate His kingdom to the world, or to use worldly powers as the means for the kingdom’s advancement. The history of the Church has sadly proved how hard it is for Christian men to learn the lesson, and how fatal to the energy and purity of the Church the forgetfulness of it has been. The temptation to such assimilation besets all organised Christianity, and is as strong to-day as when Constantine gave the Church the paralysing gift of ‘establishing’ it as a kingdom ‘of this world.’

Pilate did pick out of this saying an increased certainty that he had nothing to fear from this strange ‘King’; and half-amused contempt for a dreamer, and half-pitying wonder at such lofty claims from such a helpless enthusiast, prompted his question, ‘Art Thou a king then?’ One can fancy the scornful emphasis on that ‘Thou.’ and can understand how grotesquely absurd the notion of his prisoner’s being a king must have seemed.

Having made clear part of the sense in which the avowal was to be taken, our Lord answered plainly ‘Yes.’ Thus before the high-priest, He declared Himself to be the Son of God, and before Pilate He claimed to be King, at each tribunal putting forward the claim which each was competent to examine—and, alas! at each meeting similar levity and refusal to inquire seriously into the validity of the claim. The solemn revelation to Pilate of the true nature of His kingdom and of Himself the King fell on careless ears. A deeper mystery than Pilate dreamed of lay beneath the double designation of His origin; for He not only had been ‘born’ like other men, but had ‘come into the world,’ having ‘come forth from the Father,’ and having been before He was born. It was scarcely possible that Pilate should apprehend the meaning of that duplication, but some vague impression of a mysterious personality might reach him, and Jesus would not have fully expressed His own consciousness if He had simply said, ‘I was born.’ Let us see that we keep firm hold of all which that utterance implies and declares.

The end of the Incarnation is to ‘bear witness to the truth.’ That witness is the one weapon by which Christ’s kingdom is established. That witness is not given by words only, precious as these are, but by deeds which are more than words. These witnessing deeds are not complete till Calvary and the empty grave and Olivet have witnessed at once to the perfect incarnation of divine love, to the perfect Sacrifice for the world’s sin, to the Victor over death, and to the opening of heaven to all believers. Jesus is ‘the faithful and true Witness,’ as John calls Him, not without reminiscences of this passage, just because He is ‘the First-begotten of the dead.’ As here He told Pilate that He was a ‘king,’ because a ‘witness,’ so John, in the passage referred to, bases His being ‘Prince of the kings of the earth’ on the same fact.

How little Pilate knew that he was standing at the very crisis of his fate! A yielding to the impression that was slightly touching his heart and conscience, and he, too, might have ‘heard’ Christ’s voice. But he was not ‘of the truth,’ though he might have been if he had willed, and so the words were wind to him, and he brushed aside all the mist, as he thought

it, with the light question, which summed up a Roman man of the world's indifference to ideas, and belief in solid facts like legions and swords. 'What is truth?' may be the cry of a seeking soul, or the sneer of a confirmed sceptic, or the shrug of indifference of the 'practical man.'

It was the last in Pilate's case, as is shown by his not waiting for an answer, but ending the conversation with it as a last shot. It meant, too, that he felt quite certain that this man, with his high-strained, unpractical talk about a kingdom resting on such a filmy nothing, was absolutely harmless. Therefore the only just thing for him to have done was to have gone out to the impatient crowd and said so, and flatly refused to do the dirty work of the priests for them, by killing an innocent man. But he was too cowardly for that, and, no doubt, thought that the murder of one poor Jew was a small price to pay for popularity with his troublesome subjects. Still, like all weak men, he was not easy in his conscience, and made a futile attempt to get the right thing done, and yet not to suffer for doing it. The rejection of Barabbas is touched very lightly by John, and must be left unnoticed here. The great contribution to our knowledge which John makes is this private interview between the King who reigns by the truth, and the representative of earthly rule, based on arms and worldly forces.

## JESUS SENTENCED

‘Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote Him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the Man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye Him, and crucify Him: for I find no fault in Him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art Thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto Him, Speakest Thou not unto me I knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release Him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this Man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him! Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led Him away.’—[JOHN xix. 1-16](#).

The struggle between the vacillation of Pilate and the fixed malignity of the rulers is the principal theme of this fragment of Christ’s judicial trial. He Himself is passive and all but silent, speaking only one sentence of calm rebuke. The frequent changes of scene from within to without the praetorium indicate the steps in the struggle, and vividly reflect the irresolution of Pilate. These changes may help to mark the stages in the narrative.

I. The cruelties and indignities in [verses 1-3](#) were inflicted within the ‘palace,’ to which Pilate, with his prisoner, had returned after the popular vote for Barabbas. John makes that choice of the robber the reason for the scourging of Jesus. His thought seems to be that Pilate, having failed in his attempt to get rid of the whole difficulty by releasing Jesus, according to the ‘custom,’ ordered the scourging, in hope that the lighter punishment might satisfy the turbulent crowd, whom he wished to humour, while, if possible, saving their victim. It was the expedient of a weak and cynical nature, and, like all weak attempts at compromise between right and wrong, only emboldened the hatred which it was meant to appease. If by

clamour the rulers had succeeded in getting Pilate to scourge a man whom he thought innocent, they might well hope to get him to crucify, if they clamoured loudly and long enough.

One attitude only befitted Pilate, since he did not in the least believe that Jesus threatened the Roman supremacy; namely, to set Him at liberty, and let the disappointed rulers growl like wild beasts robbed of their prey. But he did not care enough about a single half-crazy Jewish peasant to imperil his standing well with his awkward subjects, for the sake of righteousness. The one good which Rome could give to its vassal nations was inflexible justice and a sovereign law; but in Pilate's action there was not even the pretence of legality. Tricks and expedients run through it all, and never once does he say, This is the law, this is justice, and by it I stand or fall.

The cruel scourging, which, in Roman hands, was a much more severe punishment than the Jewish 'beating with rods' and often ended in death, was inflicted on the silent, unresisting Christ, not because His judge thought that it was deserved, but to please accusers whose charge he knew to be absurd. The underlings naturally followed their betters' example, and after they had executed Pilate's orders to scourge, covered the bleeding wounds with some robe, perhaps ragged, but of the royal colour, and crushed the twisted wreath of thorn-branch down on the brows, to make fresh wounds there. The jest of crowning such a poor, helpless creature as Jesus seemed to them, was exactly on the level of such rude natures, and would be the more exquisite to them because it was double-barrelled, and insulted the nation as well as the 'King.' They came in a string, as the tense of the original word suggests, and offered their mock reverence. But that sport became tame after a little, and mockery passed into violence, as it always does in such natures. These rough legionaries were cruel and brutal, and they were unconscious witnesses to His Kingship as founded on suffering; but they were innocent as compared with the polished gentleman on the judgment-seat who prostituted justice, and the learned Pharisees outside who were howling for blood.

II. In [verses 4-8](#) the scene changes again to without the palace, and shows us Pilate trying another expedient, equally in vain. The hesitating governor has no chance with the resolute, rooted hate of the rulers. Jesus silently and unresistingly follows Pilate from the hall, still wearing the mockery of royal pomp. Pilate had calculated that the sight of Him in such guise, and bleeding from the lash, might turn hate into contempt, and perhaps give a touch of pity. 'Behold the man!' as he meant it, was as if he had said, 'Is this poor, bruised, spiritless sufferer worth hate or fear? Does He look like a King or a dangerous enemy?' Pilate for once drops the scoff of calling Him their King, and seeks to conciliate and move to pity. The profound meanings which later ages have delighted to find in his words, however warrantable, are no part of their design as spoken, and we gain a better lesson from the scene by keeping close to the thoughts of the actors. What a contrast between the vacillation of the governor, on the one hand, afraid to do right and reluctant to do wrong, and the dogged malignity of the rulers and their tools on the other, and the calm, meek endurance of the silent Christ,

knowing all their thoughts, pitying all, and fixed in loving resolve, even firmer than the rulers' hate, to bear the utmost, that He might save a world!

Some pity may have stirred in the crowd, but the priests and their immediate dependants silenced it by their yell of fresh hate at the sight of the prisoner. Note how John gives the very impression of the fierce, brief roar, like that of wild beasts for their prey, by his 'Crucify, crucify!' without addition of the person. Pilate lost patience at last, and angrily and half seriously gives permission to them to take the law into their own hands. He really means, 'I will not be your tool, and if my conviction of "the Man's" innocence is to be of no account, you must punish Him; for I will not.' How far he meant to abdicate authority, and how far he was launching sarcasms, it is difficult to say. Throughout he is sarcastic, and thereby indicates his weakness, indemnifying himself for being thwarted by sneers which sit so ill on authority.

But the offer, or sarcasm, whichever it was, missed fire, as the appeal to pity had done, and only led to the production of a new weapon. In their frantic determination to compass Jesus' death, the rulers hesitate at no degradation; and now they adduced the charge of blasphemy, and were ready to make a heathen the judge. To ask a Roman governor to execute their law on a religious offender, was to drag their national prerogative in the mud. But formal religionists, inflamed by religious animosity, are often the degraders of religion for the gratification of their hatred. They are poor preservers of the Church who call on the secular arm to execute their 'laws.' Rome went a long way in letting subject peoples keep their institutions; but it was too much to expect Pilate to be the hangman for these furious priests, on a charge scarcely intelligible to him.

What was Jesus doing while all this hell of wickedness and fury boiled round Him? Standing there, passive and dumb, 'as a sheep before her shearers,' Himself is the least conspicuous figure in the history of His own trial. In silent communion with the Father, in silent submission to His murderers, in silent pity for us, in silent contemplation of 'the joy that was set before Him,' He waits on their will.

III. Once more the scene changes to the interior of the praetorium (*vs. 9-11*). The rulers' words stirred a deepened awe in Pilate. He 'was the more afraid'; then he had been already afraid. His wife's dream, the impression already produced by the person of Jesus, had touched him more deeply than probably he himself was aware of; and now this charge that Jesus had 'made Himself the Son of God' shook him. What if this strange man were in some sense a messenger of the gods? Had he been scourging one sent from them? Sceptical he probably was, and therefore superstitious; and half-forgotten and disbelieved stories of gods who had 'come down in the likeness of men' would swim up in his memory. If this Man were such, His strange demeanour would be explained. Therefore he carried Jesus in again, and, not now as judge, sought to hear from His own lips His version of the alleged claim.

Why did not Jesus answer such a question? His silence was answer; but, besides that, Pilate had not received as he ought what Jesus had already declared to him as to His kingdom and His relation to 'the truth,' and careless turning away from Christ's earlier words is righteously and necessarily punished by subsequent silence, if the same disposition remains. That it did remain, Christ's silence is proof. Had there been any use in answering, Pilate would not have asked in vain. If Jesus was silent, we may be sure that He who sees all hearts and responds to all true desires was so, because He knew that it was best to say nothing. The question of His origin had nothing to do with Pilate's duty then, which turned, not on whence Jesus had come, but on what Pilate believed Him to have done, or not to have done. He who will not do the plain duty of the moment has little chance of an answer to his questions about such high matters.

The shallow character of the governor's awe and interest is clearly seen from the immediate change of tone to arrogant reminder of his absolute authority. 'To me dost Thou not speak?' The pride of offended dignity peeps out there. He has forgotten that a moment since he half suspected that the prisoner, whom he now seeks to terrify with the cross, and to allure with deliverance, was perhaps come from some misty heaven. Was that a temper which would have received Christ's answer to his question?

But one thing he might be made to perceive, and therefore Jesus broke silence for the only time in this section, and almost the only time before Pilate. He reads the arrogant Roman the lesson which he and all his tribe in all lands and ages need—that their power is derived from God, therefore in its foundation legitimate, and in its exercise to be guided by His will and used for His purposes. It was God who had brought the Roman eagles, with their ravening beaks and strong claws, to the Holy City. Pilate was right in exercising jurisdiction over Jesus. Let him see that he exercised justice, and let him remember that the power which he boasted that he 'had' was 'given.' The truth as to the source of power made the guilt of Caiaphas or of the rulers the greater, inasmuch as they had neglected the duties to which they had been appointed, and by handing over Jesus on a charge which they themselves should have searched out, had been guilty of 'theocratic felony.' This sudden flash of bold rebuke, reminding Pilate of his dependence, and charging him with the lesser but yet real 'sin,' went deeper than any answer to his question would have done, and spurred him to more earnest effort, as John points out. He 'sought to release Him,' as if formerly he had been rather simply unwilling to condemn than anxious to deliver.

IV. So the scene changes again to outside. Pilate went out alone, leaving Jesus within, and was met before he had time, as would appear, to speak, by the final irresistible weapon which the rulers had kept in reserve. An accusation of treason was only too certain to be listened to by the suspicious tyrant who was then Emperor, especially if brought by the authorities of a subject nation. Many a provincial governor had had but a short shrift in such a case, and Pilate knew that he was a ruined man if these implacable zealots howling before

him went to Tiberius with such a charge. So the die was cast. With rage in his heart, no doubt, and knowing that he was sacrificing 'innocent blood' to save himself, he turned away from the victorious mob, apparently in silence, and brought Jesus out once more. He had no more words to say to his prisoner. Nothing remained but the formal act of sentence, for which he seated himself, with a poor assumption of dignity, yet feeling all the while, no doubt, what a contemptible surrender he was making.

Judgment-seats and mosaic pavements do not go far to secure reverence for a judge who is no better than an assassin, killing an innocent man to secure his own ends. Pilate's sentence fell most heavily on himself. If 'the judge is condemned when the guilty is acquitted,' he is tenfold condemned when the innocent is sentenced.

Pilate returned to his sarcastic mood when he returned to his injustice, and found some satisfaction in his old jeer, 'your King.' But the passion of hatred was too much in earnest to be turned or even affected by such poor scoffs, and the only answer was the renewed roar of the mob, which had murder in its tone. The repetition of the governor's taunt, 'Shall I crucify your King?' brought out the answer in which the rulers of the nation in their fury blindly flung away their prerogative. It is no accident that it was 'the chief priests' who answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.' Driven by hate, they deliberately disown their Messianic hope, and repudiate their national glory. They who will not have Christ have to bow to a tyrant. Rebellion against Him brings slavery.

## AN EYE-WITNESS'S ACCOUNT OF THE CRUCIFIXION

‘And He bearing His cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified Him, and two other with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that He said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also His coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted My raiment among them, and for My vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold Thy Son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.’—[JOHN xix. 17-30](#).

In great and small matters John's account adds much to the narrative of the crucifixion. He alone tells of the attempt to have the title on the Cross altered, of the tender entrusting of the Virgin to his care, and of the two ‘words’ ‘I thirst’ and ‘It is finished.’ He gives details which had been burned into his memory, such as Christ's position ‘in the midst’ of the two robbers, and the jar of ‘vinegar’ standing by the crosses. He says little about the act of fixing Jesus to the Cross, but enlarges what the other Evangelists tell as to the soldiers ‘casting lots.’ He had heard what they said to one another. He alone distinctly tells that when He went forth, Jesus was bearing the Cross which afterwards Simon of Cyrene had to carry, probably because our Lord's strength failed.

Who appointed the two robbers to be crucified at the same time? Not the rulers, who had no such power but probably Pilate, as one more shaft of sarcasm which was all the sharper both because it seemed to put Jesus in the same class as they, and because they were of the same class as the man of the Jews' choice, Barabbas, and possibly were two of his gang. Jesus was ‘in the midst,’ where He always is, completely identified with the transgressors, but central to all things and all men. As He was in the midst on the Cross, with a penitent



on one hand and a rejecter on the other, He is still in the midst of humanity, and His judgment-seat will be as central as His Cross was.

All the Evangelists give the title written over the Cross, but John alone tells that it was Pilate's malicious invention. He thought that he was having a final fling at the priests, and little knew how truly his title, which was meant as a bitter jest, was a fact. He had it put into the three tongues in use—'Hebrew,' the national tongue; 'Greek,' the common medium of intercourse between varying nationalities; and 'Latin' the official language. He did not know that he was proclaiming the universal dominion of Jesus, and prophesying that wisdom as represented by Greece, law and imperial power as represented by Rome, and all previous revelation as represented by Israel, would yet bow before the Crucified, and recognise that His Cross was His throne.

The 'high-priests' winced, and would fain have had the title altered. Their wish once more denied Jesus, and added to their condemnation, but it did not move Pilate. It would have been well for him if he had been as firm in carrying out his convictions of justice as in abiding by his bitter jest. He was obstinate in the wrong place, partly because he was angry with the rulers, and partly to recover his self-respect, which had been damaged by his vacillation. But his stiff-necked speech had a more tragic meaning than he knew, for 'what he had written' on his own life-page on that day could never be erased, and will confront him. We are all writing an imperishable record, and we shall have to read it out hereafter, and acknowledge our handwriting.

John next sets in strong contrast the two groups round the Cross—the stolid soldiers and the sad friends. The four legionaries went through their work as a very ordinary piece of military duty. They were well accustomed to crucify rebel Jews, and saw no difference between these three and former prisoners. They watched the pangs without a touch of pity, and only wished that death might come soon, and let them get back to their barracks. How blind men may be to what they are gazing at! If knowledge measures guilt, how slight the culpability of the soldiers! They were scarcely more guilty than the mallet and nails which they used. The Sufferer's clothes were their perquisite, and their division was conducted on cool business principles, and with utter disregard of the solemn nearness of death. Could callous indifference go further than to cast lots for the robe at the very foot of the Cross?

But the thing that most concerns us here is that Jesus submitted to that extremity of shame and humiliation, and hung there naked for all these hours, gazed on, while the light lasted, by a mocking crowd. He had set the perfect Pattern of lowly self-abnegation when, amid the disciples in the upper room, He had 'laid aside His garments,' but now He humbles Himself yet more, being clothed only 'with shame.' Therefore should we clothe Him with hearts' love. Therefore God has clothed Him with the robes of imperial majesty.

Another point emphasised by John is the fulfilment of prophecy in this act. The seamless robe, probably woven by loving hands, perhaps by some of the weeping women who stood

there, was too valuable to divide, and it would be a moment's pastime to cast lots for it. John saw, in the expedient naturally suggested to four rough men, who all wanted the robe but did not want to quarrel over it, a fulfilment of the cry of the ancient sufferer, who had lamented that his enemies made so sure of his death that they divided his garments and cast lots for his vesture. But he was 'wiser than he knew,' and, while his words were to his own apprehension but a vivid metaphor expressing his desperate condition, 'the Spirit which was in' him 'did signify' by them 'the sufferings of Christ.' Theories of prophecy or sacrifice which deny the correctness of John's interpretation have the New Testament against them, and assume to know more about the workings of inspiration than is either modest or scientific.

What a contrast the other group presents! John's enumeration of the women may be read so as to mention four or three, according as 'His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas,' is taken to mean one woman or two. The latter is the more probable supposition, and it is also probable that the unnamed sister of our Lord's mother was no other than Salome, John's own mother. If so, entrusting Mary to John's care would be the more natural. Tender care, joined with consciousness that henceforth the relation of son and mother was to be supplanted, not merely by Death's separating fingers, but by faith's uniting bond, breathed through the word, so loving yet so removing, 'Woman, behold thy son!' Dying trust in the humble friend, which would go far to make the friend worthy of it, breathed in the charge, to which no form of address corresponding to 'Woman' is prefixed. Jesus had nothing else to give as a parting gift, but He gave these two to each other, and enriched both. He showed His own loving heart, and implied His faithful discharge of all filial duties hitherto. And He taught us the lesson, which many of us have proved to be true, that losses are best made up when we hear Him pointing us by them to new offices of help to others, and that, if we will let Him, He will point us too to what will fill empty places in our hearts and homes.

The second of the words on the Cross which we owe to John is that pathetic expression, 'I thirst.' Most significant is the insight into our Lord's consciousness which John, here as elsewhere, ventures to give. Not till He knew 'that all things were accomplished' did He give heed to the pangs of thirst, which made so terrible a part of the torture of crucifixion. The strong will kept back the bodily cravings so long as any unfulfilled duty remained. Now Jesus had nothing to do but to die, and before He died He let flesh have one little alleviation. He had refused the stupefying draught which would have lessened suffering by dulling consciousness, but He asked for the draught which would momentarily slake the agony of parched lips and burning throat.

The words of [verse 28](#) are not to be taken as meaning that Jesus said 'I thirst' with the mere intention of fulfilling the Scripture. His utterance was the plaint of a real need, not a performance to fill a part. But it is John who sees in that wholly natural cry the fulfilment

of the psalm ([Ps. lxix. 21](#)). All Christ's bodily sufferings may be said to be summed up in this one word, the only one in which they found utterance. The same lips that said, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink,' said this. Infinitely pathetic in itself, that cry becomes almost awful in its appeal to us when we remember who uttered it, and why He bore these pangs. The very 'Fountain of living water' knew the pang of thirst that every one that thirsteth might come to the waters, and might drink, not water only, but 'wine and milk, without money or price.'

John's last contribution to our knowledge of our Lord's words on the Cross is that triumphant 'It is finished,' wherein there spoke, not only the common dying consciousness of life being ended, but the certitude, which He alone of all who have died, or will die, had the right to feel and utter, that every task was completed, that all God's will was accomplished, all Messiah's work done, all prophecy fulfilled, redemption secured, God and man reconciled. He looked back over all His life and saw no failure, no falling below the demands of the occasion, nothing that could have been bettered, nothing that should not have been there. He looked upwards, and even at that moment He heard in His soul the voice of the Father saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!'

Christ's work is finished. It needs no supplement. It can never be repeated or imitated while the world lasts, and will not lose its power through the ages. Let us trust to it as complete for all our needs, and not seek to strengthen 'the sure foundation' which it has laid by any shifting, uncertain additions of our own. But we may remember, too, that while Christ's work is, in one aspect, finished, when He bowed His head, and by His own will 'gave up the ghost,' in another aspect His work is not finished, nor will be, until the whole benefits of His incarnation and death are diffused through, and appropriated by, the world. He is working to-day, and long ages have yet to pass, in all probability, before the voice of Him that sitteth on the throne shall say 'It is done!'

## THE TITLE ON THE CROSS

‘Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross.’—[JOHN xix. 19](#).

This title is recorded by all four Evangelists, in words varying in form but alike in substance. It strikes them all as significant that, meaning only to fling a jeer at his unruly subjects, Pilate should have written it, and proclaimed this Nazarene visionary to be He for whom Israel had longed through weary ages. John’s account is the fullest, as indeed his narrative of all Pilate’s shufflings is the most complete. He alone records that the title was tri-lingual (for the similar statement in the Authorised Version of Luke is not part of the original text). He alone gives the Jews’ request for an alteration of the title, and Pilate’s bitter answer. That angry reply betrays his motive in setting up such words over a crucified prisoner’s head. They were meant as a savage taunt of the Jews, not as an insult to Jesus, which would have been welcome to them. He seems to have regarded our Lord as a harmless enthusiast, to have had a certain liking for Him, and a languid curiosity as to Him, which came by degrees to be just tinged with awe as he felt that he could not quite make Him out. Throughout, he was convinced that His claim to be a king contained no menace for Caesar, and he would have let Jesus go but for fear of being misrepresented at Rome. He felt that the sacrifice of one more Jew was a small price to pay to avert his accusation to Caesar; he would have sacrificed a dozen such to keep his place. But he felt that he was being coerced to do injustice, and his anger and sense of humiliation find vent in that written taunt. It was a spurt of bad temper and a measure of his reluctance.

Besides the interest attaching to it as Pilate’s work, it seems to John significant of much that it should have been fastened on the Cross, and that it should have been in the three languages, Hebrew (Aramaic), Greek, and Latin.

Let us deal with three points in succession.

I. The title as throwing light on the actors in the tragedy.

We may consider it, first, in its bearing on Jesus’ claims. He was condemned by the priests on the theocratic charge of blasphemy, because He made Himself the Son of God. He was sentenced by Pilate on the civil charge of rebellion, which the priests brought against Him as an inference necessarily resulting from His claim to be the Son of God. They drew the same conclusion as Nathanael did long before: ‘Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God,’ and therefore ‘Thou art the King of Israel.’ And they were so far right that if the former designation is correct, the latter inevitably follows.

Both charges, then, turned on His personal claims. To Pilate He explained the nature of His kingdom, so as to remove any suspicion that it would bring Him and His subjects into collision with Rome, but He asserted His kingship, and it was His own claim that gave Pilate the material for His gibe. It is worth notice, then, that these two claims from His own lips, made to the authorities who respectively took cognisance of the theocratic and of the

civic life of the nation, and at the time when His life hung on the decision of the two, were the causes of His judicial sentence. The people who allege that Jesus never made the preposterous claims for Himself which Christians have made for Him, but was a simple Teacher of morality and lofty religion, have never fairly faced the simple question: 'For what, then, was He crucified?' It is easy for them to dilate on the hatred of the Jewish officials and the gross earthliness of the masses, as explaining the attitude of both, but it is not so easy to explain how material was found for judicial process. One can understand how Jesus was detested by rulers, and how they succeeded in stirring up popular feeling against Him, but not how an indictment that would hold water was framed against Him. Nor would even Pilate's complaisance have gone so far as to have condemned a prisoner against whom all that could be said was that he was disliked because he taught wisely and well and was too good for his critics. The question is, not what made Jesus disliked, but what set the Law in motion against Him? And no plausible answer has ever been given except the one that was nailed above His head on the Cross. It was not His virtues or the sublimity of His teaching, but His twofold claim to be Son of God and King of Israel that haled Him to His death.

We may further ask why Jesus did not clear up the mistakes, if they were mistakes, that led to His condemnation. Surely He owed it to the two tribunals before which He stood, no less than to Himself and His followers, to disown the erroneous interpretations on which the charges against Him were based. Even a Caiaphas was entitled to be told, if it were so, that He meant no blasphemy and was not claiming anything too high for a reverent Israelite, when He claimed to be the Son of God. If Jesus let the Sanhedrim sentence Him under a mistake of what His words meant, He was guilty of His own death.

We note, further, the light thrown by the Title on Pilate's action. It shows his sense of the unreality of the charge which he basely allowed himself to be forced into entertaining as a ground of condemning Jesus. If this enigmatical prisoner had had a sword, there would have been some substance in the charge against Him, but He was plainly an idea-monger, and therefore quite harmless, and His kingship only fit to be made a jest of and a means of girding at the rulers. 'Practical men' always under-estimate the power of ideas. The Title shows the same contempt for 'mere theorists' as animated his question, 'What is truth?' How little he knew that this 'King,' at whom he thought that he could launch clumsy jests, had lodged in the heart of the Empire a power which would shatter and remould it!

In his blindness to the radiant truth that stood before him, in the tragedy of his condemnation of that to which he should have yielded himself, Pilate stands out as a beacon for all time, warning the world against looking for the forces that move the world among the powers that the world recognises and honours. If we would not commit Pilate's fault over again, we must turn to 'the base things of this world' and the 'things that are not' and find in them the transforming powers destined to 'bring to nought things that are.'

Pilate's gibe was an unconscious prophecy. He thought it an exquisite jest, for it hurt. He was an instance of that strange irony that runs through history, and makes, at some crisis, men utter fateful words that seem put into their lips by some higher power. Caiaphas and he, the Jewish chief of the Sanhedrim and the Roman procurator, were foremost in Christ's condemnation, and each of them spoke such words, profoundly true and far beyond the speaker's thoughts. Was the Evangelist wrong in saying: 'This spake he not of himself?'

II. The Title on the Cross as unveiling the ground of Christ's dominion.

It seemed a ludicrous travesty of royalty that a criminal dying there, with a crowd of his 'subjects' gloating on his agonies and shooting arrowy words of scorn at him, should be a King. But His cross is His throne. It is so because His death is His great work for the world. It is so because in it we see, with melted hearts, the sublimest revelation of His love. Absolute authority belongs to utter self-sacrifice. He, and only He, who gives Himself wholly to and for me, thereby acquires the right of absolute command over me. He is the 'Prince of all the kings of the earth,' because He has died and become the 'First-begotten from the dead.' From the hour when He said, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me,' down to the hour when the seer heard the storm of praise from 'ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands' breaking round the throne, every New Testament reference to Christ's dominion is accompanied with a reference to His cross, and every reference to His cross merges in a reference to His throne. The crown of thorns was a revelation of the inmost nature of Christ's rule. The famous Iron Crown of Milan is a hard, cold circlet within a golden covering blazing with jewels. Christ's right to sway men, like His power to do so, rests on His sacrifice for men. A Christianity without a Cross is a Christianity without authority, as has been seen over and over again in the history of the Church, and as is being seen again today, if men would only look. A Christ without a Cross is a Christ without a Kingdom. The dominion of the world belongs to Him who can sway men's inmost motives. Hearts are His who has bought them with His own.

III. The Title as prophesying Christ's universal dominion.

The three tongues in which it was written were chosen simply to make it easy to read by the crowd from every part of the Empire assembled at the Passover. There were Palestinian Jews there who probably read Aramaic only, and representatives from the widely diffused Jewish emigration in Greek-speaking lands, as well as Roman officials and Jews from Italy who would be most familiar with Latin. Pilate wanted his shaft to reach them all. It was, in its tri-lingual character, a sign of Israel's degradation and a flourishing of the whip in their faces, as a government order in English placarded in a Bengalee village might be, or a Russian ukase in Warsaw. Its very wording betrayed a foreign hand, for a Jew would have written 'King of Israel,' not 'of the Jews.'

But John divined a deeper meaning in this Title, just as he found a similar prophecy of the universality of Christ's death in the analogous word of Caiaphas. As in that saying he

heard a faint prediction that Jesus should die 'not for that people only, but that He might also gather into one the scattered children of God,' so he feels that Pilate was wiser than he knew, and that his written words in their threefold garb symbolised the relation of Christ and His work to the three great types of civilisation which it found possessed of the field. It bent them all to its own purposes, absorbed them into itself, used their witness and was propagated by means of them, and finally sucked the life out of them and disintegrated them. The Jew contributed the morality and monotheism of the Old Testament; the Greek, culture and the perfected language that should contain the treasure, the fresh wine-skin for the new wine; the Roman made the diffusion of the kingdom possible by the *pax Romana*, and at first sheltered the young plant. All three, no doubt, marred as well as helped the development of Christianity, and infused into it deleterious elements, which cling to it to-day, but the prophecy of the Title was fulfilled and these three tongues became heralds of the Cross and with 'loud, uplifted trumpets blew' glad tidings to the ends of the world.

That Title thus became an unconscious prophecy of Christ's universal dominion. The Psalmist that sang of Messiah's world-wide rule was sure that 'all nations shall serve Him,' and the reason why he was certain of it was 'for He shall deliver the needy when he crieth.' We may be certain of it for the same reason. He who can deal with man's primal needs, and is ready and able to meet every cry of the heart, will never want suppliants and subjects. He who can respond to our consciousness of sin and weakness, and can satisfy hungry hearts, will build His sway over the hearts whom He satisfies on foundations deep as life itself. The history of the past becomes a prophecy of the future. Jesus has drawn men of all sorts, of every stage of culture and layer of civilisation, and of every type of character to Him, and the power which has carried a peasant of Nazareth to be the acknowledged King of the civilised world is not exhausted, and will not be till He is throned as Saviour and Ruler of the whole earth. There is only one religion in the world that is obviously growing. The gods of Greece and Rome are only subjects for studies in Comparative Mythology, the labyrinthine pantheon of India makes no conquests, Buddhism is moribund. All other religions than Christianity are shut up within definite and comparatively narrow geographical and chronological limits. But in spite of premature jubilations of enemies and much hasty talk about the need for a re-statement (which generally means a negation) of Christian truth, we have a clear right to look forward with quiet confidence. Often in the past has the religion of Jesus seemed to be wearing or worn out, but it has a strange recuperative power, and is wont to startle its enemies' paeans over its grave by rising again and winning renewed victories. The Title on the Cross is for ever true, and is written again in nobler fashion 'on the vesture and on the thigh' of Him who rides forth at last to rule the nations, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.'

## THE IRREVOCABLE PAST

‘What I have written I have written.’—**JOHN xix. 22.**

This was a mere piece of obstinacy. Pilate knew that he had prostituted his office in condemning Jesus, and he revenged himself for weak compliance by ill-timed mulishness. A cool-headed governor would have humoured his difficult subjects in such a trifle, as a just one would have been inflexible in a matter of life and death. But this man’s facile yielding and his stiff-necked obstinacy were both misplaced. ‘So I will, so I command. Let my will suffice for a reason,’ was what he meant. He had written his gibe, and not all the Jews in Jewry should make him change.

But his petulant answer to the rulers’ request for the removal of the offensive placard carried in it a deeper meaning, as the Title also did, and as the people’s fierce yell, ‘His blood be on us and on our children,’ did. Possibly the Evangelist had some thought of that sort in recording this saying; but, at all events, I venture to take a liberty with it which I should not do if it were a word of God’s, or if it were given for our instruction. So I take it now as expressing in a vivid way, and irrespective of Pilate’s intention, the thought of the irrevocable past.

I. Every man is perpetually writing a permanent record of himself.

It is almost impossible to get the average man to think of his life as a whole, or to realise that the fleeting present leaves indelible traces. They seem to fade away wholly. The record appears to be written in water. It is written in ink which is invisible, but as indelible as invisible. Grammarians define the perfect tense as that which expresses an action completed in the past and of which the consequences remain in the present. That is true of all our actions. Our characters, our circumstances, our remembrances, are all permanent. Every day we make entries in our diary.

II. That record, once written, is irrevocable.

We all know what it is to long that some one action should have been otherwise, to have taken some one step which perhaps has coloured years, and which we would give the world not to have taken. But it cannot be. Remorse cannot alter it. Wishes are vain. Repentance is vain. A new line of conduct is vain.

What an awful contrast in this respect between time future and time past! Think of the indefinite possibilities in the one, the rigid fixity of the other. Our present actions are like cements that dry quickly and set hard on exposure to the air—the dirt of the trowel abides on the soft brick for ever. Many cuneiform inscriptions were impressed with a piece of wood on clay, and are legible millenniums after.

We have to write *currente calamo*, and as soon as written, the MS. is printed and stereotyped, and no revising proofs nor erasures are possible. An action, once done, escapes from us wholly.



How needful, then, to have lofty principles ready at hand! The fresco painter must have a sure touch, and a quick hand, and a full mind.

What a boundless field the future offers us! How much it may be! How much, perhaps, we resolve it shall be! What a shrunken heap the harvest is! Are you satisfied with what you have written?

III. This record, written here, is read yonder.

Our actions carry eternal consequences. These will be read by ourselves. Character remains. Memory remains.

We shall read with all illusions stripped away.

Others will read—God and a universe.

‘We shall all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ.’

IV. This record may be blotted out by the blood of Christ.

It cannot be made not to have been, but God’s pardon will be given, and in respect to all personal consequences it is made non-existent. Circumstances may remain, but their pressure is different. Character may be renewed and sanctified, and even made loftier by the evil past. Our dead selves may become ‘stepping-stones to higher things.’

Memory may remain, but its sting is gone, and new hopes, and joys, and work may fill the pages of our record.

‘He took away the handwriting that was against us, nailing it to His Cross.’

Our lives and characters may become a palimpsest. ‘I will write upon him My new name.’ ‘Ye are an epistle of Christ ministered by us.’

## CHRIST'S FINISHED AND UNFINISHED WORK

'Jesus . . . said, It is finished.'—**JOHN xix. 30.**

'He said unto me, It is done.'—**REV. xxi. 6.**

One of these sayings was spoken from the Cross, the other from the Throne. The Speaker of both is the same. In the one, His voice 'then shook the earth,' as the rending rocks testified; in the other, His voice 'will shake not the earth only but also heaven'; for 'new heavens and a new earth' accompanied the proclamation. In the one, like some traveller ready to depart, who casts a final glance over his preparations, and, satisfied that nothing is omitted, gives his charioteer the signal and rolls away, Jesus Christ looked back over His life's work, and, knowing that it was accomplished, summoned His servant Death, and departed. In the other, He sets His seal to the closed book of the world's history, and ushers in a renovated universe. The one masks the completion of the work on which the world's redemption rests, the other marks the completion of the age-long process by which the world's redemption is actually realised. The one proclaims that the foundation is laid, the other that the headstone is set on the finished building. The one bids us trust in a past perfected work; the other bids us hope in the perfect accomplishment of the results of that work. Taken singly, these sayings are grand; united, they suggest thoughts needed always, never more needful than to-day.

I. We see here the work which was finished on the Cross.

The Evangelist gives great significance to the words of my first text, as is shown by his statement in a previous verse: 'Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, said, I thirst,' and then—'It is finished.' That is to say, there is something in that dying voice a great deal deeper and more wonderful than the ordinary human utterance with which a dying man might say, 'It is all over now. I have done,' for this utterance came from the consciousness that all things had been accomplished by Him, and that He had done His life's work.

Now, there, taking the words even in their most superficial sense, we come upon the strange peculiarity which marks off the life of Jesus Christ from every other life that was ever lived. There are no loose ends left, no unfinished tasks drop from His nerveless hands, to be taken up and carried on by others. His life is a rounded whole, with everything accomplished that had been endeavoured, and everything done that had been commanded. 'His hands have laid the foundation; His hands shall also finish.' He alone of the sons of men, in the deepest sense, completed His task, and left nothing for successors. The rest of us are taken away when we have reared a course or two of the structure, the dream of building which brightened our youth. The pen drops from paralysed hands in the middle of a sentence, and a fragment of a book is left. The painter's brush falls with his palette at the foot of his easel, and but the outline of what he conceived is on the canvas. All of us leave tasks half

done, and have to go away before the work is completed. The half-polished columns that lie at Baalbec are but a symbol of the imperfection of every human life. But this Man said, 'It is finished,' and 'gave up the ghost.' Now, if we ponder on what lies in that consciousness of completion, I think we find, mainly, three things.

Christ rendered a complete obedience. All through His life we see Him, hearing with the inward ear the solemn voice of the Father, and responding to it with that 'I must' which runs through all His days, from the earliest dawning of consciousness, when He startled His mother with 'I must be about My Father's business,' until the very last moments. In that obedience to the all-present necessity which He cheerfully embraced and perfectly discharged, there was no flaw. He alone of men looks back upon a life in which His clear consciousness detected neither transgression nor imperfection. In the midst of His career He could front His enemies with 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' and no man then, and no man in all the generations that have elapsed since—though some have been blind enough to try it, and malicious enough to utter their attempts,—has been able to answer the challenge. In the midst of His career He said, 'I do always the things that please Him'; and nobody then or since has been able to lay his finger upon an act of His in which, either by excess or defect, or contrariety, the will of God has not been fully represented. At the beginning of His career He said, in answer to the Baptist's remonstrance, 'It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness,' and at the end of His career He looked back, and knowing that He had thus done what became Him—namely, fulfilled it all—He said, 'It is finished!'

The utterance further expresses Christ's consciousness of having completed the revelation of God. Jesus Christ has made known the Father, and the generations since have added nothing to His revelation. The very people, to-day, that turn away from Christianity, in the name of higher conceptions of the divine nature, owe their conceptions of it to the Christ from whom they turn. Not in broken syllables; not 'at sundry times and in divers manners,' but with the one perfect, full-toned name of God on His lips, and vocal in His life, He has declared the Father unto us. In the course of His career He said, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'; and, looking back on His life of manifestation of God, He proclaimed, 'It is finished!' And the world has since, with all its thinking, added nothing to the name which Christ has declared.

The utterance farther expresses His consciousness of having made a completed, atoning Sacrifice. Remember that the words of my first text followed that awful cry that came from the darkness, and as by one lightning flash, show us the waves and billows rolling over His head. 'My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?' In that infinitely pathetic and profound utterance, to the interpretation of which our powers go but a little way, Jesus Christ blends together, in the most marvellous fashion, desolation and trust, the consciousness that God is His God, and the consciousness that He is bereft of the light of His presence. Brethren! I know of no explanation of these words which does justice to both the elements

that are intertwined so intimately in them, except the old one, which listens to Him as they come from His quivering lip, and says, 'The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.'

Ah, brethren! unless there was something a great deal more than the physical shrinking from physical death in that piteous cry, Jesus Christ did not die nearly as bravely as many a poor, trembling woman who, at the stake or the block, has owed her fortitude to Him. Many a blood-stained criminal has gone out of life with less tremor than that which, unless you take the explanation that Scripture suggests of the cry, marred the last hours of Jesus Christ. Having drained the cup, He held it up inverted when He said 'It is finished!' and not a drop trickled down the edge. He drank it that we might never need to drink it; and so His dying voice proclaimed that 'by one offering for sin for ever,' He 'obtained eternal redemption' for us.

II. Now, secondly, note the work which began from the Cross. Between my two texts lie untold centuries, and the whole development of the consequences of Christ's death, like some great valley stretching between twin mountain-peaks on either side, which from some points of view will be foreshortened and invisible, but when gazed down upon, is seen to stretch widely leagues broad, from mountain ridge to mountain ridge. So my two texts, by the fact that millenniums have to interpose between the time when 'It is finished!' is spoken, and the time when 'It is done!' can be proclaimed from the Throne, imply that the interval is filled by a continuous work of our Lord's, which began at the moment when the work on the Cross ended.

Now it has very often been the case, as I take leave to think, that the interpretation of the former of these two texts has been of such a kind as to distort the perspective of Christian truth, and to obscure the fact of that continuous work of our Lord's. Therefore it may not be out of place if, in a sentence or two, I recall to you the plain teaching of the New Testament upon this matter. 'It is finished!' Yes; and as the lower course of some great building is but the foundation for the higher, when 'finished' it is but begun. The work which, in one aspect, is the close, in another aspect is the commencement of Christ's further activity. What did He say Himself, when He was here with His disciples? 'I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.' What was the last word that came fluttering down, like an olive leaf, into the bosoms of the men as they stood with uplifted faces gazing upon Him as He disappeared? 'Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the ages.' What is the keynote of the book which carries on the story of the Gospels in the history of the militant Church? 'The former treatise have I made. . . of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up'—and, being taken up, continued, in a new form, both the doing and the teaching. Thus that book, misnamed the Acts of the Apostles, sets Him forth as the Worker of all the progress of the Church. Who is it that 'adds to the Church daily such as were being saved?' The Lord. Who is it that opened the hearts of the hearers to the message? The Lord.

Who is it that flings wide the prison-gates when His persecuted servants are in chains? The Lord. Who is it that bids one man attach himself to the chariot of the eunuch of Ethiopia, and another man go and bear witness in Rome? The Lord. Through the whole of that book there runs the keynote, as its dominant thought, that men are but the instruments, and the hand that wields them is Christ's, and that He who wrought the finished work that culminated on Calvary is operating a continuous work through the ages from His Throne.

Take that last book of Scripture, which opens with a view of the ascended Christ 'walking in the midst of the seven candlesticks, and holding the stars in His right hand;' which further draws aside the curtains of the heavenly sanctuary, and lets us see 'the Lamb in the midst of the Throne,' opening the seven seals—that is to say, setting loose for their progress through the world the forces that make the history of humanity, and which culminates in the vision of the final battle in which the Incarnate Word of God goes forth to victory, with all the armies of heaven following Him. Are not its whole spirit and message that Jesus Christ, the Lamb who is the Antagonist of the Beast, is working through all the history of the world, and will work till its kingdoms are 'become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ?'

Now, that continuous operation of Jesus Christ in the midst of men is not to be weakened down to the mere continued influence of the truths which He proclaimed, or the Gospel which He brought. There is something a great deal more than the diminishing vibrations of a force long since set in operation, and slowly ceasing to act. Dead teachers do still 'rule our spirits from their urns'; but it is no dead Christ who, by the influence of what He did when He was living, sways the world and comforts His Church; it is a living Christ who to-day is working in His people, by His Spirit. Further, He works on the world through His people by the Word; they plant and water, He 'gives the increase.' And He is working in the world, for His Church and for the world, by His wielding of all power that is given to Him, in heaven and on earth. So that the work that is done upon earth He doeth it all Himself; and Christian people unduly limit the sphere of Christ's operations when they look back only to the Cross, and talk about a 'finished work' there, and forget that that finished work there is but the vestibule of the continuous work that is being done to-day.

Christian people! The present work of Christ needs working servants. We are here in order to carry on His work. The Apostle ventured to say that he was appointed 'to fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ'; we may well venture to say that we are here mainly to apply to the world the benefits resulting from the finished work upon the Cross. The accomplishment of redemption, and the realisation of the accomplished redemption, are two wholly different things. Christ has done the one. He says to us, 'You are honoured to help Me to do the other.' According to the accurate rendering of a great saying of the Old Testament, 'Take no rest, and give Him no rest, till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth, Christ's work is finished; there is nothing for us to do with it but trust it. Christ's work is going on; come to His help. Ye are fellow-labourers with and to the Incarnate Truth.

III. I need not say more than a word about the third thought, suggested by these texts—viz., the completion of the work which began on the Cross.

'It is done!' That lies, no man knows how far, ahead of us. As surely as astronomers tell us that all this universe is hastening towards a central point, so surely 'that far-off divine event' is that 'to which the whole creation moves.' It is the blaze of light which fills the distant end of the dim vista of human history. Its elements are in part summed up in the context—the tabernacle of God with men, the perfected fellowship of the human with the divine, the housing of men in the very home and heart of God; 'a new heaven and a new earth,' a renovated universe; the removal of all evil, suffering, sorrow, sin, and tears. These things are to be, and shall be, when He says 'It is done!'

Brethren! nothing else than such an issue can be the end of Creation, for nothing else than such is the purpose of God for man, and God is not going to be beaten by the world and the devil. Nothing else than such can be the issue of the Cross; for 'He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied,' and Christ is not going to labour in vain, and spend His life, and give His breath and His blood for nought.

Nothing but the work finished on the Cross guarantees the coming of that perfected issue. I know not where else there is hope for mankind, looking on the history of humanity, except in that great message, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come, has died, lives for ever, and is the world's King and Lord.

So for ourselves, in regard to the one part of the work, let us listen to Him saying 'It is finished!' abandon all attempts to eke it out by additions of our own, and cast ourselves on the finished Revelation, the finished Obedience, the finished Atonement, made once for all on the Cross. But as for the continuous work going on through the ages, let us cast ourselves into it with earnestness, self-sacrifice, consecration, and continuity, for we are fellow-workers with Christ, and Christ will work in, with, and for us if we will work for Him.

## CHRIST OUR PASSOVER

‘These things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken.’—[JOHN xix. 36](#).

The Evangelist, in the words of this text, points to the great Feast of the Passover and to the Paschal Lamb, as finding their highest fulfilment, as he calls it, in Jesus Christ. For this purpose of bringing out the correspondence between the shadow and the substance he avails himself of a singular coincidence concerning a perfectly unimportant matter—viz., the abnormally rapid sinking of Christ’s physical strength in the crucifixion, by which the final indignity of breaking the bones of the sufferers was avoided in His case. John sees, in that entirely insignificant thing, a kind of fingerpost pointing to far more important, deeper, and real correspondences. We are not to suppose that he was so purblind, and attached so much importance to externals, as that this outward coincidence exhausted in his conception the correspondence between the two. But It was a trifle that suggested a greater matter. It was a help aiding gross conceptions and common minds to grasp the inward relation between Jesus and that Passover rite. But just as our Lord would have fulfilled the prophecy about the King coming ‘meek, and having salvation,’ though He had never ridden on a literal ass into the literal Jerusalem, so our Lord would have ‘fulfilled’ the shadow of the Passover with the substance of His own sacrifice if there had never been this insignificant correspondence, in outward things, between the two.

But whilst my text is the Evangelist’s commentary, the question arises, How did he come to recognise that our Lord was all which that Passover signified? And the answer is, he recognised it through Christ’s own teaching. He does not record the institution of the Lord’s Supper. It did not fall into his scheme to deal with external events of that sort, and he knew that it had been sufficiently taught by the three earlier Gospels, to which his is a supplement. But though he did not narrate the institution, he takes it for granted in the words of my text, and his vindication of his seeing the fulfilment of ‘A bone of Him shall not be broken’ in the incident to which I have referred, lies in this, that Jesus Christ Himself swept away the Passover and substituted the memorial feast of the Lord’s Supper. ‘This do in remembrance of Me,’ said at the table where the Paschal lamb had been eaten, sufficiently warrants John’s allusion here.

So then, marking the fact that our Evangelist is but carrying out the lesson that he had learned in the upper room, we may fairly take the identification of the Paschal lamb with the crucified Christ as being the last instance in which our Lord Himself laid His hand upon Old Testament incidents and said, ‘They all mean Me.’ And it is from that point of view, and not merely for the purpose of dealing with the words that I have read as our starting-point, that I wish to speak now.

I. Now then, the first thing that strikes me is that in this substitution of Himself for the Passover we have a strange instance of Christ's supreme authority.

Try to fling yourself back in imagination to that upper room, where Jesus and a handful of Galileans were sitting, and remember the sanctity which immemorial usage had cast round that centre and apex of the Jewish ritual, established at the Exodus by a solemn divine appointment, intended to commemorate the birth of the nation, venerable by antiquity and association with the most vehement pulsations of national feeling, the centre point of Jewish religion. Christ said: 'Put it all away; do not think about the Exodus; do not think about the destroying Angel; do not think about the deliverance. Forget all the past; do this in remembrance of Me.' Take into account that the Passover had a double sacredness, as a religious festival, and also as commemorating the birthday of the nation, and then estimate what a strange sense of His own importance the Man must have had who said: 'That past is done with, and it is Me that you have to think of now.' If I might venture to take a very modern illustration without vulgarising a great thing, suppose that on the other side of the Atlantic somebody were to stand up and say, 'I abrogate the Fourth of July and Independence Day. Do not think about Washington and the establishment of the United States any more. Think about me!' That is exactly what Jesus Christ did. Only instead of a century there were millenniums of observance which He thus laid aside. So I say that is a strange exercise of authority.

What does it imply? It implies two things, and I must say a word about each of them. It implies that Christ regarded the whole of the ancient system of Judaism, its history, its law, its rites of worship, as pointing onwards to Himself, that He recognised in it a system the whole *raison d'être* of which was anticipatory and preparatory of Himself. For Him the Decalogue was given, for Him priests were consecrated, for Him kings were anointed, for Him prophets spake, for Him sacrifices smoked, for Him festivals were appointed, and the nation and its history were all one long proclamation: 'The King cometh! go ye forth to meet Him.' You cannot get less than that out of the way in which He handled, as is told in this Gospel, Jacob's ladder, the Serpent in the wilderness, the Manna that fell from Heaven, the Pillar of Cloud that led the people, the Rock that gushed forth water, and now, last of all, the Passover, which was the very shining apex of the whole sacrificial and ritual system.

And remember, too, that this way of dealing with all the institutions of the nation as meaning, in their inmost purpose, Himself, is exactly parallel to His way of dealing with the sacred words of Mosaic commandment and prohibition in the Sermon on the Mount, where He set side by side as of equal—I was going to say, and I should have been right in saying, identical—authority what was 'said to them of old time' and what 'I say unto you.' Amidst the dust of our present controversies as to the processes by which, and the times at which, the Old Testament books assumed their present form, there is grave danger that the essential thing about the whole matter should be obscured. The way in which what is called Higher



Criticism may finally locate the origins and dates of the various parts of that ancient record and that ancient system does not in the slightest degree affect the outstanding characteristic of the whole, that it is the product of the divine hand, working (if you will) through men who had more freedom of action whilst they were its organs than our grandfathers thought. Be it so; but still that divine Hand shaped the whole in order that, besides its educational effects upon the generations that received it, there should shine through it all the expectation of the coming King. And I venture to say that, however grateful we may be to modern investigation for light upon these other points to which I have referred, the ignorant reader that reads Jesus Christ into all the Old Testament may be very uncritical and mistaken in regard to details, but he has got hold of the root of the matter, and is nearer to the apprehension of the essence and spirit and purpose of the ancient Revelation than the most learned critic who does not see that it is the preparation for, and the prophecy of, Jesus Christ Himself. And the vindication of such a position lies in this, among other facts, that He in the upper room, in harmony with, and in completion of, all that He had previously spoken about His relation to the Old Testament, claimed the Passover as the prophecy of Himself, and said, 'I am the Lamb of God.'

I need not dwell, I suppose, on the other consideration that is involved in this strange exercise of authority—viz., the naturalness, as without any sense of doing anything presumptuous or extraordinary, with which Christ assumes His right to handle divine appointments with the most perfect freedom, to modify them, to reshape them, to divert them from their first purpose, and to enjoin them with an authority equal to that with which the Lord said unto Moses, 'Keep ye this day through your generations.' There is only one supposition on which I, for my part, can understand that conduct—that He was the possessor of authority the same as the Authority that had originally instituted the rite.

And so, dear brethren! when our Lord said, 'Do this in remembrance of Me,' I pray you to ask yourselves, What did that involve in regard to His nature and the source of His authority over us? And what did it involve in regard to His relation to that ancient Revelation?

II. And now another point that I would suggest is—we have, in this substitution of the new rite for the old, our Lord's clear declaration of what was the very heart of His work in the world.

'This do in remembrance of Me.' What is it, then, to which He points? Is it to the wisdom, the tenderness, the deep beauty, the flashing moral purity that gleamed and shone lambent in His words? No! Is it to the gracious self—oblivion, the gentle accessibility, the loving pity, the leisurely heart always ready to help, the eye ready to fill with tears, the hand ever outstretched and ever laden with blessings? No! It is the death on the Cross which He, if I might so say, isolates, at least which He underscores with red lines, and which He would have us remember, as we remember nothing else. Brethren, rites are insignificant in many aspects, but are often of enormous importance as witnesses to truths. And I point to the Lord's

Supper, the one rite of the Christian Church, which is to be repeated over and over and over again, and see in it the great barrier which has rendered it impossible, and will render it impossible, as I believe, for evermore, that a Christianity, which obscures the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, should ever pose as the full representation of the Master's mind, or as the full expression of the Saviour's word.

What do men and churches that falter in their allegiance to the truth of Christ's redemptive death do with the Lord's Supper? Nothing! For the most part they ignore it, or if they retain it, do not, for the life of them, know how to explain it, or why it should be there. The explanation of why it is there is the great truth, of which it is the clear utterance and the strong defence, the truth that 'Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' and that 'the Son of Man came. . . to give His life a ransom for the many.'

What did that Passover say? Two things it said, the blood that was sprinkled on the lintels and on the door-posts was the token to the destroying Angel, as with his broad, silent pinions he swept through the land, bringing a blacker night into Egyptian darkness, and leaving behind him no house 'in which there was not one dead.' All the houses of which the occupants had put the ruddy mark on the lintels and on the doorposts, and were wise enough not to go forth from behind the shelter of that mark on the door, were safe when the morning dawned. And so to us all who, by our sinfulness, have brought down upon our heads exposedness to that retribution, which, in a righteously governed universe, must needs follow sin, and to that death which the separation from God—the necessary result of sin—most surely is, there is proffered in that great Sacrifice shelter from the destroying sword.

But that is not all. Whilst the blood on the posts meant security, the Lamb on the table meant emancipation. So they who find in the dying Christ their exemption from the last consequences of transgression, find, in partaking of the Christ whose sacrifice is their pardon, the communication of a new power, which sets them free from a worse than Egyptian bondage, and enables them to shake from their emancipated limbs the fetters of the grimmest of the Pharaohs that have wielded a tyrannous dominion over them. Pardon and freedom, the creation of a nation subject only to the law of Jehovah Himself—these were the facts that the Passover festival and the Passover lamb signified, and these are the facts which, in nobler fashion, are brought to us by Jesus Christ. So, I beseech you, let Him teach you what His work in the world is, as He lays His own hand on that highest of the ancient festivals, and endorses the Baptist's declaration, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!'

III. Now, lastly, let me ask you to notice how, in this regal and authoritative dealing by our Lord with that ancient festival, there lies a loving provision for our weakness.

Surely we may venture to say that Jesus Christ desired to be remembered, even by that handful of poor people, and by us, not only for our sakes, but because His heart, too, craved

that He should not be forgotten by those whom He was leaving. As you may remember, the dying king turned to the bishop standing by him, with the enigmatical word which no one understood but the receiver of it—‘Remember!’ so did Jesus Christ. He appeals to our thankfulness, He appeals to our affections, He lets us see that He wishes to live in our memories, because He delights in it, as well as because it is for our profit.

The Passover was purely and simply a rite of remembrance. I venture to believe that the Lord’s Supper is nothing more. I know how people talk about the bare, bald, Zwinglian ideas of the Communion. They do look very bald and bare by the side of modern notions and mediaeval notions resuscitated. Well, I had rather have the bareness than I would have it overlaid by coverings under which there is room for abundance of vermin to lurk. Christ puts the Lord’s Supper in the place of the Passover. The Passover was a purely memorial rite. You Christian people will understand the spirituality of the whole Gospel system, and the nature of the only bond which unites men to Jesus and brings spiritual blessings to them—viz. faith—all the better, the more you cling, in spite of all that is going on round us to-day, to that simple, intelligible, Scriptural notion that we commemorate the Sacrifice, not offer the Sacrifice. Jesus Christ said that the Lord’s Supper was to be observed ‘in remembrance of Me.’ That was His explanation of its purpose, and I for one am content to take as the expounder of the laws of the feast, the feast’s own Founder.

Now one more word. In the Passover men fed on the Sacrifice. Jesus Christ presents Himself to each of us as at once the Sacrifice for our sins and the Food of our souls. If you will keep your minds in touch with the truth about Him, and with Him whom the truth about Him reveals to you, if you will keep your hearts in touch with that great and unspeakable sign of God’s love, if you will keep your wills in submission to His authority, if you will let His blood, ‘which is the life,’ or as you may otherwise word it, His Spirit, come into your lives, and be your spirit, your motive, then you will go out from the table, not like the disciples to flee, and deny, and forget, nor like the Israelites to wander in a wilderness, but strengthened for many a day of joyous service and true communion, and will come at last to what He has promised us: ‘Ye shall sit with Me at My table in My Kingdom,’ whence we shall go ‘no more out.’

## JOSEPH AND NICODEMUS

‘And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; . . . And there came also Nicodemus which at the first came to Jesus by night.’—[JOHN xix. 38, 39](#).

While Christ lived, these two men had been unfaithful to their convictions; but His death, which terrified and paralysed and scattered His avowed disciples, seems to have shamed and stung them into courage. They came now, when they must have known that it was too late, to lavish honour and tears on the corpse of the Master whom they had been too cowardly to acknowledge, whilst acknowledgment might yet have availed. How keen an arrow of self-condemnation must have pierced their hearts as they moved in their offices of love, which they thought that He could never know, round His dead corpse!

They were both members of the Sanhedrim; the same motives, no doubt, had withheld each of them from confessing Christ; the same impulses united them in this too late confession of discipleship. Nicodemus had had the conviction, at the beginning of Christ’s ministry, that He was at least a miraculously attested and God-sent Teacher. But the fear which made him steal to Jesus by night—the unenviable distinction which the Evangelist pitilessly reiterates at each mention of him—arrested his growth and kept him dumb when silence was treason. Joseph of Arimathea is described by two of the Evangelists as ‘a disciple’; by the other two as a devout Israelite, like Simeon and Anna, ‘waiting for the Kingdom of God.’ Luke informs us that he had not concurred in the condemnation of Jesus, but leads us to believe that his dissent had been merely silent. Perhaps he was more fully convinced than Nicodemus, and at the same time even more timid in avowing his convictions.

We may take these two contrite cowards as they try to atone for their unfaithfulness to their living Master by their ministrations to Him dead, as examples of secret disciples, and see here the causes, the misery, and the cure of such.

I. Let us look at them as illustrations of secret discipleship and its causes.

They were restrained from the avowal of the Messiahship of Jesus by fear. There is nothing in the organisation of society at this day to make any man afraid of avowing the ordinary kind of Christianity which satisfies the most of us; rather it is the proper thing with the bulk of us middle-class people, to say that in some sense or other we are Christians. But when it comes to a real avowal, a real carrying out of a true discipleship, there are as many and as formidable, though very different, impediments in the way to-day, from those which blocked the path of these two cowards in our text. In all regions of life it is hard to work out into practice any moral conviction whatever. How many of us are there who have beliefs about social and moral questions which we are ashamed to avow in certain companies for fear of the finger of ridicule being pointed at us? It is not only in the Church, and in reference to purely religious belief, that we find the curse of secret discipleship, but it is everywhere.

Wherever there are moral questions which are yet the subject of controversy, and have not been enthroned with the hallelujahs of all men, you get people that carry their convictions shut up in their own breasts, and lock their lips in silence, when there is most need of frank avowal. The political, social, and moral conflicts of this day have their 'secret disciples,' who will only come out of their holes when the battle is over, and will then shout with the loudest.

But to turn to the more immediate subject before us, how many men and women, I wonder, are there who ought to be and are not, distinctly and openly united with the Christian community?

I do not mean to say—God forbid that I should—that connection with any existing church is the same as a connection with Jesus Christ, or that the neglect to be so associated is tantamount to secret discipleship; I know there are plenty of other ways of acknowledging Him than that, but I am quite sure that this is one department in which a large number of men, in all our congregations—and there are not a few in this congregation—need a very plain word of earnest remonstrance. It is one way of manifesting whose you are, that you should unite yourselves openly with those who belong to Him, and who try to serve Him. I do not dwell upon this matter, because I do not wish to be misunderstood, as if I supposed that union to a church is equivalent to union with Him; or that a connection with a church is the only, or even the principal way of making an open avowal of Christian principle; but I am certain that amongst us in this day there is a laxity in this matter which is doing harm both to the Church and to some of you. Therefore I say to you, dear friends, suffer the word of exhortation as to the duty of openly uniting yourselves with the Christian community.

But far higher and more important than that—do you ever say anyhow that you belong to Jesus Christ? In a society like ours, in which the influence of Christian morality affects a great many people who have no personal connection with Him, it is not always enough that the life should preach, because over a very large field of ordinary daily life the underground influence, so to speak, of Christian ethics has infiltrated and penetrated, so that many a tree bears a greener leaf because of the water that has found its way to it from the river, though it be planted far from its banks. Even those who are not Christians live outward lives largely regulated by Christian principle. The whole level of morality has been heaved up, as the coastline has sometimes been by hidden fires slowly working, by the imperceptible, gradual influence of the gospel.

So it needs sometimes that you should say 'I am a Christian,' as well as that you should live like one. Ask yourselves, dear friends! whether you have buttoned your greatcoat over your uniform that nobody may know whose soldier you are. Ask yourselves whether you have sometimes held your tongues because you knew that if you spoke people would find out where you came from and what country you belonged to. Ask yourselves, Have you ever accompanied the witness of your lives with the commentary of your confession? Did

you ever, anywhere but in a church, stand up and say, 'I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord'?

And then ask yourselves another question: Have you ever dared to be singular? We are all of us in this world often thrust into circumstances in which it is needful that we should say, 'So do not I because of the fear of the Lord.' Boys go to school; they used always to kneel down at their bedsides and say their prayers when they were at home. They do not like to do it with all those critical and cruel eyes—and there are no eyes more critical and more cruel than young eyes—fixed upon them, and so they give up prayer. A young man comes to Manchester, goes into a warehouse, pure of life, and with a tongue that has not blossomed into rank fruit of obscenity and blasphemy. And he hears, at the next desk there, words that first of all bring a blush to his cheek, and he is tempted into conduct that he knows to be a denial of his Master. And he covers up his principles, and goes with the tempters into the evil. I might sketch a dozen other cases, but I need not. In one form or other, we have all to go through the same ordeal. We have sometimes to dare to be in a minority of one, if we will not be untrue to our Master and to ourselves.

Now the reasons for this unfaithfulness to conviction and to Christ, are put by the Apostle here in a very blunt fashion—'For fear of the Jews.' That is not what we say to ourselves; some of us say, 'Oh! I have got beyond outward organisations. I find it enough to be united to Christ. The Christian communities are very imperfect. There is not any of them that I quite see eye to eye with. So I stand apart, contemplating all, and happy in my unsectarianism.' Yes, I quite admit the faults, and suppose that as long as men think at all they will not find any Church which is entirely to their mind; and I rejoice to think that some day we shall all outgrow visible organisations—when we get there where the seer 'saw no temple therein.' Admitting all that, I also know that isolation is always weakness, and that if a man stand apart from the wholesome friction of his brethren, he will get to be a great diseased mass of oddities, of very little use either to himself, or to men, or to God. It is not a good thing, on the whole, that people should fight for their own hands, and the wisest thing any of us can do is, preserving our freedom of opinion, to link ourselves with some body of Christian people, and to find in them our shelter and our home.

But these two in our text were moved by 'fear.' They dreaded ridicule, the loss of position, the expulsion from Sanhedrim and synagogue, social ostracism, and all the armoury of offensive weapons which would have been used against them by their colleagues. So, ignobly they kept their thumb on their convictions, and the two of them sat dumb in the council when the scornful question was asked, 'Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?' when they ought to have started to their feet and said 'Yes, we have!' And when Nicodemus ventured a feeble remonstrance, which he carefully divested of all appearance of personal sympathy, and put upon the mere abstract ground of fair play—'Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?'—one contemptuous question was enough to reduce

him to silence. 'Art thou also of Galilee?' was enough to cow him into dropping his timid plea for Him whom in his heart he believed to be the Messiah.

So with us, the fear of loss of position comes into play. I have heard of people who settled the congregation which they should honour by their presence from the consideration of the social advantages which it offered. I have heard of their saying, 'Oh! we cannot attach ourselves to such and such a community; there is no society for the children.' Then many of us are very much afraid of being laughed at. Ridicule, I think, to sensitive people in a generation like ours, is pretty nearly as bad as the old rack and the physical torments of martyrdom. We have all got so nervous and high-strung nowadays, and depend so much upon other people's good opinion, that it is a dreadful thing to be ridiculed. Timid people do not come to the front and say what they believe, and take up unpopular causes, because they cannot bear to be pointed at and pelted with the abundant epithets of disparagement, which are always flung at earnest people who will not worship at the appointed shrines, and have sturdy convictions of their own.

Ridicule breaks no bones. It has no power if you make up your mind that it shall not have. Face it, and it will only be unpleasant for a moment at first. When a child goes into the sea to bathe, he is uncomfortable till his head has been fairly under water, and then after that he is all right. So it is with the ridicule which out-and-out Christian faithfulness may bring on us. It only hurts at the beginning, and people very soon get tired. Face your fears and they will pass away. It is not perhaps a good advice to give unconditionally, but it is a very good one in regard of all moral questions—always do what you are afraid to do. In nine cases out of ten it will be the right thing to do. If people would only discount 'the fear of men which bringeth a snare' by making up their minds to neglect it, there would be fewer 'dumb dogs' and 'secret disciples' haunting and weakening the Church of Christ.

II. I have spent too much time upon this part of my subject, and I must deal briefly with the following. Let me say a word about the illustrations that we have in this text of the miseries of this secret discipleship.

How much these two men lost—all those three years of communion with the Master; all His teaching, all the stimulus of His example, all the joy of fellowship with Him! They might have had a treasure in their memories that would have enriched them for all their days, and they had flung it all away because they were afraid of the curled lip of a long-bearded Pharisee or two.

And so it always is; the secret disciple diminishes his communion with his Master. It is the valleys which lay their bosoms open to the sun that rejoice in the light and warmth; the narrow clefts in the rocks that shut themselves grudgingly up against the light, are all dank and dark and dismal. And it is the men that come and avow their discipleship that will have the truest communion with their Lord. Any neglected duty puts a film between a man and his Saviour; any conscious neglect of duty piles up a wall between you and Christ. Be sure

of this, that if from cowardly or from selfish regard to position and advantages, or any other motive, we stand apart from Him, and have our lips locked when we ought to speak, there will steal over our hearts a coldness, His face will be averted from us, and our eyes will not dare to seek, with the same confidence and joy, the light of His countenance.

What you lose by unfaithful wrapping of your convictions in a napkin and burying them in the ground is the joyful use of the convictions, the deeper hold of the truth by which you live, and before which you bow, and the true fellowship with the Master whom you acknowledge and confess. And when these men came for Christ's corpse and bore it away, what a sharp pang went through their hearts! They woke at last to know what cowardly traitors they had been. If you are a disciple at all, and a secret one, you will awake to know what you have been doing, and the pang will be a sharp one. If you do not awake in this life, then the distance between you and your Lord will become greater and greater; if you do, then it will be a sad reflection that there are years of treason lying behind you. Nicodemus and Joseph had the veil torn away by the contemplation of their dead Master. You may have the veil torn away from your eyes by the sight of the throned Lord; and when you pass into the heavens may even there have some sharp pang of condemnation when you reflect how unfaithful you have been.

Blessed be His name! The assurance is firm that if a man be a disciple he shall be saved; but the warning is sure that if he be an unfaithful and a secret disciple there will be a life-long unfaithfulness to a beloved Master to be purged away 'so as by fire.'

III. And so, lastly, let me point you to the cure.

These men learned to be ashamed of their cowardice, and their dumb lips learned to speak, and their shy, hidden love forced for itself a channel by which it could flow out into the light; because of Christ's death. And in another fashion that same death and Cross are for us, too, the cure of all cowardice and selfish silence. The sight of Christ's Cross makes the coward brave. It was no small piece of courage for Joseph to go to Pilate and avow his sympathy with a condemned criminal. The love must have been very true which was forced to speak by disaster and death. And to us the strongest motive for stiffening our vacillating timidity into an iron fortitude, and fortifying us strongly against the fear of what man can do to us, is to be found in gazing upon His dying love who met and conquered all evils and terrors for our sakes.

That Cross will kindle a love which will not rest concealed, but will be 'like the ointment of the right hand which bewrayeth itself.' I can fancy men to whom Christ is only what He was to Nicodemus at first, 'a Teacher sent from God,' occupying Nicodemus' position of hidden belief in His teaching without feeling any need to avow themselves His followers; but if once into our souls there has come the constraining and the melting influence of that great and wondrous love which died for us, then, dear brethren, it is unnatural that we should be silent. If those 'for whom Christ has died' should hold their peace, 'the stones



would immediately cry out.’ That death, wondrous, mysterious, terrible, but radiant, and glorious with hope, with pardon, with holiness for us and for all the world—that death smites on the chords of our hearts, if I may so speak, and brings out music from them all. The love that died for me will force me to express my love, ‘Then shall the tongue of the dumb sing,’ and silence will be impossible.

The sight of the Cross not only leads to courage, and kindles a love which demands expression, but it impels to joyful surrender. Joseph gave a place in his own new tomb, where he hoped that one day his bones should be laid by the side of the Master against whom he had sinned—for he had no thought of a resurrection. Nicodemus brought a lavish, almost an extravagant, amount of costly spices, as if by honour to the dead he could atone for treason to the living. And both the one and the other teach us that if once we gain the true vision of that great and wondrous love that died on the Cross for us, then the natural language of the loving heart is—

‘Here, Lord! I give myself away; ‘Tis all that I can do.’

If following Him openly involves sacrifices, the sacrifices will be sweet, so long as our hearts look to His dying love. All love delights in expression, and most of all in expression by surrender of precious things, which are most precious because they give love materials which it may lay at the beloved’s feet. What are position, possessions, reputation, capacities, perils, losses, self, but the ‘sweet spices’ which we are blessed enough to be able to lay upon the altar which glorifies the Giver and the gift? The contemplation of Christ’s sacrifice—and that alone—will so overcome our natural selfishness as to make sacrifice for His dear sake most blessed.

I beseech you, then, look ever to Him dying on the Cross for each of us. It will kindle our courage, it will make our hearts glow with love, it will turn our silence into melody and music of praise; it will lead us to heights of consecration and joys of confession; and so it will bring us at last into the possession of that wondrous honour which He promised when He said, ‘He that confesseth Me before men, him will I also confess; and he that denieth Me before men, him will I also deny.’

## THE GRAVE IN A GARDEN

‘In the garden a new tomb.’—[JOHN xix. 41 \(R.V.\)](#).

This is possibly no more than a topographical note introduced merely for the sake of accuracy. But it is quite in John’s manner to attach importance to these apparent trifles and to give no express statement that he is doing so. There are several other instances in the Gospel where similar details are given which appear to have had in his eyes a symbolical meaning—e.g. ‘And it was night.’ There may have been such a thought in his mind, for all men in high excitement love and seize symbols, and I can scarcely doubt that the reason which induced Joseph to make his grave in a garden was the reason which induced John to mention so particularly its situation, and that they both discerned in that garden round the sepulchre, the expression of what was to the one a dim desire, to the other ‘a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead’—that they who are laid to rest in the grave shall come forth again in new and fairer life, as ‘the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to bud.’

To us at all events on Easter morning, with nature rising on every hand from her winter death, and ‘life re-orient out of dust,’ that new sepulchre in the garden may well serve for the starting-point of the familiar but ever-precious lessons of the day.

I. A symbol of death and decay as interwoven with all nature and every joy.

We think of Eden and the first coming of death.

The grave was fittingly in the garden, because nature too is subject to the law of decay and death. The flowers fade and men die. Meditative souls have ever gathered lessons of mortality there, and invested death with an alien softness by likening it to falling leaves and withered blooms. But the contrast is greater than the resemblance, and painless dropping of petals is not a parallel to the rending of soul and body.

The garden’s careless wealth of beauty and joy continues unconcerned whatever befalls us. ‘One generation cometh and another goeth, but the earth abideth for ever.’

The grave is in the garden because all our joys and works have sooner or later death associated with them.

Every relationship.

Every occupation.

Every joy.

The grave in the garden bids us bring the wholesome contemplation of death into all life.

It may be a harm and weakening to think of it, but should be a strength.

II. The dim hopes with which men have fought against death.

To lay the dead amid blooming nature and fair flowers has been and is natural to men. The symbolism is most natural, deep, and beautiful, expressing the possibility of life and

even of advance in the life after apparent decay. There is something very pathetic in so eager a grasping after some stay for hope.

All these natural symbols are insufficient. They are not proofs, they are only pretty analogies. But they are all that men have on which to build their hopes as to a future life apart from Christ. That future was vague, a region for hopes and wishes or fears, not for certainty, a region for poetic fancies. The thoughts of it were very faintly operative. Men asked, Shall we live again? Conscience seemed to answer, Yes! The instinct of immortality in men's souls grasped at these things as proofs of what it believed without them, but there was no clear light.

III. The clear light of certain hope which Christ's resurrection brings.

The grave in the garden reversed Adam's bringing of death into Eden.

Christ's resurrection as a fact bears on the belief in a future state as nothing else can.

It changes hope into certainty. It shows by actual example that death has nothing to do with the soul; that life is independent of the body; that a man after death is the same as before it. The risen Lord was the same in His relations to His disciples, the same in His love, in His memory, and in all else.

It changes shadowy hopes of continuous life into a solid certainty of resurrection life. The former is vague and powerless. It is impossible to conceive of the future with vividness unless as a bodily life. And this is the strength of the Christian conception of the future life, that corporeity is the end and goal of the redeemed man.

It changes terror and awe into joy, and opens up a future in which He is.

We shall be with Him.

We shall be like Him.

Now we can go back to all these incomplete analogies and use them confidently. Our faith does not rest upon them but upon what has actually been done on this earth.

Christ is 'the First fruits of them that slept.' What will the harvest be!

As the single little seed is poor and small by the side of the gorgeous flower that comes from it; so will be the change. 'God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.'

How then to think of death for ourselves and for those who are gone? Thankfully and hopefully.

## THE RESURRECTION MORNING

‘The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her.’—[JOHN xx. 1-18](#).

John’s purpose in his narrative of the resurrection is not only to establish the fact, but also to depict the gradual growth of faith in it, among the disciples. The two main incidents in this passage, the visit of Peter and John to the tomb and the appearance of our Lord to Mary, give the dawning of faith before sight and the rapturous faith born of sight. In the remainder of the chapter are two more instances of faith following vision, and the teaching of the whole is summed up in Christ’s words to the doubter, ‘Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!’

I. The open sepulchre and the bewildered alarm it excited. The act of resurrection took place before sunrise. ‘At midnight,’ probably, ‘the Bridegroom came.’ It was fitting that He who was to scatter the darkness of the grave should rise while darkness covered the earth,

and that no eye should behold 'how' that dead was 'raised up.' The earthquake and the descent of angels and the rolling away of the stone were after the tomb was empty.

John's note of time seems somewhat earlier than that of the other Gospels, but is not so much so as to require the supposition that Mary preceded the other women. She appears alone here, because the reason for mentioning her at all is to explain how Peter and John knew of the empty tomb, and she alone had been the informant. In these Eastern lands, 'as it began to dawn,' 'very early at the rising of the sun,' and 'while it was yet dark,' are times very near each other, and Mary may have reached the sepulchre a little before the others. Her own words, 'We know not,' show that she had spoken with others who had seen the empty grave. We must therefore suppose that she had with the others come to it, seen that the sacred corpse was gone and their spices useless, exchanged hurried words of alarm and bewilderment, and then had hastened away before the appearance of the angels.

The impulse to tell the leaders of the forlorn band the news, which she thinks to be so bad, was womanly and natural. It was not hope, but wonder and sorrow that quickened her steps as she ran through the still morning to find them. Whether they were in one house or not is uncertain; but, at all events, Peter's denial had not cut him off from his brethren, and the two who were so constantly associated before and afterwards were not far apart that morning. The disciple who had stood by the Cross to almost the last had an open heart, and probably an open house for the denier. 'Restore such an one, . . . considering thyself.'

Mary had seen the tomb empty, and springs to the conclusion that 'they'—some unknown persons—have taken away the dead body, which, with clinging love that tries to ignore death, she still calls 'the Lord.' Possibly she may have thought that the resting-place in Joseph's new sepulchre was only meant for temporary shelter (ver. 15). At all events the corpse was gone, and the fact suggested no hope to her. How often do we, in like manner, misinterpret as dark what is really pregnant with light, and blindly attribute to 'them' what Jesus does! A tone of mind thus remote from anticipation of the great fact is a precious proof of the historical truth of the resurrection; for here was no soil in which hallucinations would spring, and such people would not have believed Him risen unless they had seen Him living.

II. Peter and John at the tomb, the dawning of faith, and the continuance of bewildered wonder. In the account, we may observe, first, the characteristic conduct of each of the two. Peter is first to set out, and John follows, both men doing according to their kind. The younger runs faster than his companion. He looked into the tomb, and saw the wrappings lying; but the reverent awe which holds back finer natures kept him from venturing in. Peter is not said to have looked before entering. He loved with all his heart, but his love was impetuous and practical, and he went straight in, and felt no reason why he should pause. His boldness encouraged his friend, as the example of strong natures does. Some of my readers

will recall Bushnell's noble sermon on 'Unconscious Influence' from this incident, and I need say no more about it.

Observe, too, the further witness of the folded grave-clothes. John from outside had not seen the napkin, lying carefully rolled up apart from the other cloths. It was probably laid in a part of the tomb invisible from without. But the careful disposal of these came to him, when he saw them, with a great flash of illumination. There had been no hurried removal.

Here had been no hostile hands, or there would not have been this deliberation; nor friendly hands, or there would not have been such dishonour to the sacred dead as to carry away the body nude. What did it mean? Could He Himself have done for Himself what He had bade them do for Lazarus? Could He have laid aside the garments of the grave as needing them no more? 'They have taken away'—what if it were not 'they' but He? No trace of hurry or struggle was there. He did 'not go out with haste, nor go by flight,' but calmly, deliberately, in the majesty of His lordship over death, He rose from His slumber and left order in the land of confusion.

Observe, too, the birth of the Apostle's faith. John connects it with the sight of the folded garments. 'Believed' here must mean more than recognition of the fact that the grave was empty. The next clause seems to imply that it means belief in the resurrection. The scripture, which they 'knew' as scripture, was for John suddenly interpreted, and he was lifted out of the ignorance of its meaning, which till that moment he had shared with his fellow-disciples. Their failure to understand Christ's frequent distinct prophecies that He would rise again the third day has been thought incredible, but is surely intelligible enough if we remember how unexampled such a thing was, and how marvellous is our power of hearing and yet not hearing the plainest truth. We all in the course of our lives are lost in astonishment when things befall us which we have been plainly told will befall. The fulfilment of all divine promises (and threatenings) is a surprise, and no warnings beforehand teach one tithes so clearly as experience.

John believed, but Peter still was in the dark. Again the former had outrun his friend. His more sensitive nature, not to say his deeper love—for that would be unjust, since their love differed in quality more than in degree—had gifted him with a more subtle and swifter-working perception. Perhaps if Peter's heart had not been oppressed by his sin, he would have been readier to feel the sunshine of the wonderful hope. We condemn ourselves to the shade when we deny our Lord by deed or word.

III. The first appearance of the Lord, and revelation of the new form of intercourse. Nothing had been said of Mary's return to the tomb; but how could she stay away? The disciples might go, but she lingered, woman-like, to indulge in the bitter-sweet of tears. Eyes so filled are more apt to see angels. No wonder that these calm watchers, in their garb of purity and joy, had not been seen by the two men. The laws of such appearance are not those of ordinary optics. Spiritual susceptibility and need determine who shall see angels, and

who shall see but the empty place. Wonder and adoration held these bright forms there. They had hovered over the cradle and stood by the shepherds at Bethlehem, but they bowed in yet more awestruck reverence at the grave, and death revealed to them a deeper depth of divine love.

The presence of angels was a trifle to Mary, who had only one thought—the absence of her Lord. Surely that touch in her unmoved answer, as if speaking to men, is beyond the reach of art. She says ‘My Lord’ now, and ‘I know not,’ but otherwise repeats her former words, unmoved by any hope caught from John. Her clinging love needed more than an empty grave and folded clothes arid waiting angels to stay its tears, and she turned indifferently and wearily away from the interruption of the question to plunge again into her sorrow. Chrysostom suggests that she ‘turned herself’ because she saw in the angels’ looks that they saw Christ suddenly appearing behind her; but the preceding explanation seems better. Her not knowing Jesus might be accounted for by her absorbing grief. One who looked at white-robed angels, and saw nothing extraordinary, would give but a careless glance at the approaching figure, and might well fail to recognise Him. But probably, as in the case of the two travellers to Emmaus, her ‘eyes were holden,’ and the cause of non-recognition was not so much a change in Jesus as an operation on her.

Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that His voice, which was immediately to reveal Him, at first suggested nothing to her; and even His gentle question, with the significant addition to the angels’ words, in ‘Whom seekest thou?’ which indicated His knowledge that her tears fell for some person dear and lost, only made her think of Him as being ‘the gardener,’ and therefore probably concerned in the removal of the body. If He were so, He would be friendly; and so she ventured her pathetic petition, which does not name Jesus (so full is her mind of the One, that she thinks everybody must know whom she means), and which so overrated her own strength in saying, ‘I will take Him away,’ The first words of the risen Christ are on His lips yet to all sad hearts. He seeks our confidences, and would have us tell Him the occasions of our tears. He would have us recognise that all our griefs and all our desires point to one Person—Himself—as the one real Object of our ‘seeking,’ whom finding, we need weep no more.

Verse 16 tells us that Mary turned herself to see Him when He next spoke, so that, at the close of her first answer to Him, she must have once more resumed her gaze into the tomb, as if she despaired of the newcomer giving the help she had asked.

Who can say anything about that transcendent recognition, in which all the stooping love of the risen Lord is smelted into one word, and the burst of rapture, awe, astonishment, and devotion pours itself through the narrow channel of one other? If this narrative is the work of some anonymous author late in the second century, he is indeed a ‘Great Unknown,’ and has managed to imagine one of the two or three most pathetic ‘situations’ in literature. Surely it is more reasonable to suppose him no obscure genius, but a well-known recorder

of what he had seen, and knew for fact. Christ's calling by name ever reveals His loving presence. We may be sure that He knows us by name, and we should reply by the same swift cry of absolute submission as sprung to Mary's lips. 'Rabboni! Master!' is the fit answer to His call.

But Mary's exclamation was imperfect in that it expressed the resumption of no more than the old bond, and her gladness needed enlightenment. Things were not to be as they had been. Christ's 'Mary!' had indeed assured her of His faithful remembrance and of her present place in His love; but when she clung to His feet she was seeking to keep what she had to learn to give up. Therefore Jesus, who invited the touch which was to establish faith and banish doubt ([Luke xxiv. 39](#); [John xx. 27](#)), bids her unclasp her hands, and gently instils the ending of the blessed past by opening to her the superior joys of the begun future. His words contain for us all the very heart of our possible relation to Him, and teach us that we need envy none who companied with Him here. His ascension to the Father is the condition of our truest approach to Him. His prohibition encloses a permission. 'Touch Me not! for I am not yet ascended,' implies 'When I am, you may.'

Further, the ascended Christ is still our Brother. Neither the mystery of death nor the impending mystery of dominion broke the tie. Again, the Resurrection is the beginning of Ascension, and is only then rightly understood when it is considered as the first upward step to the throne. 'I ascend,' not 'I have risen, and will soon leave you,' as if the Ascension only began forty days after on Olivet. It is already in process. Once more the ascended Christ, our Brother still, and capable of the touch of reverent love, is yet separated from us by the character, even while united to us by the fact, of His filial and dependent relation to God. He cannot say 'Our Father' as if standing on the common human ground. He is 'Son' as we are not, and we are 'sons' through Him, and can only call God our Father because He is Christ's.

Such were the immortal hopes and new thoughts which Mary hastened from the presence of her recovered Lord to bring to the disciples. Fragrant though but partially understood, they were like half-opened blossoms from the tree of life planted in the midst of that garden, to bloom unfading, and ever disclosing new beauty in believing hearts till the end of time.



## THE RISEN LORD'S CHARGE AND GIFT

‘Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.’—[JOHN xx. 21-23](#).

The day of the Resurrection had been full of strange rumours, and of growing excitement. As evening fell, some of the disciples, at any rate, gathered together, probably in the upper room. They were brave, for in spite of the Jews they dared to assemble; they were timid, for they barred themselves in ‘for fear of the Jews.’ No doubt in little groups they were eagerly discussing what had happened that day. Fuel was added to the fire by the return of the two from Emmaus. And then, at once, the buzz of conversation ceased, for ‘He Himself, with His human air,’ stood there in the midst, with the quiet greeting on His lips, which might have come from any casual stranger, and minimised the separation that was now ending: ‘Peace be unto you!’

We have two accounts of that evening’s interview which remarkably supplement each other. They deal with two different parts of it. John begins where Luke ends. The latter Evangelist dwells mainly on the disciples’ fears that it was some ghostly appearance that they saw, and on the removal of these by the sight, and perhaps the touch, of the hands and the feet. John says nothing of the terror, but Luke’s account explains John’s statement that ‘He showed them His hands and His side,’ and that, ‘Then were the disciples glad,’ the joy expelling the fear. Luke’s account also, by dwelling on the first part of the interview, explains what else is unexplained in John’s narrative, viz. the repetition of the salutation, ‘Peace be unto you!’ Our Lord thereby marked off the previous portion of the conversation as being separate, and a whole in itself. Their doubts were dissipated, and now something else was to begin. They who were sure of the risen Lord, and had had communion with Him, were capable of receiving a deeper peace, and so ‘Jesus said to them again, Peace be unto you!’ and thereby inaugurated the second part of the interview.

Luke’s account also helps us in another and very important way. John simply says that ‘the disciples were gathered together,’ and that might mean the Eleven only. Luke is more specific, and tells us what is of prime importance for understanding the whole incident, that ‘the Eleven. . . and they that were with them’ were assembled. This interview, the crown of the appearances on Easter Day, is marked as being an interview with the assembled body of disciples, whom the Lord, having scattered their doubts, and laid the deep benediction of His peace upon their hearts, then goes on to invest with a sacred mission, ‘As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you’; to equip them with the needed power, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost’; and to unfold to them the solemn issues of their work, ‘Whose sins ye remit

they are remitted; and whose sins ye retain they are retained.' The message of that Easter evening is for us all; and so I ask you to look at these three points.

I. The Christian Mission.

I have already said that the clear understanding of the persons to whom the words were spoken, goes far to interpret the significance of the words. Here we have at the very beginning, the great thought that every Christian man and woman is sent by Jesus. The possession of what preceded this charge is the thing, and the only thing, that fits a man to receive it, and whoever possesses these is thereby despatched into the world as being Christ's envoy and representative. And what are these preceding experiences? The vision of the risen Christ, the touch of His hands, the peace that He breathed over believing souls, the gladness that sprang like a sunny fountain in the hearts that had been so dry and dark. Those things constituted the disciples' qualification for being sent, and these things were themselves—even apart from the Master's words—their sending out on their future life's-work. Thus, whoever—and thank God I am addressing many who come under the category!—whoever has seen the Lord, has been in touch with Him, and has felt his heart filled with gladness, is the recipient of this great commission. There is no question here of the prerogative of a class, nor of the functions of an order; it is a question of the universal aspect of the Christian life in its relation to the Master who sends, and the world into which it is sent.

We Nonconformists pride ourselves upon our freedom from what we call 'sacerdotalism.' Ay! and we Nonconformists are quite willing to assert our priesthood in opposition to the claims of a class, and are as willing to forget it, should the question of the duties of the priest come into view. You do not believe in priests, but a great many of you believe that it is ministers that are 'sent,' and that you have no charge. Officialism is the dry-rot of all the Churches, and is found as rampant amongst democratic Nonconformists as amongst the more hierarchical communities. Brethren! you are included in Christ's words of sending on this errand, if you are included in this greeting of 'Peace be unto you!' 'I send,' not the clerical order, not the priest, but 'you,' because you have seen the Lord, and been glad, and heard the low whisper of His benediction creeping into your hearts.

Mark, too, how our Lord reveals much of Himself, as well as of our position, when He thus speaks. For He assumes here the royal tone, and claims to possess as absolute authority over the lives and work of all Christian people as the Father exercised when He sent the Son. But we must further ask ourselves the question, what is the parallel that our Lord here draws, not only between His action in sending us, and the Father's action in sending Him, but also between the attitude of the Son who was sent, and of the disciples whom He sends? And the answer is this—the work of Jesus Christ is continued by, prolonged in, and carried on henceforward through, the work that He lays upon His servants. Mark the exact expression that our Lord here uses. 'As My Father hath sent,' that is a past action, continuing its consequences in the present. It is not 'as My Father did send once,' but as 'My Father hath sent,'

which means 'is also at present sending,' and continues to send. Which being translated into less technical phraseology is just this, that we here have our Lord presenting to us the thought that, though in a new form, His work continues during the ages, and is now being wrought through His servants. What He does by another, He does by Himself. We Christian men and women do not understand our function in the world, unless we have realised this: 'Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ' and His interests and His work are entrusted to our hands.

How shall the servants continue and carry on the work of the Master? The chief way to do it is by proclaiming everywhere that finished work on which the world's hopes depend. But note,—'as My Father hath sent Me, so send I you,'—then we are not only to carry on His work in the world, but if one might venture to say so, we are to reproduce His attitude towards God and the world. He was sent to be 'the Light of the world'; and so are we. He was sent to 'seek and to save that which was lost'; so are we. He was sent not to do His own will, but the will of the Father that sent Him; so are we. He took upon Himself with all cheerfulness the office to which He was appointed, and said, 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me,—and to finish His work'; and that must be our voice too. He was sent to pity, to look upon the multitudes with compassion, to carry to them the healing of His touch, and the sympathy of His heart; so must we. We are the representatives of Jesus Christ, and if I might dare to use such a phrase, He is to be incarnated again in the hearts, and manifested again in the lives, of His servants. Many weak eyes, that would be dazzled and hurt if they were to gaze on the sun, may look at the clouds cradled by its side, and dyed with its lustre, and learn something of the radiance and the glory of the illuminating light from the illuminated vapour. And thus, 'as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.'

Now let us turn to

## II. The Christian Equipment.

'He breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost!' The symbolical action reminds us of the Creation story, when into the nostrils was breathed 'the breath of life, and man became a living soul.' The symbol is but a symbol, but what it teaches us is that every Christian man who has passed through the experiences which make him Christ's envoy, receives the equipment of a new life, and that that life is the gift of the risen Lord. This Prometheus came from the dead with the spark of life guarded in His pierced hands, and He bestowed it upon us; for the Spirit of life, which is the Spirit of Christ, is granted to all Christian men. Dear brethren! we have not lived up to the realities of our Christian confession, unless into our death has come, and there abides, this life derived from Jesus Himself, the communication of which goes along with all faith in Him.

But the gift which Jesus brought to that group of timid disciples in the upper room did not make superfluous the further gift on the day of Pentecost. The communication of the divine Spirit to men runs parallel with, depends on, and follows, the revelation of divine

truth, so the ascended Lord gave more of that life to the disciples, who had been made capable of more of it by the fact of beholding His ascension, than the risen Lord could give on that Easter Day. But whilst thus there are measures and degrees, the life is given to every believer in correspondence with the clearness and the contents of his faith.

It is the power that will fit any of us for the work for which we are sent into the world. If we are here to represent Jesus Christ, and if it is true of us that 'as He is, so are we, in this world,' that likeness can only come about by our receiving into our spirits a kindred life which will effloresce and manifest itself to men in kindred beauty of foliage and of fruit. If we are to be 'the lights of the world,' our lamps must be fed with oil. If we are to be Christ's representatives, we must have Christ's life in us. Here, too, is the only source of strength and life to us Christian people, when we look at the difficulties of our task and measure our own feebleness against the work that lies before us. I suppose no man has ever tried honestly to be what Christ wished him to be amidst his fellows, whether as preacher or teacher or guide in any fashion, who has not hundreds of times clasped his hands in all but despair, and said, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' That is the temper into which the power will come. The rivers run in the valleys, and it is the lowly sense of our own unfitness for the task which yet presses upon us, and imperatively demands to be done, that makes us capable of receiving that divine gift.

It is for lack of it that so much of so-called 'Christian effort' comes to nothing. The priests may pile the wood upon the altar, and compass it all day long with vain cries, and nothing happens. It is not till the fire comes down from heaven that sacrifice and altar and wood and water in the trench, are licked up and converted into fiery light. So, dear brethren! it is because the Christian Church as a whole, and we as individual members of it, so imperfectly realise the A B C of our faith, our absolute dependence on the inbreathed life of Jesus Christ, to fit us for any of our work, that so much of our work is ploughing the sands, and so often we labour for vanity and spend our strength for nought. What is the use of a mill full of spindles and looms until the fire-born impulse comes rushing through the pipes? Then they begin to move.

Let me remind you, too, that the words which our Lord here employs about these great gifts, when accurately examined, do lead us to the thought that we, even we, are not altogether passive in the reception of that gift. For the expression, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost' might, with more completeness of signification, be rendered, 'take ye the Holy Ghost.' True, the outstretched hand is nothing, unless the giving hand is stretched out too. True, the open palm and the clutching fingers remain empty, unless the open palm above drops the gift. But also true, things in the spiritual realm that are given have to be asked for, because asking opens the heart for their entrance. True, that gift was given once for all, and continuously, but the appropriation and the continual possession of it largely depend upon ourselves. There must be desire before there can be possession. If a man does not take his pitcher to

the fountain the pitcher remains empty, though the fountain never ceases to spring. There must be taking by patient waiting. The old Friends had a lovely phrase when they spoke about 'waiting for the springing of the life.' If we hold out a tremulous hand, and our cup is not kept steady, the falling water will not enter it, and much will be spilt upon the ground. Wait on the Lord, and the life will rise like a tide in the heart. There must be a taking by the faithful use of what we possess. 'To him that hath shall be given.' There must be a taking by careful avoidance of what would hinder. In the winter weather the water supply sometimes fails in a house. Why? Because there is a plug of ice in the service-pipe. Some of us have a plug of ice, and so the water has not come,

'Take the Holy Spirit!'

Now, lastly, we have here

III. The Christian power over sin.

I am not going to enter upon controversy. The words which close our Lord's great charge here have been much misunderstood by being restricted. It is eminently necessary to remember here that they were spoken to the whole community of Christian souls. The harm that has been done by their restriction to the so-called priestly function of absolution has been, not only the monstrous claims which have been thereon founded, but quite as much the obscuration of the large effects that follow from the Christian discharge by all believers of the office of representing Jesus Christ.

We must interpret these words in harmony with the two preceding points, the Christian mission and the Christian equipment. So interpreted, they lead us to a very plain thought which I may put thus. This same Apostle tells us in his letter that 'Jesus Christ was manifested to take away sin.' His work in this world, which we are to continue, was 'to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.' We continue that work when,—as we have all, if Christians, the right to do—we lift up our voices with triumphant confidence, and call upon our brethren to 'behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!' The proclamation has a twofold effect, according as it is received or rejected; to him who receives it his sins melt away, and the preacher of forgiveness through Christ has the right to say to his brother, 'Thy sins are forgiven because thou believest on Him.' The rejecter or the neglecter binds his sin upon himself by his rejection or neglect. The same message is, as the Apostle puts it, 'a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.' These words are the best commentary on this part of my text. The same heat, as the old Fathers used to say, 'softens wax and hardens clay.' The message of the word will either couch a blind eye, and let in the light, or draw another film of obscuration over the visual orb.

And so, Christian men and women have to feel that to them is entrusted a solemn message, that they walk in the world charged with a mighty power, that by the preaching of the Word, and by their own utterance of the forgiving mercy of the Lord Jesus, they may 'remit' or 'retain' not only the punishment of sin, but sin itself. How tender, how diligent,

how reverent, how—not bowed down, but—erect under the weight of our obligations, we should be, if we realised that solemn thought!

## THOMAS AND JESUS

‘And after eight days, again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus.’—[JOHN xx. 26](#).

There is nothing more remarkable about the narrative of the resurrection, taken as a whole, than the completeness with which our Lord’s appearances met all varieties of temperament, condition, and spiritual standing. Mary, the lover; Peter, the penitent; the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, the thinkers; Thomas, the stiff unbeliever—the presence of the Christ is enough for them all; it cures those that need cure, and gladdens those that need gladdening. I am not going to do anything so foolish as to try to tell over again, less vividly, this well-known story. We all remember its outlines, I suppose: the absence of Thomas from Christ’s first meeting with the assembled disciples on Easter evening; the dogged disbelief with which he met their testimony; his arrogant assumption of the right to lay down the conditions on which he should believe, and Christ’s gracious acceptance of the conditions; the discovery when they were offered that they were not needful; the burst of glad conviction which lifted him to the loftiest height reached while Christ was on earth, and then the summing up of all in our Lord’s words—‘Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed!’—the last Beatitude, that links us and all the generations yet to come with the story, and is like a finger pointing to it, as containing very special lessons for them all.

I simply seek to try to bring out the force and instructiveness of the story. The first point is—

### I. The isolation that misses the sight of the Christ.

‘Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.’ No reason is assigned. The absence may have been purely accidental, but the specification of Thomas as ‘one of the Twelve,’ seems to suggest that his absence was regarded by the Evangelist as a dereliction of apostolic duty; and the cause of it may be found, I think, with reasonable probability, if we take into account the two other facts that the same Evangelist records concerning this Apostle. One is his exclamation, in which a constitutional tendency to accept the blackest possibilities as certainties, blends very strangely and beautifully with an intense and brave devotion to his Master. ‘Let us also go,’ said Thomas, when Christ announced His intention, but a few days before the Passion, of returning to the grave of Lazarus, ‘that we may die with Him.’ ‘He is going to His death, that I am sure of, and I am going to be beside Him even in His death.’ A constitutional pessimist! The only other notice that we have of him is that he broke in—with apparent irreverence which was not real,—with a brusque contradiction of Christ’s saying that they knew the way, and they knew His goal. ‘Lord! we know not whither Thou goest’—there spoke pained love fronting the black prospect of eternal separation,—‘and how can we know the way?’—there spoke almost impatient despair.

So is not that the kind of man who on the Resurrection day would have been saying to himself, even more decidedly and more bitterly than the two questioning thinkers on the road to Emmaus had said it, 'We trusted that this had been He, but it is all over now'? The keystone was struck out of the arch, and this brick tumbled away of itself. The hub was taken out of the wheel, and the spokes fell apart. The divisive tendency was begun, as I have had occasion to remark in other sermons. Thomas did the very worst thing that a melancholy man can do, went away to brood in a corner by himself, and so to exaggerate all his idiosyncrasies, to distort the proportion of truth, to hug his despair, by separating himself from his fellows. Therefore he lost what they got, the sight of the Lord. He 'was not with them when Jesus came.' Would he not have been better in the upper room than gloomily turning over in his mind the dissolution of the fair company and the shipwreck of all his hopes?

May we not learn a lesson? I venture to apply these words, dear friends, to our gatherings for worship. The worst thing that a man can do when disbelief, or doubt, or coldness shrouds his sky, and blots out the stars, is to go away alone and shut himself up with his own, perhaps morbid, or, at all events, disturbing thoughts. The best thing that he can do is to go amongst his fellows. If the sermon does not do him any good, the prayers and the praises and the sense of brotherhood will help him. If a fire is going out, draw the dying coals close together, and they will make each other break into a flame. One great reason for some of the less favourable features that modern Christianity presents, is that men are beginning to think less than they ought to do, and less than they used to do, of the obligation and the blessing, whatever their spiritual condition, of gathering together for the worship of God. But, further, there is a far wider thought than that here, which I have already referred to, and which I do not need to dwell upon, namely, that, although, of course, there are very plain limits to be put to the principle, yet it is a principle, that solitude is not the best medicine for any disturbed or saddened soul. It is true that 'solitude is the mother-country of the strong,' and that unless we are accustomed to live very much alone, we shall not live very much with God. But on the other hand, if you cut yourself off from the limiting, and therefore developing, society of your fellows, you will rust, you will become what they call eccentric. Your idiosyncrasies will swell into monstrosities, your peculiarities will not be subjected to the gracious process of pruning which society with your fellows, and especially with Christian hearts, will bring to them. And in every way you will be more likely to miss the Christ than if you were kindly with your kind, and went up to the house of God in company.

Take the next point that is here:

II. The stiff incredulity that prescribed terms.

When Thomas came back to his brethren, they met him with the witness that they had seen the Lord, and he met them as they had met the witnesses that brought the same message to them. They had thought the women's words 'idle tales.' Thomas gives them back their own incredulity. I need not remind you of what I have already had occasion to say, how



much this frank acknowledgment that none of these, who were afterwards to be witnesses of the Resurrection to the world, accepted testimony to the Resurrection as enough to convince them, enhances the worth of their testimony, and how entirely it shatters the conception that the belief in the Resurrection was a mist that rose from the undrained swamps of their own heated imaginations.

But notice how Thomas exaggerated their position, and took up a far more defiant tone than any of them had done. He is called 'doubting Thomas.' He was no doubter. Flat, frank, dogged disbelief, and not hesitation or doubt, was his attitude. The very form in which he puts his requirement shows how he was hugging his unbelief, and how he had no idea that what he asked would ever be granted. 'Unless I have so-and-so I will not,' indicates an altogether spiritual attitude from what 'If I have so-and-so, I will,' would have indicated. The one is the language of willingness to be persuaded, the other is a token of a determination to be obstinate. What right had he—what right has any man—to say, 'So-and-so must be made plain to me, or I will not accept a certain truth'? You have a right to ask for satisfactory evidence; you have no right to make up your minds beforehand what that must necessarily be. Thomas showed his hand not only in the form of his expression, not only in his going beyond his province and prescribing the terms of surrender, but also in the terms which he prescribed. True, he is only saying to the other Apostles, 'I will give in if I have what you had,' for Jesus Christ had said to them, 'Handle Me and see!' But although thus they could say nothing in opposition, it is clear that he was asking more than was needful, and more than he had any right to ask. And he shows his hand, too, in another way. 'I will not believe!'—what business had he, what business have you, to bring any question of will into the act of belief or credence? Thus, in all these four points, the form of the demand, the fact of the demand, the substance of the demand, and the implication in it that to give or withhold assent was a matter to be determined by inclination, this man stands not as an example of a doubter, but as an example, of which there are too many copies amongst us always, of a determined disbeliever and rejecter.

So I come to the third point, and that is:

III. The revelation that turned the denier into a rapturous confessor.

What a strange week that must have been between the two Sundays—that of the Resurrection and the next! Surely it would have been kinder if the Christ had not left the disciples, with their new-found, tremulous, raw conviction. It would have been less kind if He had been with them, for there is nothing that is worse for the solidity of a man's spiritual development than that it should be precipitated, and new thoughts must have time to take the shape of the mind into which they come, and to mould the shape of the mind into which they come. So they were left to quiet reflection, to meditation, to adjust their thoughts, to get to understand the bearings of the transcendent fact. And as a mother will go a little way off from her little child, in order to encourage it to try to walk, they were left alone to make

experiments of that self-reliance which was also reliance on Him, and which was to be their future and their permanent condition. So the week passed, and they became steadier and quieter, and began to be familiar with the thought, and to see some glimpses of what was involved in the mighty fact, of a risen Saviour. Then He comes back again, and when He comes He singles out the unbeliever, leaving the others alone for the moment, and He gives him back, granted, his arrogant conditions. How much ashamed of them Thomas must have been when he heard them quoted by the Lord's own lips! How different they would sound from what they had sounded when, in the self-sufficiency of his obstinate determination, he had blurted them out in answer to his brethren's testimony! There is no surer way of making a good man ashamed of his wild words than just to say them over again to him when he is calm and cool. Christ's granting the request was Christ's sharpest rebuke of the request. But there was not only the gracious and yet chastising granting of the foolish desire, but there was a penetrating warning: 'Be not faithless, but believing.' What did that mean? Well, it meant this: 'It is not a question of evidence, Thomas; it is a question of disposition. Your incredulity is not due to your not having enough to warrant your belief, but to your tendency and attitude of mind and heart.' There is light enough in the sun; it is our eyes that are wrong, and deep below most questions, even of intellectual credence, lies the disposition of the man. The ultimate truths of religion cannot be matters of demonstration any more than the fundamental truths of any science can be proved; any more than Euclid's axioms can be demonstrated; any more than the sense of beauty or the ear for music depend on the understanding. 'Be not faithless, but believing.' The eye that is sound will see the light.

And there is another lesson here. The words of our Lord, literally rendered, are, 'become not faithless, but believing.' There are two tendencies at work with us, and the one or the other will progressively lay hold upon us, and we shall increasingly yield to it. You can cultivate the habit of incredulity until you descend into the class of the faithless; or you can cultivate the opposite habit and disposition until you rise to the high level of a settled and sovereign belief.

It is clear that Thomas did not reach forth his hand and touch. The rush of instantaneous conviction swept him along and bore him far away from the state of mind which had asked for such evidence. Our Lord's words must have pierced his heart, as he thought: 'Then He was here all the while; He heard my wild words; He loves me still.' As Nathanael, when he knew that Jesus had seen him under the fig-tree, broke out with the exclamation, 'Rabbi! Thou art the Son of God,' so Thomas, smitten as by a lightning flash with the sense of Jesus' all-embracing knowledge and all-forgiving love, forgets his incredulity and breaks into the rapturous confession, the highest ever spoken while He was on earth: 'My Lord and my God!' So swiftly did his whole attitude change. It was as when the eddying volumes of smoke in some great conflagration break into sudden flame, the ruddier and hotter, the blacker

they were. Sight may have made Thomas believe that Jesus was risen, but it was something other and more inward than sight that opened his lips to cry, 'My Lord and my God!' Finally, we note—

IV. A last Beatitude that extends to all generations.

'Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.' I need not do more than just in a sentence remind you that we shall very poorly understand either this saying or this Gospel or the greater part of the New Testament, if we do not make it very clear to our minds that 'believing' is not credence only but trust. The object of the Christian's faith is not a proposition; it is not a dogma nor a truth, but a Person. And the act of faith is not an acceptance of a given fact, a Resurrection or any other, as true, but it is a reaching out of the whole nature to Him and a resting upon Him. I have said that Thomas had no right to bring his will to bear on the act of belief, considered as the intellectual act of accepting a thing as true. But Christian faith, being more than intellectual belief, does involve the activity of the will. Credence is the starting-point, but it is no more. There may be belief in the truth of the gospel and not a spark of faith in the Christ revealed by the gospel.

Even in regard to that lower kind of belief, the assent which does not rest on sense has its own blessing. We sometimes are ready to think that it would have been easier to believe if 'we had seen with our eyes, and our hands had handled the (incarnate) Word of Life' but that is a mistake.

This generation, and all generations that have not seen Him, are not in a less advantageous position in regard either to credence or to trust, than were those that companied with Him on earth, and the blessing Which He breathed out in that upper room comes floating down the ages like a perfume diffused through the atmosphere, and is with us fragrant as it was in the 'days of His flesh.' There is nothing in the world's history comparable to the warmth and closeness of conscious contact with that Christ, dead for nearly nineteen centuries now, which is the experience today of thousands of Christian men and women. All other names pass, and as they recede through the ages, thickening veils of oblivion, mists of forgetfulness, gather round them. They melt away into the fog and are forgotten. Why is it that one Person, and one Person only, triumphs even in this respect over space and time, and is the same close Friend with whom millions of hearts are in loving touch, as He was to those that gathered around Him upon earth?

What is the blessing of this faith that does not rest on sense, and only in a small measure on testimony or credence? Part of its blessing is that it delivers us from the tyranny of sense, sets us free from the crowding oppression of 'things seen and temporal'; draws back the veil and lets us behold 'the things that are unseen and eternal.' Faith is sight, the sight of the inward eye. It is the direct perception of the unseen. It sees Him who is invisible. The vision which is given to the eye of faith is more real in the true sense of that word, more substantial in the true sense of that word, more reliable and more near than that sight by which the

bodily eye beholds external things. We see, when we trust, greater things than when we look. The blessing of blessings is that the faith which triumphs over the things seen and temporal, brings into every life the presence of the unseen Lord.

Brethren! do not confound credence with trust. Remember that trust does involve an element of will. Ask yourselves if the things seen and temporal are great enough, lasting enough, real enough to satisfy you, and then remember whose lips said, 'Become not faithless but believing,' and breathed His last Beatitude upon those 'who have not seen and yet have believed.' We may all have that blessing lying like dew upon us, amidst the dust and scorching heat of the things seen and temporal. We shall have it, if our heart's trust is set on Him, whom one of the listeners on that Sunday spoke of long after, in words which seem to echo that promise, as 'Jesus in whom though now ye see Him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.'

## THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE

‘And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.’—[JOHN xx. 30, 31](#).

It is evident that these words were originally the close of this Gospel, the following chapter being an appendix, subsequently added by the writer himself. In them we have the Evangelist’s own acknowledgment of the incompleteness of his Gospel, and his own statement of the purpose which he had in view in composing it. That purpose was first of all a doctrinal one, and he tells us that in carrying it out he omitted many things that he could have put in if he had chosen. But that doctrinal purpose was subordinate to a still further aim. His object was not only to present the truth that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, but to present it in such a way as to induce his readers to believe in that Christ. And he desired that they might have faith in order that they might have life.

Now, it is a very good old canon in judging of a book that ‘in every work’ we are to ‘regard the writer’s end,’ and if that simple principle had been applied to this Gospel, a great many of the features in it which have led to some difficulty would have been seen to be naturally explained by the purpose which the Evangelist had in view.

But this text may be applied very much more widely than to John’s Gospel. We may use it to point our thoughts to the strange silences and incompletenesses of the whole of Revelation, and to the explanation of these incompletenesses by the consideration of the purpose which it all had in view. In that sense I desire to look at these words before us.

I. First, then, we have here set forth the incompleteness of Scripture.

Take this Gospel first. Anybody who looks at it can see that it is a fragment. It is not meant to be a biography; it is avowedly a selection, and a selection under the influence, as I shall have to show you presently, of a distinct dogmatic purpose. There is nothing in it about Christ’s birth, nothing in it about His baptism, nor about His selection of His Apostles. There is scarcely anything about the facts of His outward life at all. There is scarcely a word about the whole of His ministry in Galilee. There is not one of His parables, there are only seven of His miracles before the Resurrection, and two of these occur also in the other Evangelists. There is scarcely any of His ethical teaching; there is not a word about the Lord’s Supper.

And so I might go on enumerating many remarkable gaps in this Gospel. Nearly half of it is taken up with the incidents of one week at the end of His life, and the incidents of and after the Resurrection. Of the remainder—by far the larger portion consists of several conversations which are hung upon miracles that seem to be related principally for the sake of these. The whole of the phenomena show us at once the fragmentary character of this Gospel as stamped upon the very surface.

And when we turn to the other three, the same thing is true, though less strikingly so. Why was it that in the Church, after the completion of the Scriptural canon, there sprang up a whole host of Apocryphal Gospels, full of childish stories of events which people felt had been passed over with strange silence, in the teachings of the four Evangelists: stories of His childhood, for instance, and stories about what happened between His death and His resurrection? A great many miracles were added to those that have been told us in Scripture. The condensed hints of the canonical Gospels received a great expansion, which indicated how much their silence about certain points had been felt. What a tiny pamphlet they make! Is it not strange that the greatest event in the world's history should be told in such brief outline, and that here, too, the mustard seed, 'less than the least of all seeds,' should have become such a great tree? Put the four Gospels down by the side of the two thick octavo volumes, which it is the regulation thing to write nowadays, as the biography of any man that has a name at all, and you will feel their incompleteness as biographies. They are but a pen-and-ink drawing of the Sun! And yet, although they be so tiny that you might sit down and read them all in an evening over the fire, is it not strange that they have stamped on the mind of the world an image so deep and so sharp, of such a character as the world never saw elsewhere? They are fragments, but they have left a symmetrical and an unique impression on the consciousness of the whole world.

And then, if you turn to the whole Book, the same thing is true, though in a modified sense there. I have no time to dwell upon that fruitful field, but the silence of Scripture is quite as eloquent as its speech. Think, for instance, of how many things in the Bible are taken for granted which one would not expect to be taken for granted in a book of religious instruction. It takes for granted the being of a God. It takes for granted our relations to Him. It takes for granted our moral nature. In its later portions, at all events, it takes for granted the future life. Look at how the Bible, as a whole, passes by, without one word of explanation or alleviation, a great many of the difficulties which gather round some of its teaching. For instance, we find no attempt to explain the divine nature of our Lord; or the existence of the three Persons in the Godhead. It has not a word to say in explanation of the mystery of prayer; or of the difficulty of reconciling the Omnipotent will of God on the one hand, with our own free will on the other. It has not a word to explain, though many a word to proclaim and enforce, the fact of Christ's death as the atonement for the sins of the whole world. Observe, too, how scanty the information on points on which the heart craves for more light. How closely, for instance, the veil is kept over the future life! How many questions which are not prompted by mere curiosity, our sorrow and our love ask in vain!

Nor is the incompleteness of Scripture as a historical book less marked. Nations and men appear on its pages abruptly, rending the curtain of oblivion, and striding to the front of the stage for a moment, and then they disappear, swallowed up of night. It has no care to tell the stories of any of its heroes, except for so long as they were the organs of that divine

breath, which, breathed through the weakest reed, makes music. The self-revelation of God, not the acts and fortunes of even His noblest servants, is the theme of the Book. It is full of gaps about matters that any sciolist or philosopher or theologian would have filled up for it. There it stands, a Book unique in the world's history, unique in what it says, and no less unique in what it does not say.

'Many other things truly did' that divine Spirit in His march through the ages, 'which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe.'

II. And so that brings me next to say a word or two about the more immediate purpose which explains all these gaps and incompletenesses.

John's Gospel, and the other three Gospels, and the whole Bible, New Testament and Old, have this for their purpose, to produce in men's hearts the faith in Jesus as 'the Christ' and as 'the Son of God.'

I need not speak at length about this one Gospel with any special regard to that thought. I have already said that the Evangelist avows that his work is a selection, that he declares that the purpose that determined his selection was doctrinal, and that he picked out facts which would tend to represent Jesus Christ to us in the twofold capacity,—as the Christ, the Fulfiller of all the expectations and promises of the Old Covenant, and as the Son of God. The one of these titles is a name of office, the other a name of nature; the one declares that He had come to be, and to do, all to which types and prophecies and promises had dimly pointed, and the other declares that He was 'the Eternal Word,' which 'in the beginning was with God and was God,' and was manifest here upon earth to us.

This was his purpose, and this representation of Jesus Christ is that which shapes all the facts and all the phenomena of this Gospel, from the very first words of it to its close.

And so, although it is wide from my present subject, I may just make one parenthetical remark, to the effect that it is ridiculous in the face of this statement for 'critics' to say, as some of them do: 'The author of the fourth Gospel has not told us this, that, and the other incident in Christ's life, therefore, he did not know it.' Then some of them will draw the conclusion that John's Gospel is not to be trusted in the given case, because he does not give us a certain incident, and others might draw the conclusion that the other three Evangelists are not to be trusted because they do give it us. And the whole fabric is built up upon a blunder, and would have been avoided if people had listened when John said to them: 'I knew a great many things about Jesus Christ, but I did not put them down here because I was not writing a biography, but preaching a gospel; and what I wanted to proclaim was that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.'

But now we may extend that a great deal further. It is just as true about the whole New Testament. The four Gospels are written to tell us these two facts about Christ. They are none of them merely biographies; as such they are singularly deficient, as we have seen. But they are biographies plus a doctrine; and the biography is told mainly for the sake of carrying

this twofold truth into men's understandings and hearts, that Jesus is, first of all, the Christ, and second, the Son of God.

And then comes the rest of the New Testament, which is nothing more than the working out of the theoretical and practical consequence of these great truths. All the Epistles, the Book of Revelation, and the history of the Church, as embodied in the Acts of the Apostles,—all these are but the consequences of that fundamental truth; and the whole of Scripture in its later portions is but the drawing of the inferences and the presenting of the duties that flow from the facts that 'Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.'

And what about the Old Testament? Why, this about it: that whatever may be the conclusion as to the date and authorship of any of the books in it,—and I am not careful to contend about these at present;—and whatever a man may believe about the verbal prophecies which most of us recognise there,—there is stamped unmistakably upon the whole system, of which the Old Testament is the record, an onward-looking attitude. It is all anticipatory of 'good things to come,' and of a Person who will bring them. Sacrifice, sacred offices, such as priesthood and kingship, and the whole history of Israel, have their faces turned to the future. 'They that went before, and they that followed after, cried "Hosanna! Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord!"' This Christ towers up above the history of the world and the process of revelation, like Mount Everest among the Himalayas. To that great peak all the country on the one side runs upwards, and from it all the valleys on the other descend; and the springs are born there which carry verdure and life over the world.

Christ, the Son of God, is the centre of Scripture; and the Book— whatever be the historical facts about its origin, its authorship, and the date of the several portions of which it is composed—the Book is a unity, because there is driven right through it, like a core of gold, either in the way of prophecy and onward-looking anticipation, or in the way of history and grateful retrospect, the reference to the one 'Name that is above every name,' the name of the Christ, the Son of God.

And all its incompleteness, its fragmentariness, its carelessness about persons, are intended, as are the slight parts in a skilful artist's handiwork, to emphasise the beauty and the sovereignty of that one central Figure on which all lights are concentrated, and on which the painter has lavished all the resources of his art. So God—for God is the Author of the Bible—on this great canvas has painted much in sketchy outline, and left much unfilled in, that every eye may be fixed on the central Figure, the Christ of God, on whose head comes down the Dove, and round whom echoes the divine declaration: 'This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

But it is not merely in order to represent Jesus as the Christ of God that these things are written, but it is that that representation may become the object of our faith. If the intention of Scripture had been simply to establish the fact that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God, it might have been done in a very different fashion. A theological treatise would have



been enough to do that. But if the object be that men should not only accept with their understandings the truth concerning Christ's office and nature, but that their hearts should go out to Him, and that they should rest their sinful souls upon Him as the Son of God and the Christ, then there is no other way to accomplish that, but by the history of His life and the manifestation of His heart. If the object were simply to make us know about Christ, we do not need a Book like this; but if the object is to lead us to put our faith in Him, then we must have what we have here, the infinitely touching and tender Figure of Jesus Christ Himself, set before us in all its sweetness and beauty as He lived and moved and died for us.

And so, dear friends, let me put one last word here about this part of my subject. If this be the purpose of Scripture, then let us learn on the one hand the wretched insufficiency of a mere orthodox creed, and let us learn on the other hand the equal insufficiency of a mere creedless emotion.

If the purpose of Scripture, in these Gospels, and all its parts, is that we should believe 'that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,' that purpose is not accomplished when we simply yield our understanding to that truth and accept it as a great many people do. That was much more the fault of the last generation than of this, though many of us may still make the mistake of supposing that we are Christians because we idly assent to—or, at least, do not deny, and so fancy that we accept—Christian truth. But, as Luther says in one of his rough figures, 'Human nature is like a drunken peasant; if you put him up on the horse on the one side, he is sure to tumble down on the other.' And so the reaction from the heartless, unpractical orthodoxy of half a century ago has come with a vengeance to-day, when everybody is saying, 'Oh! give me a Christianity without dogma!' Well, I say that too, about a great many of the metaphysical subtleties which have been called Doctrinal Christianity. But this doctrine of the nature and office of Jesus Christ cannot be given up, and the Christianity which Christ and His Apostles taught be retained. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Do you trust your soul to Him in these characters? If you do, I think we can shake hands. If you do not, Scripture has failed to do its work on you, and you have not reached the point which all God's lavish revelation has been expended on the world that you and all men might attain.

III. Now, lastly, notice the ultimate purpose of the whole.

Scripture is not given to us merely to make us know something about God in Christ, nor only in order that we may have faith in the Christ thus revealed to us, but for a further end—great, glorious, but, blessed be His Name! not distant—namely, that we may 'have life in His name.' 'Life' is deep, mystical, inexplicable by any other words than itself. It includes pardon, holiness, well-being, immortality, Heaven; but it is more than they all.

This life comes into our dead hearts and quickens them by union with God. That which is joined to God lives. Each being according to its nature, is, on condition of the divine

power acting upon it. This bit of wood upon which I put my hand, and the hand which I put upon it, would equally crumble into nothingness if they were separated from God.

You can separate your wills and your spiritual nature from Him, and thus separated you are 'dead in trespasses and in sins.' And, O brother! the message comes to you: there is life in that great Christ, 'in His name'; that is to say, in that revealed character of His by which He is made known to us as the Christ and the Son of God.

Union with Him in His Sonship will bring life into dead hearts. He is the true 'Prometheus' who has come from Heaven with 'fire,' the fire of the divine Life in the 'reed' of His humanity, and He imparts it to us all if we will. He lays Himself upon us, as the prophet laid himself on the little child in the upper chamber; and lip to lip, and beating heart to dead heart, He touches our death, and it is quickened into life.

The condition on which that great Name will bring to us life is simply our faith. Do you believe in Him, and trust yourself to Him, as He who came to fulfil all that prophet, priest, and king, sacrifice, altar, and Temple of old times prophesied and looked for? Do you trust in Him as the Son of God who comes down to earth that we in Him might find the immortal life which He is ready to give? If you do, then, dear brethren! the end that God has in view in all His revelation, that Christ had in view in His bitter Passion, has been accomplished for you. If you do not it has not. You may admire Him, you may think loftily of Him, you may be ready to call Him by many great and appreciative names, but Oh! unless you have learned to see in Him the divine Saviour of your souls, you have not seen what God means you to see.

But if you have, then all other questions about this Book, important as they are in their places, may settle themselves as they will; you have got the kernel, the thing that it was meant to bring you. Many an erudite scholar, who has studied the Bible all his life, has missed the purpose for which it was given; and many a poor old woman in her garret has found it. It is not meant to wrangle over, it is not meant to be read as an interesting product of the religious consciousness, it is not to be admired as all that remains of the literature of a nation that had a genius for religion; but it is to be taken as being God's great Word to the world, the record of the revelation that He has given us in His Son. The Eternal Word is the theme of all the written word. Have you made the jewel which is brought us in that casket your own? Is Jesus to you the Son of the living God, believing on whom you share His life, and become 'sons of God' by Him? Can you take on to your thankful lips that triumphant and rapturous confession of the doubting Thomas,—the flag flying on the completed roof-tree of this Gospel—'My Lord and my God'? If you can, you will receive the blessing which Christ then promised to all of us standing beyond the limits of that little group, 'who have not seen and yet have believed'—even that eternal life which flows into our dead spirits from the Christ, the Son of God, who is the Light of the world, and the Life of men.

## AN ELOQUENT CATALOGUE

‘There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples.’—[JOHN xxi. 2](#).

This chapter, containing the infinitely significant and pathetic account of our Lord’s appearance to these disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, is evidently an appendix to the Gospel of John. The design of that Gospel is complete with the previous chapter, and there is a formal close, as of the whole book, at the end thereof. But whilst obviously an appendix, this chapter is as obviously the work of the same hand as wrote the Gospel. There are many minute points of identity between the style of it and of the rest of the work, so that there can be no difficulty or doubt as to whence it came. This enumeration of these seven disciples, regarded as being the work of John himself, seems to me to be significant, and to contain a good many lessons. And I desire to turn to these now.

I. First of all, the fact that they were together is significant.

How did they come to hold together? How had they not yielded to the temptation to seek safety by flight, which would have been the natural course after the death of their Leader on a charge of treason against the Roman power? The process of disintegration had begun, and we see it going on in the conduct of the disciples before the Resurrection. The ‘Shepherd was smitten,’ and, as a matter of course, ‘the sheep’ began to ‘scatter.’ And yet here we find them back in Galilee, in their old haunts, and not trying to escape by separation, which would have been the first step suggested to ordinary men in an ordinary state of things. But where everybody knew them, and they knew everybody, and everybody knew them to be disciples of Jesus Christ, thither they go, and hold together as if they had still a living centre and a uniting bond. How did that come about? The fact that after Christ’s death there was a group of men united together simply and solely as disciples, and exhibiting their unity as disciples conspicuously, in the face of the men that knew them best, this forms a strange phenomenon that needs an explanation. And there is only one explanation of it, that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. That drew them together once more. You cannot build a Church on a dead Christ; and of all the proofs of the Resurrection, I take it that there is none that it is harder for an unbeliever to account for, in harmony with his hypothesis, than the simple fact that Christ’s disciples held together after He was dead, and presented a united front to the world.

So, then, the fact of the group is itself significant, and we may claim it as being a morsel of evidence for the historical veracity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

II. Then the composition of this group is significant.

Taken in comparison with the original nucleus of the Church, the calling of which we find recorded in the first chapter of this Gospel, it is to be noticed that of the five men who made the Primitive Church, there are three who reappear here by name—viz. Simon Peter,

John and Nathanael, and Nathanael never appears anywhere else except in these two places. Then, note that there are two unnamed men here, 'two other of His disciples'; who, I think, in all probability are the two of the original five that we do not find named here—viz. 'Philip and Andrew, Simon Peter's brother'—both of them connected with Bethsaida, the place where probably this appearance of the risen Lord took place.

So, then, I think, the fair inference from the list before us is that we have here the original nucleus again, the first five, with a couple more, and the couple more are 'Thomas, who is called Didymus'—and we shall see the reason for his presence in a moment—and the brother of John, one of the first pair.

Thus, then, to the original little group that had gathered round Him at the first, and to whom He had been so often manifested in this very scene where they were standing now, He is revealed again. There, along the beach, is the place where James and John and Simon and Andrew were called from their nets three short years ago. Across yonder, on the other side of the lake, is the bit of green grass where the thousands were fed. Behind it is the steep slope down which the devil-possessed herd rushed. There, over the shoulder of the hill, is the road that leads up to Cana of Galilee, which they had trod together on that never-to-be-forgotten first morning, and from which little village one of the group came. They who had accompanied with Him all the time of His too short fellowship, and had seen all His manifestations, were fittingly chosen to be the recipients of this last appearance, which was to be full of instruction as to the work of the Church, its difficulties, its discouragements, its rewards, its final success, and His benediction of it until the very end of time. It was not for nothing that they who were gathered together were that first nucleus of the Church, who received again from their Master the charge to be 'fishers of men.'

And then, if we look at the list, having regard to the history of those that make it up, it seems to me that that also brings us some valuable considerations. Foremost stand, as receiving this great manifestation of Jesus Christ, the two greatest sinners of the whole band, 'Simon Peter, and Thomas, which is called Didymus,' the denier and the doubter. Singularly contrasted these two men were in much of their disposition; and yet alike in the fact that the Crucifixion had been too much for their faith. The one of them was impetuous, the other of them slow. The one was always ready to say more than he meant; the other always ready to do more than he said. The one was naturally despondent, disposed to look ahead and to see the gloomiest side of everything—'Let us also go that we may die with Him'—the other never looking an inch beyond his nose, and always yielding himself up to the impulse of the moment. And yet both of them were united in this, that the one, from a sudden wave of cowardice which swept him away from his deepest convictions and made him for an hour untrue to his warmest love, and the other, from giving way to his constitutional tendency to despondency, and to taking the blackest possible view of everything—they had both of

them failed in their faith, the one turning out a denier and the other turning out a doubter. And yet here they are, foremost upon the list of those who saw the Risen Christ.

Well, there are two lessons there, and the one is this—let us Christian people learn with what open hearts and hands we should welcome a penitent when he comes back. The other is,—let us learn who they are to whom Jesus Christ deigns to manifest Himself—not immaculate monsters, but men that, having fallen, have learned humility and caution, and by penitence have risen to a securer standing, and have turned even their transgressions into steps in the ladder that lifts them to Christ. It was something that the first to whom the risen Saviour appeared when He came victorious and calm from the grave, was the woman ‘out of whom He had cast seven devils,’ and the blessed truth which that teaches is the same as that which is to be drawn from this list of those whom He regarded, and whom we regard, as then constituting the true nucleus of His Church—a list which is headed by the blackest denier and the most obstinate and captious sceptic in the whole company. ‘There were together Simon Peter and Thomas, which is called Didymus,’ and the little group was glad to have them, and welcomed them, as it becomes us to welcome brethren who have fallen, and who come again saying, ‘I repent.’

Well, then, take the next: he was ‘Nathanael, of Cana in Galilee’; a guileless ‘Israelite indeed,’ so swift to believe, so ready with his confession, so childlike in his wonder, so ardent in his love and faith. The only thing that Christ is recorded as having said to him is this: ‘Because I said. . . believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these.’ A promise of growing clearness of vision and growing fullness of manifestation was made to this man, who never appears anywhere else in Scripture but in these two scenes, and so may stand to us as the type of the opposite kind of Christian experience from that stormy one of the doubter and the denier—viz. that of persistent, quiet, continuous growth, which is marked by faithful use of the present amount of illumination, and is rewarded by a continual increase of the same. If the keynote to the two former lives is, that sin confessed helps a man to climb, the keynote to this man’s is the other truth, that they are still more blessed who, with no interruptions, backslidings, inconsistencies, or denials, by patient continuousness in well-doing, widen the horizon of their Christian vision and purge their eyesight for daily larger knowledge. To these, as to the others, there is granted the vision of the risen Lord, and to them also is entrusted the care of His sheep and His lambs. We do not need to go away into the depths and the darkness in order to realise the warmth and the blessedness of the light. There is no necessity that any Christian man’s career should be broken by denials like Peter’s or by doubts like Thomas’s, but we may ‘grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.’ ‘So is the kingdom of heaven, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.’

Then, still further, there were here ‘the two sons of Zebedee.’ These were the men of whom the Master said that they were ‘sons of thunder,’ who, by natural disposition, in so

far as they resembled one another (which they seem to have done), were eager, energetic, somewhat bigoted, ready with passionate rebukes, and not unwilling to invoke destructive vengeance, all for the love of Him. They were also touched with some human ambition which led them to desire a place at His right hand and His left, but the ambition, too, was touched with love towards Him, which half redeemed it. But by dwelling with Him one of them, at least, had become of all the group the likeliest his Master. And the old monastic painters taught a very deep truth when, in their pictures of the apostles, they made John's almost a copy of the Master's face. To him, too, there was granted in like manner a place amongst this blessed company, and it is surely a trace of his hand that his place should seem so humble. Any other but himself would certainly have put James and John in their natural place beside Peter. It must have been himself who slipped himself and his brother into so inconspicuous a position in the list, and further veiled his personality under the patronymic, 'the sons of Zebedee.'

Last of all come 'two other of His disciples,' not worth naming. Probably, as I have said, they were the missing two out of the five of the first chapter; but possibly they were only 'disciples' in the wider sense, and not of the Apostolic group at all. Nobody can tell. What does it matter? The lesson to be gathered from their presence in this group is one that most of us may very well take to heart. There is a place for commonplace, undistinguished people, whose names are not worth repeating in any record; there is a place for us one-talented folk, in Christ's Church, and we, too, have a share in the manifestation of His love. We do not need to be brilliant, we do not need to be clever, we do not need to be influential, we do not need to be energetic, we do not need to be anything but quiet, waiting souls, in order to have Christ showing Himself to us, as we toil wearily through the darkness of the night. Undistinguished disciples have a place in His heart, a sphere and a function in His Church, and a share in His revelation of Himself.

III. The last point that I touch is this, that the purpose of this group is significant.

What did they thus get together for? 'Simon Peter saith, I go a fishing. They say, We also go with thee.' So they went back again to their old trade, and they had not left the nets and the boats and the hired servants for ever, as they once thought they had.

What sent them back? Not doubt or despair; because they had seen Jesus Christ up in Jerusalem, and had come down to Galilee at His command on purpose to meet Him. 'There shall ye see Him, lo! I have told you,' was ringing in their ears, and they went back in full confidence of His appearance there. It is very like Peter that he should have been the one to suggest filling an hour of the waiting time with manual labour. The time would be hanging heavily on his hands. John could have 'sat still in the house,' like Mary, the heart all the busier, because the hands lay quietly in the lap. But that was not Peter's way, and John was ready to keep him company. Peter thought that the best thing they could do, till Jesus chose to come, was to get back to their work, and he was sensible and right. The best preparation

for Christ's appearance, and the best attitude to be found in by Him, is doing our daily work, however secular and small it may be. A dirty, wet fishing boat, all slimy with scales, was a strange place in which to wait for the manifestation of a risen Saviour. But it was the right place, righter than if they had been wandering about amongst the fancied sanctities of the synagogues.

They went out to do their work; and to them was fulfilled the old saying, 'I, being in the way, the Lord met me.' Jesus Christ will come to you and me in the street if we carry the waiting heart there, and in the shop, and the factory, and the counting-house, and the kitchen, and the nursery, and the study, or wherever we may be. For all things are sacred when done with a hallowed heart, and He chooses to make Himself known to us amidst the dusty commonplaces of daily life.

He had said to them before the Crucifixion: 'When I sent you forth without purse or scrip, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing.' And then He said, as changing the conditions: 'But now he that hath a purse or scrip, let him take it.' As long as He was with them they were absolved from these common tasks. Now that He had left them the obligation recurred. And the order of things for His servants in all time coming was therein declared to be: no shirking of daily tasks on the plea of wanting divine communications; keep at your work, and if it last all night, stick to it; and if there are no fish in the net, never mind; out with it again. And be sure that sooner or later you will see Him standing on the beach, and hear His voice, and be blessed by His smile.

## THE BEACH AND THE SEA

‘When the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.’—[JOHN xxi. 4](#).

The incident recorded in this appendix to John’s Gospel is separated from the other appearances of our risen Lord in respect of place, time, and purpose. They all occurred in and about Jerusalem; this took place in Galilee. The bulk of them happened on the day of the Resurrection, one of them a week after. This, of course, to allow time for the journey, must have been at a considerably later date. Their object was, mainly, to establish the reality of the Resurrection, the identity of Christ’s physical body, and to confirm the faith of the disciples therein. Here, these purposes retreat into the background; the object of this incident is to reveal the permanent relations between the risen Lord and His struggling Church.

The narrative is rich in details which might profitably occupy us, but the whole may be gathered up in two general points of view in considering the revelation which we have here in the participation of Christ in His servants’ work, and also the revelation which we have in the preparation by Christ of a meal for His toiling servants. We take this whole narrative thus regarded as our subject on this Easter morning.

I. First we have here a revelation of the permanent relation of Jesus Christ to His Church and to the individuals who compose it, in this, that the risen Lord on the shore shares in the toil of His servants on the restless sea.

The little group of whom we read in this narrative reminds us of the other group of the first disciples in the first chapter of this Gospel. Four out of the five persons named in our text appear there: Simon Peter, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, James and John. And a very natural inference is that the ‘two others’ unnamed here are the two others of that chapter, viz. Andrew and Philip. If so, we have at the end, the original little group gathered together again; with the addition of the doubting Thomas.

Be that as it may, there they are on the shore of the sea, and Peter characteristically takes the lead and suggests a course that they all accept: ‘I go a fishing.’ ‘We also go with thee.’

Now we must not read that as if it meant: ‘It is all over! Our hopes are vain! We dreamed that we were going to be princes in the Messiah’s Kingdom, we have woken up to find that we are only fishermen. Let us go back to our nets and our boats!’ No! all these men had seen the risen Lord, and had received from His breath the gift of the Holy Spirit. They had all gone from Jerusalem to Galilee, in obedience to His command, and were now waiting for His promised appearance. Very noble and beautiful is the calm patience with which they fill the time of expectation with doing common and long-abandoned tasks. They go back to the nets and the boats long since forsaken at the Master’s bidding. That is not like fanatics. That is not like people who would be liable to the excesses of excitement that would lead to



the 'hallucination,' which is the modern explanation of the resurrection faith, on the part of the disciples.

And it is a precious lesson for us, dear brethren! that whatever may be our memories, and whatever may be our hopes, the very wisest thing we can do is to stick to the common drudgery, and even to go back to abandoned tasks. It stills the pulses. 'Study to be quiet; and to do our own business' is the best remedy for all excitement, whether it be of sorrow or of hope. And not seldom to us, if we will learn and practise that lesson, as to these poor men in the tossing fisherman's boat, the accustomed and daily duties will be the channel through which the presence of the Master will be manifested to us.

So they go, and there follow the incidents which I need not repeat, because we all know them well enough. Only I wish to mark the distinct allusion throughout the whole narrative to the earlier story of the first miraculous draught of fishes which was connected with their call to the Apostleship, and was there by Christ declared to have a symbolical meaning. The correspondences and the contrasts are obvious. The scene is the same; the same green mountains look down upon the same blue waters. It was the same people that were concerned. They were, probably enough, in the same fishing-boat. In both there had been a night of fruitless toil; in both there was the command to let down the net once more; in both obedience was followed by instantaneous and large success.

So much for the likenesses; the contrasts are these. In the one case the Master is in the boat with them, in the other He is on the shore; in the one the net is breaking; in the other, 'though there were so many, yet did it not break.' In the one Peter, smitten by a sense of his own sinfulness, says, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' In the other, Peter, with a deeper knowledge of his own sinfulness, but also with the sweet knowledge of forgiveness, casts himself into the sea, and flounders through the shallows to reach the Lord. The one is followed by the call to higher duty and to the abandonment of possessions; the other is followed by rest and the mysterious meal on the shore.

That is to say, whilst both of the stories point the lesson of service to the Master, the one of them exhibits the principles of service to Him whilst He was still with them, and the other exhibits the principles of service to Him when He is removed from struggling and toiling on the billows to the calm of the peaceful shore in the morning light.

So we may take that night of toil as full of meaning. Think of them as the darkness fell, and the solemn bulk of the girdling hills lay blacker upon the waters, and the Syrian sky was mirrored with all its stars sparkling in the still lake. All the night long cast after cast was made, and time after time the net was drawn in and nothing in it but tangle and mud. And when the first streak of the morning breaks pale over the Eastern hills they are still so absorbed in their tasks that they do not recognise the voice that hails them from the nearer shore: 'Lads, have ye any meat?' And they answer it with a half surly and wholly disappointed monosyllabic 'No!' It is an emblem for us all; weary and wet, tugging at the oar in the dark,

and often seeming to fail. What then? If the last cast has brought nothing, try another. Out with the nets once more! Never mind the darkness, and the cold, and the wetting spray, and the weariness. You cannot expect to be as comfortable in a fishing-boat as in your drawing-room. You cannot expect that your nets will be always full. Failure and disappointment mingle in the most successful lives. Christian work has often to be done with no results at all apparent to the doer, but be sure of this, that they who learn and practise the homely, wholesome virtue of persistent adherence to the task that God sets them, will catch some gleams of a Presence most real and most blessed, and before they die will know that 'their labour has not been in vain in the Lord.' 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.'

And so, finally, about this first part of my subject, there stands out before us here the blessed picture of the Lord Himself, the Risen Lord, with the halo of death and resurrection round about Him; there, on the firm beach, in the increasing light of the morning, interested in, caring about, directing and crowning with His own blessing, the obedient work of His servants.

The simple prose fact of the story, in its plain meaning, is more precious than any 'spiritualising' of it. Take the fact. Jesus Christ, fresh from the grave, who had been down into those dark regions of mystery where the dead sleep and wait, and had come back into this world, and was on the eve of ascending to the Father—this Christ, the possessor of such experience, takes an interest in seven poor men's fishing, and cares to know whether their ragged old net is full or is empty. There never was a more sublime and wonderful binding together of the loftiest and the lowliest than in that question in the mouth of the Risen Lord. If men had been going to dream about what would be fitting language for a risen Saviour, if we had to do here with a legend, and not with a piece of plain, prosaic fact, do you think that the imagination would ever have entered the mind of the legend-maker to put such a question as that into such lips at such a time? 'Lads, have ye any meat?'

It teaches us that anything that interests us is not without interest to Christ. Anything that is big enough to occupy our thoughts and our efforts is large enough to be taken into His. All our ignoble toils, and all our petty anxieties, touch a chord that vibrates in that deep and tender heart. Though other sympathy may be unable to come down to the minutenesses of our little lives, and to wind itself into the narrow room in which our histories are prisoned, Christ's sympathy can steal into the narrowest cranny. The risen Lord is interested in our poor fishing and our disappointments.

And not only that, here is a promise for us, a prophecy for us, of certain guidance and direction, if only we will come to Him and acknowledge our dependence upon Him. The question that was put to them, 'Lads, have ye any meat?' was meant to evoke the answer, 'No!' The consciousness of my failure is the pre-requisite to my appeal to Him to prosper my work. And just as before He would, on the other margin of that same shore, multiply the loaves and the fishes, He put to them the question, 'How many have ye?' that they might

know clearly the inadequacy of their own resources for the hungry crowd, so here, in order to prepare their hearts for the reception of His guidance and His blessing, He provides that they be brought to catalogue and confess their failures. So He does with us all, beats the self-confidence out of us, blessed be His name! and makes us know ourselves to be empty in order that He may pour Himself into us, and flood us with the joy of His presence.

Then comes the guidance given. We may be sure that it is given to us all to-day, if we wait upon Him and ask Him. 'Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.' His command is followed by swift, unanswering, unquestioning obedience, which in its turn is immediately succeeded by the large blessing which the Master then gave on the instant, which He gives still, though often, in equal love and unquestioned wisdom, it comes long after faith has discerned His presence and obedience has bowed to His command.

It may be that we shall not see the results of our toil till the morning dawns and the great net is drawn to land by angel hands. But we may be sure that while we are toiling on the tossing sea, He watches from the shore, is interested in all our weary efforts, will guide us if we own to Him our weakness, and will give us to see at last issues greater than we had dared to hope from our poor service. The dying martyr looked up and saw Him 'standing at the right hand of God,' in the attitude of interested watchfulness and ready help. This Easter morning bids us lift our eyes to a risen Lord who 'has not left us to serve alone,' nor gone up on high, like some careless general to a safe height, while his forsaken soldiers have to stand the shock of onset without him. From this height He bends down and 'covers our heads in the day of battle.' 'He was received up,' says the Evangelist, 'and sat on the right hand of God, and they went forth and preached everywhere.' Strange contrast between His throned rest and their wandering toils for Him! But the contrast gives place to a deeper identity of work and condition, as the Gospel goes on to say, 'The Lord also working with them and confirming the word with signs following.'

Though we be on the tossing sea and He on the quiet shore, between us there is a true union and communion, His heart is with us, if our hearts be with Him, and from Him will pass over all strength, grace, and blessing to us, if only we know His presence, and owning our weakness, obey His command and expect His blessing.

II. Look at the other half of this incident before us. I pass over the episode of the recognition of Jesus by John, and of Peter struggling to His feet, interesting as it is, in order to fix upon the central thought of the second part of the narrative, viz. the risen Lord on the shore, in the increasing light of the morning, 'preparing a table' for His toiling servants. That 'fire of coals' and the simple refreshment that was being dressed upon it had been prepared there by Christ's own hand. We are not told that there was anything miraculous about it. He had gathered the charcoal; He had procured the fish; He had dressed it and prepared it. They are bidden to 'bring of the fish they had caught'; He accepts their service, and adds the result of their toil, as it would seem, to the provision which His own hand has prepared. He sum-

mons them to a meal, not the midday repast, for it was still early morning. They seat themselves, smitten by a great awe. The meal goes on in silence. No word is spoken on either side. Their hearts know Him. He waits on them, making Himself their Servant as well as their Host. He 'taketh bread and giveth them and fish likewise,' as He had done in the miracles by the same shore and on that sad night in the upper room that seemed so far away now, and in the roadside inn at Emmaus, when something in His manner or action disclosed Him to the wondering two at the table.

Now what does all that teach us? Two things; and first—neglecting for a moment the difference between shore and sea—here we have the fact of Christ's providing, even by doing menial offices, for His servants.

These seven men were wet and weary, cold and hungry. The first thing they wanted when they came out of the fishing-boat was their breakfast. If they had been at home, their wives and children would have got it ready for them. Jesus had a great deal to say to them that day, a great deal to teach them, much to do for them, and for the whole world, by the words that followed; but the first thing that He thinks about is to feed them. And so, cherishing no overstrained contempt for material necessities and temporal mercies, let us remember that it is His hand that feeds us still, and let us be glad to think that this Christ, risen from the dead and with His heart full of the large blessings that He was going to bestow, yet paused to consider: 'They are coming on shore after a night's hard toil, they will be faint and weary; let Me feed their bodies before I begin to deal with their hearts and spirits.'

And He will take care of you, brother! and of us all. The 'bread will be given' us, at any rate, and 'the water made sure.' It was a modest meal that He with His infinite resources thought enough for toiling fishermen. 'One fish,' as the original shows us, 'one loaf of bread.' No more! He could as easily have spread a sumptuous table for them. There is no covenant for superfluities, necessities will be given. Let us bring down our wishes to His gifts and promises, and recognise the fact that 'he who needs least is the nearest the gods,' and he that needs least is surest of getting from Christ what he needs.

But then, besides that, the supply of all other deeper and loftier necessities is here guaranteed. The symbolism of our text divides, necessarily, the two things which in fact are not divided. It is not all toiling on the restless sea here, any more than it is all rest and fruition yonder; but all that your spirit needs, for wisdom, patience, heroism, righteousness, growth, Christ will give you in your work; and that is better than giving it to you after your work, and the very work which is blessed by Him, and furthered and prospered by Him, the very work itself will come to be moat and nourishment. 'Out of the eater will come forth meat,' and the slain 'lions' of past struggles and sorrows, the next time we come to them, will be 'full of honey.'

Finally, there is a great symbolical prophecy here if we emphasise the distinction between the night and the morning, between the shore and the sea. We can scarcely fail to catch this

meaning in the incident which sets forth the old blessed assurance that the risen Lord is preparing a feast on the shore while His servants are toiling on the darkling sea.

All the details, such as the solid shore in contrast with the changeful sea, the increasing morning in contrast with the toilsome night, the feast prepared, have been from of old consecrated to shadow forth the differences between earth and heaven. It would be blindness not to see here a prophecy of the glad hour when Christ shall welcome to their stable home, amid the brightness of unsetting day, the souls that have served Him amidst the fluctuations and storms of life, and seen Him in its darkness, and shall satisfy all their desires with the 'bread of heaven.'

Our poor work which He deigns to accept forms part of the feast which is spread at the end of our toil, when 'there shall be no more sea.' He adds the results of our toil to the feast which He has prepared. The consequences of what we have done here on earth make no small part of the blessedness of heaven.

'Their works and alms and all their good endeavour Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod.'

The souls which a Paul or a John has won for the Master, in their vocation as 'fishers of men,' are their 'hope and joy and crown of rejoicing, in the presence of our Lord Jesus.' The great benediction which the Spirit bade the Apocalyptic seer write over 'the dead which die in the Lord,' is anticipated in both its parts by this mysterious meal on the beach. 'They rest from their labours' inasmuch as they find the food prepared for them, and sit down to partake; 'Their works do follow them' inasmuch as they 'bring of the fish which they have caught.'

Finally, Christ Himself waits on them, therein fulfilling in symbol what He has told us in great words that dimly shadow wonders unintelligible until experienced: 'Verily I say unto you, He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth, and serve them.'

So here is a vision to cheer us all. Life must be full of toil and of failure. We are on the midnight sea, and have to tug, weary and wet, at a heavy oar, and to haul an often empty net. But we do not labour alone. He comes to us across the storm, and is with us in the night, a most real, because unseen Presence. If we accept the guidance of His directing word, His indwelling Spirit, and His all-sufficient example, and seek to ascertain His will in outward Providences, we shall not be left to waste our strength in blunders, nor shall our labour be in vain. In the morning light we shall see Him standing serene on the steadfast shore. The 'Pilot of the Galilean lake' will guide our frail boat through the wild surf that marks the breaking of the sea of life on the shore of eternity; and when the sun rises over the Eastern hills we shall land on the solid beach, bringing our 'few small fishes' with us, which He will accept. And there we shall rest, nor need to ask who He is that serves us, for we shall know that 'It is the Lord!'

## **'IT IS THE LORD!'**

'Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.'—[JOHN xxi. 7.](#)

It seems a very strange thing that these disciples had not, at an earlier period of this incident, discovered the presence of Christ, inasmuch as the whole was so manifestly a repetition of that former event by which the commencement of their ministry had been signalled, when He called them to become 'fishers of men.' We are apt to suppose that when once again they embarked on the lake, and went back to their old trade, it must have been with many a thought of Him busy at their hearts. Yonder—perhaps we fancy them thinking—is the very point where we saw Him coming out of the shadows of the mountains, that night when He walked on the water; yonder is the little patch of grass where He made them all sit down whilst we bore the bread to them: there is the very spot where we were mending our nets when He came up to us and called us to Himself; and now it is all over. We have loved and lost Him; He has been with us, and has left us. 'We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel,' and the Cross has ended it all! So, we are apt to think, they must have spoken; but there does not seem to have been about them any such sentimental remembrance. John takes pains in this narrative, I think, to show them to us as plain, rough men, busy about their night's work, and thinking a great deal more of their want of success in fishing, than about the old associations which we are apt to put into their minds. Then through the darkness He comes, as they had seen Him come once before, when they know Him not; and He speaks to them as He had spoken before, and they do not detect His voice yet; and He repeats the old miracle, and their eyes are all holden, excepting the eyes of him who loved, and he first says, 'It is the Lord!' Now, besides all the other features of this incident by which it becomes the revelation of the Lord's presence with His Church, and the exhibition of the work of the Church during all the course of the world's history, it contains valuable lessons on other points, such as these which I shall try to bring before you.

Now and always, as in that morning twilight on the Galilean lake, Christ comes to men. Everywhere He is present, everywhere revealing Himself. Now, as then, our eyes are 'holden' by our own fault, so that we recognise not the merciful Presence which is all around us. Now, as then, it is they who are nearest to Christ by love who see Him first. Now, as then, they who are nearest to Him by love, are so because He loves them, and because they know and believe the love which He has to them. I find, then, in this part of the story three thoughts,—First, they only see aright who see Christ in everything. Secondly, they only see Christ who love Him. Lastly, they only love Him who know that He loves them,

I. First then, they only see aright who see Christ in everything.

This word of John's, 'It is the Lord!'—ought to be the conviction with the light of which we go out to the examination of all events, and to the consideration of all the circumstances

of our daily life. We believe that unto Christ is given 'all power in heaven and upon earth.' We believe that to Him belongs creative power—that 'without Him was not anything made which was made.' We believe that from Him came all life at first. In Him life was, as in its deep source. He is the Fountain of life. We believe that as no being comes into existence without His creative power, so none continues to exist without His sustaining energy. We believe that He allots to all men their natural characters and their circumstances. We believe that the history of the world is but the history of His influence, and that the centre of the whole universe is the cross of Calvary. In the light of such convictions, I take it, every man that calls himself a Christian ought to go out to meet life and to study all events. Let me try, then, to put before you, very briefly, one or two of the provinces in which we are to take this conviction as the keynote to all our knowledge.

No man will understand the world aright, to begin with, who cannot say about all creation, 'It is the Lord!' Nature is but the veil of the invisible and ascended Lord: and if we would pierce to the deepest foundations of all being, we cannot stop until we get down to the living power of Christ our Saviour and the Creator of the world, by whom all things were made, and whose will pouring out into this great universe, is the sustaining principle and the true force which keeps it from nothingness and from quick decay.

Why, what did Christ work all His miracles upon earth for? Not solely to give us a testimony that the Father had sent Him; not solely to make us listen to His words as a Teacher sent from God; not solely as proof of His Messiahship,—but besides all these purposes there was surely this other, that for once He would unveil to us the true Author of all things, and the true Foundation of all being. Christ's miracles interrupted the order of the world, because they made visible to men for once the true and constant Orderer of the order. They interrupted the order in so far as they struck out the intervening links by which the creative and sustaining word of God acts in nature, and suspended each event directly from the firm staple of His will. They revealed the eternal Orderer of that order in that they showed the Incarnate Word wielding the forces of nature, which He has done from of old and still does. We are then to take all these signs and wonders that He wrought, as a perennial revelation of the real state of things with regard to this natural world, and to see in them all, signs and tokens that into every corner and far-off region of the universe His loving hand reaches, and His sustaining power goes forth. Into what province of nature did He not go? He claimed to be the Lord of life by the side of the boy's bier at the gate of Nain, in the chamber of the daughter of Jairus, by the grave of Lazarus. He asserted for Himself authority over all the powers and functions of our bodily life, when He gave eyes to the blind, hearing to the deaf, feet to the lame. He showed that He was Lord over the fowl of the air, the beasts of the earth, the fish of the sea. And He asserted His dominion over inanimate nature, when the fig-tree, cursed by Him, withered away to its roots, and the winds and waves sunk into silence at His gentle voice. He let us get a glimpse into the dark regions of His rule over the unseen, when

'with authority He commanded the unclean spirits, and they came out.' And all these things He did, in order that we, walking in this fair world, encompassed by the glories of this wonderful universe, should be delivered from the temptation of thinking that it is separated from Him, or independent of His creative and sustaining power; and in order that we should feel that the continuance of all which surrounds us, the glories of heaven and the loveliness of earth, are as truly owing to the constant intervention of His present will, and the interposition beneath them of His sustaining hand, as when first, by the 'Word of God' who 'was with God and who was God,' speaking forth His fiat, there came light and beauty out of darkness and chaos.

O Christian men! we shall never understand the Christian thought about God's universe, until we are able to say, Preservation is a continual creation; and beneath all the ordinary workings of Nature, as we faithlessly call it, and the apparently dead play of secondary causes, there are welling forth, and energising, the living love and the blessed power of Christ, the Maker, and Monarch, and Sustainer of all. 'It is the Lord!' is the highest teaching of all science. The mystery of the universe, and the meaning of God's world, are shrouded in hopeless obscurity, until we learn to feel that all laws suppose a Lawgiver, and that all working involves a divine energy; and that beneath all which appears there lies for ever rising up through it and giving it its life and power, the one true living Being, the Father in heaven, the Son by whom He works, and the Holy Ghost the Spirit. Darkness lies on Nature, except to those who in

'the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky,'

see that Form which these disciples saw in the morning twilight. Let 'It is the Lord!' be the word on our lips as we gaze on them all, and nature will then be indeed to us the open secret, the secret of the Lord which 'He will show to them that fear Him.'

Then again, the same conviction is the only one that is adequate either to explain or to make tolerable the circumstances of our earthly condition. To most men—ah! to all of us in our faithless times—the events that befall ourselves, seem to be one of two things equally horrible, the play of a blind Chance, or the work of an iron Fate. I know not which of these two ghastly thoughts about the circumstances of life is the more depressing, ruining all our energy, depriving us of all our joy, and dragging us down with its weight. But brethren, and friends, there are but these three ways for it—either our life is the subject of a mere chaotic chance; or else it is put into the mill of an iron destiny, which goes grinding on and crushing with its remorseless wheels, regardless of what it grinds up; or else, through it all, in it all, beneath it and above it all, there is the Will which is Love, and the Love which is Christ!



Which of these thoughts is the one that commends itself to your own hearts and consciences, and which is the one under which you would fain live if you could? I understand not how a man can front the awful possibilities of a future on earth, knowing all the points at which he is vulnerable, and all the ways by which disaster may come down upon him, and retain his sanity, unless he believes that all is ruled, not merely by a God far above him, who may be as unsympathising as He is omnipotent, but by his Elder Brother, the Son of God, who showed His heart by all His dealings with us here below, and who loves as tenderly, and sympathises as closely with us as ever He did when on earth He gathered the weary and the sick around Him. Is it not a thing, men and women, worth having, to have this for the settled conviction of your hearts, that Christ is moving all the pulses of your life, and that nothing falls out without the intervention of His presence and the power of His will working through it? Do you not think such a belief would nerve you for difficulty, would lift you buoyantly over trials and depressions, and would set you upon a vantage ground high above all the petty annoyances of life? Tell me, is there any other place where a man can plant his foot and say, 'Now I am on a rock and I care not what comes'? The riddle of Providence is solved, and the discipline of Providence is being accomplished when we have grasped this conviction—All events do serve me, for all circumstances come from His will and pleasure, which is love; and everywhere I go—be it in the darkness of disaster or in the sunshine of prosperity—I shall see standing before me that familiar and beloved Shape, and shall be able to say, 'It is the Lord!' Friends and brethren, that is the faith to live by, that is the faith to die by; and without it life is a mockery and a misery.

Once more this same conviction, 'It is the Lord!' should guide us in all our thoughts about the history and destinies of mankind and of Christ's Church. The Cross is the centre of the world's history, the incarnation and the crucifixion of our Lord are the pivot round which all the events of the ages revolve. 'The testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy,' and the growing power of Jesus is the spirit of history, and in every book that calls itself the history of a nation, unless there be written, whether literally or in spirit, this for its motto, 'It is the Lord!' all will be shallow and incomplete.

'They that went before and they that came after,' when He entered into the holy city in His brief moment of acceptance and pomp, surrounded Him with hosannas and jubilant gladness. It is a deep and true symbol of the whole history of the world. All the generations that went before Him, though they knew it not, were preparing the way of the Lord, and heralding the advent of Him who was 'the desire of all nations' and 'the light of men'; and all the generations that come after, though they know it not, are swelling the pomp of His triumph and hastening the time of His crowning and dominion. 'It is the Lord!' is the secret of all national existence. It is the secret of all the events of the world. The tangled web of human history is only then intelligible when that is taken as its clue, 'From Him are all things, and to Him are all things.' The ocean from which the stream of history flows, and

that into which it empties itself, are one. He began it, He sustains it. 'The help that is done upon earth He doeth it Himself,' and when all is finished, it will be found that all things have indeed come from Christ, been sustained and directed by Christ, and have tended to the glory and exaltation of that Redeemer, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Maker of the worlds, and before whose throne are for ever gathered for service, whether they know it or not, the forces of the Gentiles, the riches of the nations, the events of history, the fates and destinies of every man.

I need not dwell upon the way in which such a conviction as this, my friends, living and working in our hearts, would change for us the whole aspect of life, and make everything bright and beautiful, blessed and calm, strengthening us for all which we might have to do, nerving us for duty, and sustaining us against every trial, leading us on, triumphant and glad, through regions all sparkling with tokens of His presence and signs of His love, unto His throne at last, to lay down our praises and our crowns before Him. Only let me leave with you this one word of earnest entreaty, that you will lay to heart the solemn alternative—either see Christ in everything, and be blessed; or miss Him, and be miserable. Oh! it is a waste, weary world, unless it is filled with signs of His presence. It is a dreary seventy years, brother, of pilgrimage and strife, unless, as you travel along the road, you see the marks that He who went before you has left by the wayside for your guidance and your sustenance. If you want your days to be true, noble, holy, happy, manly, and Godlike, believe us, it is only when they all have flowing through them this conviction, 'It is the Lord!' that they all become so.

II. Then, secondly, only they who love, see Christ.

John, the Apostle of Love, knew Him first. In religious matters, love is the foundation of knowledge. There is no way of knowing a Person except love. The knowledge of God and the knowledge of Christ are not to be won by the exercise of the understanding. A man cannot argue his way into knowing Christ. No skill in drawing inferences will avail him there. The treasures of wisdom—earthly wisdom—are all powerless in that region. Man's understanding and natural capacity—let it keep itself within its own limits and region, and it is strong and good; but in the region of acquaintance with God and Christ, the wisdom of this world is foolishness, and man's understanding is not the organ by which he can know Christ. Oh no! there is a better way than that: 'He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.' As it is, in feebler measure, with regard to our personal acquaintance with one another, where it is not so much the power of the understanding, or the quickness of the perception, or the talent and genius of a man, that make the foundation of his knowledge of his friend, as the force of his sympathy and the depth of his affection; so—with the necessary modification arising from the transference from earthly acquaintances to the great Friend and Lover of our souls in heaven—so is it with regard to our knowledge of Christ. Love will trace Him everywhere, as dear friends can detect each other in little marks which are

meaningless to others. Love's quick eye pierces through disguises impenetrable to a colder scrutiny. Love has in it a longing for His presence which makes us eager and quick to mark the lightest sign that He for whom it longs is near, as the footstep of some dear one is heard by the sharp ear of affection long before any sound breaks the silence to those around. Love leads to likeness to the Lord, and that likeness makes the clearer vision of the Lord possible. Love to Him strips from our eyes the film that self and sin, sense and custom, have drawn over them. It is these which hide Him from us. It is because men are so indifferent to, so forgetful of, their best Friend that they fail to behold Him, 'It is the Lord!' is written large and plain on all things, but like the great letters on a map, they are so obvious and fill so wide a space, that they are not seen. They who love Him know Him, and they who know Him love Him. The true eye-salve for our blinded eyes is applied when we have turned with our hearts to Christ. The simple might of faithful love opens them to behold a more glorious vision than the mountain 'full of chariots of fire,' which once flamed before the prophet's servant of old—even the august and ever-present form of the Lord of life, the Lord of history, the Lord of providence. When they who love Jesus turn to see 'the Voice that speaks with them,' they ever behold the Son of Man in His glory; and where others see but the dim beach and a mysterious stranger, it is to their lips that the glad cry first comes, 'It is the Lord!'

And is it not a blessed thing, brethren! that thus this high and glorious prerogative of recognising the marks of Christ's presence everywhere, of going through life gladdened by the assurance of His nearness, does not depend on what belongs to few men only, but on what may belong to all? When we say that 'not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called'—when we say that love is the means of knowledge—we are but in other words saying that the way is open to all, and that no characteristics belonging to classes, no powers that must obviously always belong to but a handful, are necessary for the full apprehension of the power and blessedness of Christ's Gospel. The freeness and the fullness of that divine message, the glorious truth that it is for all men, and is offered to all, are couched in that grand principle, Love that thou mayest know; love, and thou art filled with the fullness of God, Not for the handful, not for the elite of the world; not for the few, but for the many; not for the wise, but for all; not for classes, but for humanity—for all that are weak, and sinful, and needy, and foolish, and darkened He comes, who only needs that the heart that looks should love, and then it shall behold!

But if that were the whole that I have to say, I should have said but little to the purpose. It very little avails to tell men to love. We cannot love to order, or because we think it duty. There is but one way of loving, and that is to see the lovely. The disciple who loved Jesus was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' Generalise that, and it teaches us this, that

III. They love who know that Christ loves them. His divine and eternal mercy is the foundation of the whole. Our love, brethren, can never be any thing else than our echo to His voice of tenderness than the reflected light upon our hearts of the full glory of His affec-

tion. No man loveth God except the man who has first learned that God loves him. 'We love Him, because He first loved us.' And when we say, 'Love Christ,' if we could not go on to say, 'Nay, rather let Christ's love come down upon you'—we had said worse than nothing. The fountain that rises in my heart can only spring up heavenward, because the water of it has flowed down into my heart from the higher level. All love must descend first, before it can ascend. We have, then, no Gospel to preach, if we have only this to preach, 'Love, and thou art saved.' But we have a Gospel that is worth the preaching, when we can come to men who have no love in their hearts, and say, 'Brethren! listen to this—you have to bring nothing, you are called upon to originate no affection; you have nothing to do but simply to receive the everlasting love of God in Christ His Son, which was without us, which began before us, which flows forth independent of us, which is unchecked by all our sins, which triumphs over all our transgressions, and which will make us—loveless, selfish, hardened, sinful men—soft, and tender, and full of divine affection, by the communication of its own self.

Oh, then, look to Christ, that you may love Him! Think, brethren, of that full, and free, and boundless mercy which, from eternity, has been pouring itself out in floods of grace and loving-kindness over all creatures. Think of that everlasting love which presided at the foundation of the earth, and has sustained it ever since. Think of that Saviour who has died for us, and lives for us. Think of Christ, the heart of God, and the fullness of the Father's mercy; and do not think of yourselves at all. Do not ask yourselves, to begin with, the question, Do I love Him or do I not? You will never love by that means. If a man is cold, let him go to the fire and warm himself. If he is dark, let him stand in the sunshine, and he will be light. If his heart is all clogged and clotted with sin and selfishness, let him get under the influence of the love of Christ, and look away from himself and his own feelings, towards that Saviour whose love shed abroad is the sole means of kindling ours. You have to go down deeper than your feelings, your affections, your desires, your character. There you will find no resting-place, no consolation, no power. Dig down to the living Rock, Christ and His infinite love to you, and let it be the strong foundation, built into which you and your love may become living stones, a holy temple, partaking of the firmness and nature of that on which it rests. They that love do so because they know that Christ loves them; and they that love see Him everywhere; and they that see Him everywhere are blessed for evermore. And let no man here torture himself, or limit the fullness of this message that we preach, by questionings whether Christ loves Him or not. Are you a man? are you sinful? have you broken God's law? do you need a Saviour? Then put away all these questions, and believe that Christ's personal love is streaming out for the whole world, and that there is a share for you if you like to take it and be blessed!

There is one last thought arising from the whole subject before us, that may be worth mention before I close. Did you ever notice how this whole incident might be turned, by a

symbolical application, to the hour of death, and the vision which may meet us when we come thither? It admits of the application, and perhaps was intended to receive the application, of such a symbolic reference. The morning is dawning, the grey of night going away, the lake is still; and yonder, standing on the shore, in the uncertain light, there is one dim Figure, and one disciple catches a sight of Him, and another casts himself into the water, and they find 'a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread,' and Christ gathers them around His table, and they all know that 'It is the Lord!' It is what the death of the Christian man, who has gone through life recognising Christ everywhere, may well become:—the morning breaking, and the finished work, and the Figure standing on the quiet beach, so that the last plunge into the cold flood that yet separates us, will not be taken with trembling reluctance; but, drawn to Him by the love beaming out of His face, and upheld by the power of His beckoning presence, we shall struggle through the latest wave that parts us, and scarcely feel its chill, nor know that we have crossed it; till falling blessed at His feet, we see, by the nearer and clearer vision of His face, that this is indeed heaven. And looking back upon 'the sea that brought us thither,' we shall behold its waters flashing in the light of that everlasting morning, and hear them breaking in music upon the eternal shore. And then, brethren, when all the weary night-watchers on the stormy ocean of life are gathered together around Him who watched with them from His throne on the bordering mountains of eternity, where the day shines for ever—then He will seat them at His table in His kingdom, and none will need to ask, 'Who art Thou?' or 'Where am I?' for all shall know that 'It is the Lord!' and the full, perfect, unchangeable vision of His blessed face will be heaven!

## **'LOVEST THOU ME?'**

'Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My lambs.'—[JOHN xxi. 15](#).

Peter had already seen the risen Lord. There had been that interview on Easter morning, on which the seal of sacred secrecy was impressed; when, alone, the denier poured out his heart to his Lord, and was taken to the heart that he had wounded. Then there had been two interviews on the two successive Sundays in which the Apostle, in common with his brethren, had received, as one of the group, the Lord's benediction, the Lord's gift of the Spirit, and the Lord's commission. But something more was needed; there had been public denial, there must be public confession. If he had slipped again into the circle of the disciples, with no special treatment or reference to his fall, it might have seemed a trivial fault to others, and even to himself. And so, after that strange meal on the beach, we have this exquisitely beautiful and deeply instructive incident of the special treatment needed by the denier before he could be publicly reinstated in his office.

The meal seems to have passed in silence. That awe which hung over the disciples in all their intercourse with Jesus during the forty days, lay heavy on them, and they sat there, huddled round the fire, eating silently the meal which Christ had provided, and no doubt gazing silently at the silent Lord. What a tension of expectation there must have been as to how the oppressive silence was to be broken! and how Peter's heart must have throbbed, and the others' ears been pricked up, when it was broken by 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?' We may listen with pricked-up ears too. For we have here, in Christ's treatment of the Apostle, a revelation of how He behaves to a soul conscious of its fault; and in Peter's demeanour an illustration of how a soul, conscious of its fault, should behave to Him.

There are three stages here: the threefold question, the threefold answer, and the threefold charge. Let us look at these.

### I. The threefold question.

The reiteration in the interrogation did not express doubt as to the veracity of the answer, nor dissatisfaction with its terms; but it did express, and was meant, I suppose, to suggest to Peter and to the others, that the threefold denial needed to be obliterated by the threefold confession; and that every black mark that had been scored deep on the page by that denial needed to be covered over with the gilding or bright colouring of the triple acknowledgment. And so Peter thrice having said, 'I know Him not!' Jesus with a gracious violence forced him to say thrice, 'Thou knowest that I love Thee.' The same intention to compel Peter to go back upon his past comes out in two things besides the triple form of the question. The one is the designation by which he is addressed, 'Simon, son of Jonas,' which travels back, as it were, to the time before he was a disciple, and points a finger to his weak humanity

before it had come under the influence of Jesus Christ. 'Simon, son of Jonas,' was the name that he bore in the days before his discipleship. It was the name by which Jesus had addressed him, therefore, on that never-to-be-forgotten turning-point of his life, when he was first brought to Him by his brother Andrew. It was the name by which Jesus had addressed him at the very climax of his past life when, high up, he had been able to see far, and in answer to the Lord's question, had rung out the confession: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!' So the name by which Jesus addresses him now says to him in effect: 'Remember thy human weakness; remember how thou wert drawn to Me; remember the high-water mark of thy discipleship, when I was plain before thee as the Son of God, and remembering all these, answer Me—lovest thou Me?'

The same intention to drive Peter back to the wholesome remembrance of a stained past is obvious in the first form of the question. Our Lord mercifully does not persist in giving to it that form in the second and third instances: 'Lovest thou Me more than these?' More than these, what? I cannot for a moment believe that that question means something so trivial and irrelevant as 'Lovest thou Me more than these nets, and boats, and the fishing?' No; in accordance with the purpose that runs through the whole, of compelling Peter to retrospect, it says to him, 'Do you remember what you said a dozen hours before you denied Me, "Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I"? Are you going to take that stand again? Lovest thou Me more than these that never discredited their boasting so shamefully?'

So, dear brethren! here we have Jesus Christ, in His treatment of this penitent and half-restored soul, forcing a man, with merciful compulsion, to look steadfastly and long at his past sin, and to retrace step by step, shameful stage by shameful stage, the road by which he had departed so far. Every foul place he is to stop and look at, and think about. Each detail he has to bring up before his mind. Was it not cruel of Jesus thus to take Peter by the neck, as it were, and hold him right down, close to the foul things that he had done, and say to him, 'Look! look! look ever! and answer, Lovest thou Me?' No; it was not cruel; it was true kindness. Peter had never been so abundantly and permanently penetrated by the sense of the sinfulness of his sin, as after he was sure, as he had been made sure in that great interview, that it was all forgiven. So long as a man is disturbed by the dread of consequences, so long as he is doubtful as to his relation to the forgiving Love, he is not in a position beneficially and sanely to consider his evil in its moral quality only. But when the conviction comes to a man, 'God is pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done'; and when he can look at his own evil without the smallest disturbance rising from slavish fear of issues, then he is in a position rightly to estimate its darkness and its depth. And there can be no better discipline for us all than to remember our faults, and penitently to travel back over the road of our sins, just because we are sure that God in Christ has forgotten them. The beginning of Christ's merciful treatment of the forgiven man is to compel him to remember, that he may learn and be ashamed.

And then there is another point here, in this triple question. How significant and beautiful it is that the only thing that Jesus Christ cares to ask about is the sinner's love! We might have expected: 'Simon, son of Jonas, are you sorry for what you did? Simon, son of Jonas, will you promise never to do the like any more?' No! These things will come if the other thing is there. 'Lovest thou Me?' Jesus Christ sues each of us, not for obedience primarily, not for repentance, not for vows, not for conduct, but for a heart; and that being given, all the rest will follow. That is the distinguishing characteristic of Christian morality, that Jesus seeks first for the surrender of the affections, and believes, and is warranted in the belief, that if these are surrendered, all else will follow; and love being given, loyalty and service and repentance and hatred of self-will and of self-seeking will follow in her train. All the graces of human character which Christ seeks, and is ready to impart, are, as it were, but the pages and ministers of the regal Love, who follow behind and swell the cortege of her servants.

Christ asks for love. Surely that indicates the depth of His own! In this commerce He is satisfied with nothing less, and can ask for nothing more; and He seeks for love because He is love, and has given love. Oh! to all hearts burdened, as all our hearts ought to be—unless the burden has been cast off in one way—by the consciousness of our own weakness and imperfection, surely, surely, it is a gospel that is contained in that one question addressed to a man who had gone far astray, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou?'

Here, again, we have Jesus Christ, in His dealing with the penitent, willing to trust discredited professions. We think that one of the signs of our being wise people is that experience shall have taught us 'once' being 'bit, twice' to be 'shy,' and if a man has once deceived us by flaming professions and ice-cold acts, never to trust him any more. And we think that is 'worldly wisdom,' and 'the bitter fruit of earthly experience,' and 'sharpness,' and 'shrewdness,' and so forth. Jesus Christ, even whilst reminding Peter, by that 'more than these,' of his utterly hollow and unreliable boasting, shows Himself ready to accept once again the words of one whose unverity He had proved. 'Charity hopeth all things, believeth all things,' and Jesus Christ is ready to trust us when we say, 'I love Thee,' even though often in the past our professed love has been all disproved.

We have here, in this question, our Lord revealing Himself as willing to accept the imperfect love which a disciple can offer Him. Of course, many of you well know that there is a very remarkable play of expression here. In the two first questions the word which our Lord employs for 'love' is not the same as that which appears in Peter's two first answers. Christ asks for one kind of love; Peter proffers another. I do not enter upon discussion as to the distinction between these two apparent synonyms. The kind of love which Christ asks for is higher, nobler, less emotional, and more associated with the whole mind and will. It is the inferior kind, the more warm, more sensuous, more passionate and emotional, which Peter brings. And then, in the third question, our Lord, as it were, surrenders and



takes Peter's own word, as if He had said, 'Be it so! You shrink from professing the higher kind; I will take the lower; and I will educate and bring that up to the height that I desire you to stand at.' Ah, brother! however stained and imperfect, however disproved by denials, however tainted by earthly associations, Jesus Christ will accept the poor stream of love, though it be but a trickle when it ought to be a torrent, which we can bring Him.

These are the lessons which it seems to me lie in this triple question. I have dealt with them at the greater length, because those which follow are largely dependent upon them. But let me turn now briefly, in the second place, to—

II. The triple answer.

'Yea, Lord! Thou knowest that I love Thee.' Is not that beautiful, that the man who by Christ's Resurrection, as the last of the answers shows, had been led to the loftiest conception of Christ's omniscience, and regarded Him as knowing the hearts of all men, should, in the face of all that Jesus Christ knew about his denial and his sin, have dared to appeal to Christ's own knowledge? What a superb and all-conquering confidence in Christ's depth of knowledge and forgivingness of knowledge that answer showed! He felt that Jesus could look beneath the surface of his sin, and see that below it there was, even in the midst of the denial, a heart that in its depths was true. It is a tremendous piece of confident appeal to the deeper knowledge, and therefore the larger love and more abundant forgiveness, of the righteous Lord—'Thou knowest that I love Thee.'

Brethren! a Christian man ought to be sure of his love to Jesus Christ. You do not study your conduct in order to infer from it your love to others. You do not study your conduct in order to infer from it your love to your wife, or your husband, or your parents, or your children, or your friend. Love is not a matter of inference; it is a matter of consciousness and intuition. And whilst self-examination is needful for us all for many reasons, a Christian man ought to be as sure that he loves Jesus Christ as he is sure that he loves his dearest upon earth.

It used to be the fashion long ago—this generation has not depth enough to keep up the fashion—for Christian people to talk as if it were a point they longed to know, whether they loved Jesus Christ or not. There is no reason why it should be a point we long to know. You know all about your love to one another, and you are sure about that. Why are you not sure about your love to Jesus Christ? 'Oh! but,' you say, 'look at my sins and failures'; and if Peter had looked only at his sins, do you not think that his words would have stuck in his throat? He did look, but he looked in a very different way from that of trying to ascertain from his conduct whether he loved Jesus Christ or not. Brethren, any sin is inconsistent with Christian love to Christ. Thank God, we have no right to say of any sin that it is incompatible with that love! More than that; a great, gross, flagrant, sudden fall like Peter's is a great deal less inconsistent with love to Christ than are the continuously unworthy, worldly, selfish, Christ-forgetting lives of hosts of complacent professing Christians to-day. White

ants will eat up the carcase of a dead buffalo quicker than a lion will. And to have denied Christ once, twice, thrice, in the space of an hour, and under strong temptation, is not half so bad as to call Him 'Master' and 'Lord,' and day by day, week in, week out, in works to deny Him. The triple answer declares to us that in spite of a man's sins he ought to be conscious of his love, and be ready to profess it when need is.

III. Lastly, we have here the triple commission.

I do not dwell upon it at any length, because in its original form it applies especially to the Apostolic office. But the general principles which underlie this threefold charge, to feed and to tend both 'the sheep' and 'the lambs,' may be put in a form that applies to each of us, and it is this—the best token of a Christian's love to Jesus Christ is his service of man for Christ's sake. 'Lovest thou Me?' 'Yea! Lord.' Thou hast said; go and do, 'Feed My lambs; feed My sheep.' We need the profession of words; we need, as Peter himself enjoined at a subsequent time, to be ready to 'give to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope,' and an acknowledgment of the love, that are in us. But if you want men to believe in your love, however Jesus Christ may know it, go and work in the Master's vineyard. The service of man is the garb of the love of God. 'He that loveth God will love his brother also.' Do not confine that thought of service, and feeding, and tending, to what we call evangelistic and religious work. That is one of its forms, but it is only one of them. Everything in which Christian men can serve their fellows is to be taken by them as their worship of their Lord, and is taken by the world as the convincing proof of the reality of their love.

Love to Jesus Christ is the qualification for all such service. If we are knit to Him by true affection, which is based upon our consciousness of our own falls and evils, and our reception of His forgiving mercy, then we shall have the qualities that fit us, and the impulse that drives us, to serve and help our fellows. I do not say—God forbid!—that there is no philanthropy apart from Christian faith, but I do say that, on the wide scale, and in the long run, they who are knit to Jesus Christ by love will be those who render the greatest help to all that are 'afflicted in mind, body, or estate'; and that the true basis and qualification for efficient service of our fellows is the utter surrender of our hearts to Him who is the Fountain of love, and from whom comes all our power to live in the world, as the images and embodiments of the love which has saved us that we might help to save others.

Brethren! let us all ask ourselves Christ's question to the denier. Let us look our past evils full in the face, that we may learn to hate them, and that we may learn more the width and the sweep of the power of His pardoning mercy. God grant that we may all be able to say, 'Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee!'

## YOUTH AND AGE, AND THE COMMAND FOR BOTH

Annual Sermon to the Young

‘. . . When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. . . . And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me.’—[JOHN xxi. 18, 19](#).

The immediate reference of these words is, of course, to the martyrdom of the Apostle Peter. Our Lord contrasts the vigorous and somewhat self-willed youth and the mellowed old age of His servant, and shadows forth his death, in bonds, by violence. And then He bids him, notwithstanding this prospect of the issue of his faithfulness, ‘Follow Me.’

Now I venture, though with some hesitation, to give these words a slightly different application. I see in them two pictures of youth and of old age, and a commandment based upon both. You young people are often exhorted to a Christian life on the ground of the possible approach of death. I would not undervalue that motive, but I seek now to urge the same thing upon you from a directly opposite consideration, the probability that many of you will live to be old. All the chief reasons for our being Christians are of the same force, whether we are to die to-night, or to live for a century. So in my text I wish you to note what you are now; what, if you live, you are sure to become; and what, in the view of both stages, you will be wise to do. ‘When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and wentest whither thou wouldst. When thou shalt be old another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.’ Therefore, ‘Follow Me.’

I. So, then, note the picture here of what you are.

Most of you young people are but little accustomed to reflect upon yourselves, or upon the special characteristics and prerogatives of your time of life. But it will do you no harm to think for a minute or two of what these characteristics are, that you may know your blessings, and that you may shun the dangers which attach to them.

‘When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself.’ There is a picture easily translated, and significant of much. The act of girding implies preparation for action, and may be widened out to express that most blessed prerogative of youth, the cherishing of bright imaginations of its future activity and course. The dreams of youth are often laughed at, but if a young man or woman be faithful to them they are the prophecies of the future, and are given in order that at the opening of the flower nature may put forth her power; and so we may be able to live through many a dreary hour in the future. Only, seeing that you do live so much in rich foreshadowings and fair anticipations of the times that are to come, take care that you do not waste that divine faculty, the freshness of which is granted to you as a morning gift, the ‘dew of your youth.’ See that you do not waste it in anticipations which cling like mist to the low levels of life, but that you lift it higher and embrace worthy objects. It is good

that you should anticipate, that you should live by hope. It is good that you should be drawn onwards by bright visions, whether they be ever fulfilled or no. But there are dangers in the exercise, and dreaming with some of you takes the place of realising your dreams, and you build for yourselves fair fabrics in imagination which you never take one step to accomplish and make real. Be not the slaves and fools of your imaginations, but cultivate the faculty of hoping largely; for the possibilities of human life are elastic, and no man or woman, in their most sanguine, early anticipations, if only these be directed to the one real good, has ever exhausted or attained the possibilities open to every soul.

Again, girding one's self implies independent self-reliance, and that is a gift and a stewardship given (as all gifts are stewardships) to the young. We all fancy, in our early days, that we are going to build 'towers that will reach to heaven.' Now we have come, and we will show people how to do it! The past generations have failed, but ours is full of brighter promise. There is something very touching, to us older men almost tragical, in the unbounded self-confidence of the young life that we see rushing to the front all round us. We know so well the disillusion that is sure to come, the disappointments that will cloud the morning sky. We would not carry one shadow from the darkened experience of middle life into the roseate tints of the morning. The 'vision splendid'

Will fade away Into the light of common day,'

soon enough. But for the present this self-reliant confidence is one of the blessings of your early days.

Only remember, it is dangerous, too. It may become want of reverence, which is ruinous, or presumption and rashness. Remember what a cynical head of a college said, 'None of us is infallible, not even the youngest,' and blend modesty with confidence, and yet be buoyant and strong, and trust in the power that may make you strong. And then your self-confidence will not be rashness.

'Thou wentest whither thou wouldest.' That is another characteristic of youth, after it has got beyond the schoolboy stage. Your own will tends to become your guide. For one thing, at your time of life, most other inward guides are comparatively weak. You have but little experience. Most of you have not cultivated largely the habit of patient reflection, and thinking twice before you act once. That comes: it would not be good that it should be over-predominant in you. 'Old heads on young shoulders' are always monstrosities, and it is all right that, in your early days, you should largely live by impulse, if only, as well as a will, there be a conscience at work which will do instead of the bitter experience which comes to guide some of the older of us.

Again, yours is the age when passion is strong. I speak now especially to young men. Restraints are removed for many of you. There are dozens of young men listening to me now, away from their father's home, separated from the purifying influence of sisters and of family life, living in solitary lodgings, at liberty to spend their evenings where they choose,

and nobody be a bit the wiser. Ah, my dear young friend! 'thou wentest whither thou wouldest' and thou wouldest whither thou oughtest not to go.

There is nothing more dangerous than getting into the habit of saying, 'I do as I like,' however you cover it over. Some of you say, 'I indulge natural inclinations; I am young; a man must have his fling. Let me sow my wild oats in a quiet corner, where nobody will see the crop coming up; and when I get to be as old as you are, I will do as you do; young men will be young men,' etc., etc. You know all that sort of talk. Take this for a certain fact: that whoever puts the reins into the charge of his own will when he is young, has put the reins and the whip into hands which will drive over the precipice.

My friend! 'I will' is no word for you. There is a far diviner and better one than that—'I ought.' Have you learnt that? Do you yield to that sovereign imperative, and say, 'I must, because I ought and, therefore, I will'? Bow passion to reason, reason to conscience, conscience to God—and then, be as strong in the will and as stiff in the neck as ever you choose; but only then. So much, then, for my first picture.

II. Now let me ask you to turn with me for a moment to the second one—What you will certainly become if you live.

I have already explained that putting this meaning on the latter portion of our first verse is somewhat forcing it from its original signification. And yet it is so little of violence that the whole of the language naturally lends itself to make a picture of the difference between the two stages of life.

All the bright visions that dance before your youthful mind will fade away. We begin by thinking that we are going to build temples, or 'towers that shall reach to heaven,' and when we get into middle life we have to say to ourselves: 'Well! I have scarcely material enough to carry out the large design that I had. I think that I will content myself with building a little hovel, that I may live in, and perhaps it will keep the weather off me.' Hopes diminish; dreams vanish; limited realities take their place, and we are willing to hold out our hands and let some one else take the responsibilities that we were so eager to lay upon ourselves at the first. Strength will fade away. 'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail.' Physical weariness, weakness, the longing for rest, the consciousness of ever-narrowed and narrowing powers, will come to you, and if you grow up to be old men, which it is probable that many of you will do, you will have to sit and watch the tide of your life ebb, ebb, ebbing away moment by moment.

Self-will will be wonderfully broken, for there are far stronger forces that determine a man's life than his own wishes and will. We are like swimmers in the surf of the Indian Ocean, powerless against the battering of the wave which pitches us, for all our science, and for all our muscle, where it will. Call it environment, call it fate, call it circumstances, call it providence, call it God—there is something outside of us bigger than we are, and the man who begins life, thinking 'Thus I will, thus I command, let my determination stand instead

of all other reason'; has to say at last, 'I could not do what I wanted. I had to be content to do what I could.' Thus our self-will gets largely broken down; and patient acceptance of the inevitable comes to be the wisdom and peace of the old man.

And, last of all, the picture shows us an irresistible approximation to an unwelcome goal: 'Another shall carry thee whither thou wouldest not.'

Life to the old seems to you to be so empty and ashen grey that you wonder they care to live. But life to them, for all its disappointments, its weariness, its foiled efforts, its vanished hopes, its departed companions, is yet life, and most of them cling to it like a miser to his gold. But yet, like a man sucked into Niagara above the falls, they are borne on the irresistible, smooth flood, nearer and nearer to the edge of the rock, and they hear the mighty sound in their ears long before they reach the place where the plunge is to be taken from sunshine into darkness and foam.

So 'when thou shalt be old' your fancy will be gone, your physical strength will be gone, your freshness will be gone, your faculty of hoping will work feebly and have little to work on; on earth your sense of power will be humbled, and yet you will not want to be borne to the place whither you must be borne.

Fancy two portraits, one of a little chubby boy in child's dress, with a round face and clustering curls and smooth cheeks and red lips, and another of an old man, with wearied eyes, and thin locks, and wrinkled cheeks, and a bowed frame. The difference between the two is but the symbol of the profounder differences that separate the two selves, which yet are the one self—the impetuous, self-reliant, self-willed, hopeful, buoyant youth, and the weary, feeble, broken, old man. And that is what you will come to, if you live, as sure as I am speaking to you, and you are listening to me.

III. And now, lastly, what in the view of both these stages it is wise for you to do.

'When He had spoken thus, He saith unto him, Follow Me.' What do we mean by following Christ? We mean submission to His authority. 'Follow Me' as Captain, Commander, absolute Lawgiver, and Lord. We mean imitation of His example. These two words include all human duty, and promise to every man perfection if he obeys. 'Follow Me'—it is enough, more than enough, to make a man complete and blessed. We mean choosing and keeping close to Him, as Companion as well as Leader and Lord. No man or woman will ever be solitary, though friends may go, and associates may change, and companions may leave them, and life may become empty and dreary as far as human sympathy is concerned—no man or woman will ever be solitary if stepping in Christ's footsteps, close at His heels, and realising His presence.

But you cannot follow Him, and He has no right to tell you to follow Him, unless He is something more and other to you than Example, and Commander, and Companion. What business has Jesus Christ to demand that a man should go after Him to the death? Only this business, that He has gone to the death for the man. You must follow Christ first,

my friend, by coming to Him as a sinful creature, and finding your whole salvation and all your hope in humble reliance on the merit of His death. Then you may follow Him in obedience, and imitation, and glad communion.

That being understood, I would press upon you this thought, that such a following of Jesus Christ will preserve for you all that is blessed in the characteristics of your youth, and will prevent them from becoming evil. He will give you a basis for your hopes and fulfil your most sanguine dreams, if these are based on His promises, and their realisation sought in the path of His feet. As Isaiah prophesies, 'the mirage shall become a pool.' That which else is an illusion, dancing ahead and deceiving thirsty travellers into the belief that sand is water, shall become to you really 'pools of water,' if your hopes are fixed on Jesus Christ. If you follow Him, your strength will not ebb away with shrunken sinews and enfeebled muscles. If you trust Christ, your self-will will be elevated by submission, and become strong to control your rebellious nature, because it is humble to submit to His supreme command. And if you trust and follow Jesus Christ, your hope will be buoyant, and bright, and blessed, and prolong its buoyancy, and brightness, and blessedness into 'old age, when others fade.' If you will follow Christ your old age will, if you reach it, be saved from the bitterest pangs that afflict the aged, and will be brightened by future possibilities. There will be no need for lingering laments over past blessings, no need for shrinking reluctance to take the inevitable step. An old age of peaceful, serene brightness caught from the nearer gleam of the approaching heaven, and quiet as the evenings in the late autumn, not without a touch of frost, perhaps, but yet kindly and fruitful, may be ours. And instead of shrinking from the end, if we follow Jesus, we shall put our hands quietly and trustfully into His, as a little child does into its mother's soft, warm palm, and shall not ask whither He leads, assured that since it is He who leads we shall be led aright.

Dear young friends! 'Follow Me!' is Christ's merciful invitation to you. You will never again be so likely to obey it as you are now. Well begun is half ended. 'I would have you innocent of much transgression.' You need Him to keep you in the slippery ways of youth. You could not go into some of those haunts, where some of you have been, if you thought to yourselves, 'Am I following Jesus as I cross this wicked threshold?' You may never have another message of mercy brought to your ears. If you do become a religious man in later life, you will be laying up for yourselves seeds of remorse and sorrow, and in some cases memories of pollution and filth, that will trouble you all your days. 'To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

## **'THEY ALSO SERVE WHO ONLY STAND AND WAIT'**

'Peter, seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do! Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.'—[JOHN xxi. 21, 22](#).

We have seen in a former sermon that the charge of the risen Christ to Peter, which immediately precedes these verses, allotted to him service and suffering. The closing words of that charge 'Follow Me!' had a deep significance, as uniting both parts of his task in the one supreme command of imitation of his Master.

But the same words had also a simpler meaning, as inviting the Apostle to come apart with Christ at the moment, for some further token of His love or indication of His will. Peter follows; but in following, naturally turns to see what the little group, sitting silent there by the coal fire on the beach, may be doing, and he notices John coming towards them, with intent to join them.

What emboldened John to thrust himself, uncalled for, into so secret an interview? The words in which he is described in the context answer the question. 'He was the disciple whom Jesus loved, which also leaned on His breast at Supper, and said, Lord! which is he that betrayeth Thee?' He was also bound by close ties to Peter. So with the familiarity of 'perfect love which casteth out fear,' he felt that the Master could have no secrets from him, and no charge to give to his friend which he might not share.

Peter's swift question, 'Lord! and what shall this man do?' though it has been often blamed, does not seem very blameworthy. There was perhaps a little touch of his old vivacity in it, indicating that he had not been sufficiently subdued and sobered by the prospect which Christ had held out to him; but far more than that there was a natural interest in his friend's fate, and something of a wish to have his company on the path which he was to tread. Christ's answer, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me!' gently rebukes any leaven of evil that there may have been in the question; warns him against trying to force other people into his groove; with solemn emphasis reiterates his own duty; and, in effect, bids him let his brother alone, and see that he himself discharges the ministry which he has received of the Lord.

The enigmatical words of Christ, and the long life of the Apostle, which seemed to explain them, naturally bred an interpretation of them in the Early Church which is recorded here, as I believe, by the Evangelist himself, to the effect that John, like another Enoch at the beginning of a new world, was to escape the common lot. And very beautiful is the quiet way in which the Evangelist put that error on one side, by the simple repetition of his Master's words, emphasising their hypothetical form and their enigmatical character: 'Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?'

Now all this, I think, is full of lessons. Let me try to draw one or two of them briefly now.



I. First, then, we have in that majestic 'If I will!' the revelation of the risen Christ as the Lord of life and death.

In His charge to Peter, Christ had asserted His right absolutely to control His servant's conduct and fix his place in the world, and His power to foresee and forecast his destiny and his end. But in these words He goes a step further. 'I will that he tarry'; to communicate life and to sustain life is a divine prerogative; to act by the bare utterance of His will upon physical nature is a divine prerogative. Jesus Christ here claims that His will goes out with sovereign power amongst the perplexities of human history and into the depths of that mystery of life; and that He, the Son of Man, 'quickens whom He will,' and has power 'to kill and to make alive.' The words would be absurd, if not something worse, upon any but divine lips, that opened with conscious authority, and whose Utterer knew that His hand was laid upon the innermost springs of being.

So, in this entirely incidental fashion, you have one of the strongest and plainest instances of the quiet, unostentatious and habitual manner in which Jesus Christ claimed for Himself properly divine prerogatives.

Remember that He who thus spoke was standing before these seven men there, in the morning light, on the beach, fresh from the grave. His resurrection had proved Him to be the Lord of death. He had bound it to His chariot-wheels as a Conqueror. He had risen and He stood there before them with no more mark of the corruption of the grave upon Him than there are traces of the foul water in which a sea bird may have floated, on its white wing that flashes in the sunshine as it soars. And surely as these men looked to Christ, 'declared to be the Son of God with power, by His resurrection from the dead, 'they may have begun, however 'foolish and slow of heart' they were 'to believe,' to understand that 'to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that He might be the Lord both of the dead and of the living,' both of death and of life.

These two Apostles' later history was full of proofs that Christ's claim was valid. Peter is shut up in prison and delivered once, at the very last moment, when hope was almost dead, in order that he might understand that when he was put into another prison and not delivered, the blow of martyrdom fell upon him, not because of the strength of his persecutors, but because of the will of his Lord. And John had to see his brother James, to whom he had been so closely knit, with whom he had pledged himself to drink the cup that Christ drank of, whom he had desired to have associated with himself in the special honours in the Messianic Kingdom—he had to see him slain, first of the Apostles, while he himself lingered here long after all his early associates were gone. He had, no doubt, many a longing to depart. Solitary, surrounded by a new world, pressed by many cares, he must often have felt that the cross which he had to carry was no lighter than that laid on those who had passed to their rest by martyrdom. To him it would often be martyrdom to live. His personal longing is heard for a moment in the last words of the Apocalypse, 'Amen! even so, come,

Lord Jesus!'—but undoubtedly for the most part he stayed his heart on his Lord's will, and waited in meek patience till he heard the welcome announcement, 'The Master is come and calleth for thee.'

And, dear friends! that same belief that the risen Christ is the Lord of life and death, is the only one that can stay our hearts, or make us bow with submission to His divine will. He who has conquered death by undergoing it is death's Lord as well as ours, and when He wills to bring His friends home to Himself, saith to that black-robed servant, 'Go, and he goeth; do this and he doeth it.' The vision which John saw long after this on another shore, washed by a stormier sea, spoke the same truth as does this majestic 'I will'—'He that liveth and became dead and is alive for evermore,' is by virtue of His divine eternal life, and has become in His humanity by virtue of His death and resurrection the Lord of life and death. The hands that were nailed to the Cross turn the keys of death and Hades. 'He openeth and no man shutteth; He shutteth and no man openeth.'

II. We have here before us, in this incident, the service of patient waiting.

'If I will that he tarry, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.' Peter is the man of action, not great at reflection; full of impulse, restless until his hands can do something to express his thoughts and his emotions. On the very Mount of Transfiguration he wanted to set to work and build 'three tabernacles,' instead of listening awed to the divine colloquy. In Galilee he cannot wait quietly for his Master to come, but must propose to his friends to 'go a fishing.' In the fishing-boat, as soon as he sees the Lord he must struggle through the sea to get at Him; whilst John sits quiet in the boat, blessed in the consciousness of his Master's presence and in silently gazing at Him verily there. All through the first part of the Acts of the Apostles his bold energy goes flashing and flaming. It is always his voice that rings out in the front, whether preaching on the Pentecost Day, bringing healing to the sick, or fronting the Sanhedrim. His element is in the shock of conflict and the strain of work.

John, on the other hand, seldom appears in the narrative. When he does so he stands a silent figure by the side of Peter, and disappears from it altogether before very long. We do not hear that he did anything. He seems to have had no part in the missionary work of the Church.

He 'tarried,' that was all. The word is the same—'abide'—which is so often upon his lips in his Gospel and in his Epistles, as expressive of the innermost experience of the Christian soul, the condition of all fruitfulness, blessedness, knowledge and Christ-likeness. Christ's charge to John to 'tarry' did not only, as his brethren misinterpreted it, mean that his life was to be continued, but it prescribed the manner of his life. It was to be patient contemplation, a 'dwelling in the house of the Lord,' a keeping of his heart still, like some little tarn up amongst the silent hills, for heaven with all its blue to mirror itself in.

And that quiet life of contemplation bore its fruit. In his meditation the deeds and words of his Master slowly grew ever more and more luminous to him. Deeper meanings came

out, revealing new constellations, as he gazed into that opening heaven of memory. He reaped 'the harvest of a quiet eye' and garnered the sheaves of it in his Gospel, the holy of holies of the New Testament; and in his Epistles, in which he proclaims the first and last word of revelation, 'God is love'—the pure diamond that hangs at the end of the golden chain let down from Heaven. Often, no doubt, his brethren thought him 'but an idler in the land,' but at last his 'tarrying' was vindicated.

Now, dear brethren! in all times of the world's history that form of Christian service needs to be pressed upon busy people. And there never was a time in the world's history, or in the Church's history, when it more needed to be pressed upon the ordinary Christian man than at this day. The good and the bad of our present Christianity, and of our present social life, conspire to make people think that those who are not at work in some external form of Christian service for the good of their fellows are necessarily idlers. Many of them are so, but by no means all, and there is always the danger that the external work which good, earnest people do shall become greater than can be wholesomely and safely done by them without their constant recourse to this solitary meditation, and to tarrying before God.

The stress and bustle of our everyday life; the feverish desire for immediate results; the awakened conviction that Christianity is nothing if not practical; the new sense of responsibility for the condition of our fellows; the large increase of all sorts of domestic, evangelistic, and missionary work among all churches in this day—things to be profoundly thankful for, like all other good things have their possible dangers; and it is laid on my heart to warn you of these now. For the sake of our own personal hold on Jesus Christ, for the sake of our progress in the knowledge of His truth, and for the sake of the very work which some of us count so precious, there is need that we shall betake ourselves to that still communion. The stream that is to water half a continent must rise high in the lonely hills, and be fed by many a mountain rill in the solitude, and the men who are to keep the freshness of their Christian zeal, and of the consecration which they will ever feel is being worn away by the attrition even of faithful service, can only renew and refresh it by resorting again to the Master, and imitating Him who prepared Himself for a day of teaching in the Temple by a night of communion on the Mount of Olives.

Further, there is here a lesson of tolerance for us all. Practical men are always disposed, as I said, to force everybody else into their groove. Martha is always disposed to think that Mary is idle when she is 'sitting at Christ's feet,' and wants to have her come into the kitchen and help her there. The eye which sees must not say to the hand which toils, nor the hand to the eye, 'I have no need of thee.' There are men who cannot think much; there are men who cannot work much. There are men whom God has chosen for diligent external service; there are men whom God has chosen for solitary retired musing; and we cannot dispense with either the one or the other. Did not John Bunyan do more for the world when he was shut up in Bedford Gaol and dreamed his dream than by all his tramping about Bedfordshire,

preaching to a handful of cottagers? And has not the Christian literature of the prison, which includes three at least of Paul's Epistles, proved of the greatest service and most precious value to the Church?

We need all to listen to the voice which says, 'Come ye apart by yourselves into a solitary place, and rest awhile.' Work is good, but the foundation of work is better. Activity is good, but the life which is the basis of activity is even more. There is plenty of so-called Christian work-to-day which I fear me is not life but mechanism; has slipped off its original foundations, and is, therefore, powerless. Let us tolerate the forms of service least like our own, not seek to force other men into our paths nor seek to imitate them. Let Peter flame in the van, and beard high priests, and stir and fight; and let John sit in his quiet horns, caring for his Lord's mother, and holding fellowship with his Lord's Spirit.

III. Lastly, we have here the lesson of patient acquiescence in Christ's undisclosed will.

The error into which the brethren of the Apostle fell as to the meaning of the Lord's words was a very natural one, especially when taken with the commentary which John's unusually protracted life seemed to append to it. We know that that belief lingered long after the death of the Apostle; and that legends, like the stories that are found in many nations of heroes that have disappeared, but are sleeping in some mountain recess, clustered round John's grave; over which the earth was for many a century believed to heave and fall with his gentle breathing.

John did not know exactly what his Master meant. He would not venture upon a counter-interpretation. Perhaps his brethren were right, he does not know; perhaps they were wrong, he does not know. One thing he is quite sure of, that what his Master said was: 'If I will that he tarry.' And he acquiesces quietly in the certainty that it shall be as his Master wills; and, in the uncertainty what that will is, he says in effect: 'I do not know, and it does not much matter. If I am to go to find Him, well! If He is to come to find me, well again! Whichever way it be, I know that the patient tarrying here will lead to a closer communion hereafter, and so I leave it all in His hands.'

Dear brethren! that is a blessed state that you and I may come to; a state of quiet submission, not of indifference but of acquiescence in the undisclosed will of our loving Christ about all matters, and about this alternative of life or death amongst the rest. The soul that has had communion with Jesus Christ amidst the imperfections here will be able to refer all the mysteries and problems of its future to Him with unshaken confidence. For union with Him carries with it the assurance of its own perpetuity, and 'in its sweetness yieldeth proof that it was born for immortality.' The Psalmist learned to say, 'Thou shalt afterward receive me to glory,' because he could say, 'I am continually with Thee.' And in like manner we may all rise from the experience of the present to confidence in that immortal future. Death with his 'abhorred shears' cuts other close ties, but their edge turns on the knot that binds the soul to its Saviour. He who has felt the power of communion with the ever-living

Christ cannot but feel that such union must be for ever, and that because Christ lives, and as long as Christ lives, he will live also.

Therefore, to the soul thus abiding in Christ that alternative of life or death which looms so large to us when we have not Christ with us, will dwindle down into very small dimensions. If I live there will be work for me to do here, and His love to possess; if I die there will be work for me to do there too, and His love to possess in still more abundant measure. So it will not be difficult for such a soul to leave the decision of this as of all other things with the Lord of life and death, and to lie acquiescent in His gracious hands. That calm acceptance of His will and patience with Christ's 'If' is the reward of tarrying in silent communion with Him.

My dear friend! has death to you dwindled to a very little thing? Can you say that you are quite sure that it will not touch your truest self? Are you able to leave the alternative in His hands, content with His decision and content with the uncertainty that wraps His decision? Can you say,

'Lord! It belongs not to my care,  
Whether I die or live?'

The answer to these questions is involved in the answer to the other:—Have you trusted your sinful soul for salvation to Jesus Christ, and are you drawing from Him a life which bears fruit in glad service and in patient communion? Then it will not much matter whether you are in heaven or on earth, for in both places and states the essence of your life will be the same, your Companion one, and your work identical. If it be 'Christ' for me to live it will be 'gain' for me to die.

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