EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE A

by Alexander Maclaren

The first volume of Maclaren's monumental series of biblical expositions, providing rich, eloquent, and spiritually powerful commentary on portions of Scripture. Maclaren was one of the greatest expository preachers of the Victorian era.

108 Chapters

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Chapter 0

Expositions Of Holy Scripture A

Chapter 1

CHAMBERS OF IMAGERY

'Then said He unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery!' -- EZEKIEL viii.12.This is part of a vision which came to the prophet in his captivity. He is carried away in imagination from his home amongst the exiles in the East to the Temple of Jerusalem. There he sees in one dreadful series representations of all the forms of idolatry to which the handful that were left in the land were cleaving. There meets him on the threshold of the court 'the image of jealousy,' the generalised expression for the aggregate of idolatries which had stirred the anger of the divine husband of the nation. Then he sees within the Temple three groups representing the idolatries of three different lands. First, those with whom my text is concerned, who, in some underground room, vaulted and windowless, were bowing down before painted animal forms upon the walls. Probably they were the representatives of Egyptian worship, for the description of their temple might have been taken out of any book of travels in Egypt in the present day. It is only an ideal picture that is represented to Ezekiel, and not a real fact. It is not at all probable that all these various forms of idolatry were found at any time within the Temple itself. And the whole cast of the vision suggests that it is an ideal picture, and not reality, with which we have to do. Hence the number of these idolaters was seventy -- the successors of the seventy whom Moses led up to Sinai to see the God of Israel! And now here they are grovelling before brute forms painted on the walls in a hole in the dark. Their leader bears a name which might have startled them in their apostasy, and choked their prayers in their throats, for Jaazan-iah means 'the Lord hears.' Each man has a censer in his hand -- self-consecrated priests of self-chosen deities. Shrouded in obscurity, they pleased themselves with the ancient lie, 'The Lord sees not; He hath forsaken the earth.' And then, into that Sanhedrim of apostates there comes, all unknown to them, the light of God's presence; and the eye of the prophet marks their evil.I have nothing to do here with the other groups which Ezekiel saw in his vision. The next set were the representatives of the women of Israel, who, false at once to their womanhood and to their God, were taking part in the nameless obscenities and abominations of the worship of the Syrian Adonis. And the next, who from their numbers seem to be intended to stand for the representatives of the priesthood, as the former were of the whole people, represent the worshippers who had fallen under the fascinations of a widespread Eastern idolatry, and with their backs to the house of the Lord were bowing before the rising sun.All these false faiths got on very well together. Their worshippers had no quarrel with each other. Polytheism, by its very nature and the necessity of its being, is tolerant. All its rabble of gods have a mutual understanding, and are banded together against the only One that says, 'Thou shalt have none other gods beside Me.'But now, I take this vision in a meaning which the prophet had no intention to put on it. I do not often do that with my texts, and when I do I like to confess frankly that I am doing it. So I take the words now as a kind of symbol which may help to put into a picturesque and more striking form some very familiar and homely truths. Look at that dark-painted chamber that we have all of us got in our hearts; at the idolatries that go on there, and at the flashing of the sudden light of God who marks, into the midst of the idolatry, 'Hast thou seen what the ancients of the children of Israel do in the dark, each man in the chambers of his imagery?'I. Think of the dark

and painted chamber which we all of us carry in our hearts.Every man is a mystery to himself as to his fellows. With reverence, we may say of each other as we say of God -- 'Clouds and darkness are round about Him.' After all the manifestations of a life, we remain enigmas to one another and mysteries to ourselves. For every man is no fixed somewhat, but a growing personality, with dormant possibilities of good and evil lying in him, which up to the very last moment of his life may flame up into altogether unexpected and astonishing developments. Therefore we have all to feel that after all self-examination there lie awful depths within us which we have not fathomed; and after all our knowledge of one another we yet do see but the surface, and each soul dwells alone.There is in every heart a dark chamber. Oh, brethren! there are very, very few of us that dare tell all our thoughts and show our inmost selves to our dearest ones. The most silvery lake that lies sleeping amidst beauty, itself the very fairest spot of all, when drained off shows ugly ooze and filthy mud, and all manner of creeping abominations in the slime. I wonder what we should see if our hearts were, so to speak, drained off, and the very bottom layer of every thing brought into the light. Do you think you could stand it? Well, then, go to God and ask Him to keep you from unconscious sins. Go to Him and ask Him to root out of you the mischiefs that you do not know are there, and live humbly and self-distrustfuliy, and feel that your only strength is: 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be saved.' 'Hast thou seen what they do in the dark?' Still further, we may take another part of this description with possibly permissible violence as a symbol of another characteristic of our inward nature. The walls of that chamber were all painted with animal forms, to which these men were bowing down. By our memory, and by that marvellous faculty that people call the imagination, and by our desires, we are for ever painting the walls of the inmost chambers of our hearts with such pictures. That is an awful power which we possess, and, alas! too often use for foul idolatries.I do not dwell upon that, but I wish to drop one very earnest caution and beseeching entreaty, especially to the younger members of my congregation now. You, young men and women, especially you young men, mind what you paint upon those mystic walls! Foul things, as my text says, 'creeping things and abominable beasts,' only too many of you are tracing there. Take care, for these figures are ineffaceable. No repentance will obliterate them. I do not know whether even Heaven can blot them out. What you love, what you desire, what you think about, you are photographing on the walls of your immortal soul. And just as to-day, thousands of years after the artists have been gathered to the dust, we may go into Egyptian temples and see the figures on their walls, in all the freshness of their first colouring, as if the painter had but laid down his pencil a moment ago; so, on your hearts, youthful evils, the sins of your boyhood, the pruriences of your earliest days, may live in ugly shapes, that no tears and no repentance will ever wipe out. Nothing can do away with 'the marks of that which once hath been.' What are you painting on the chambers of imagery in your hearts? Obscenity, foul things, mean things, low things? Is that mystic shrine within you painted with such figures as were laid bare in some chambers in Pompeii, where the excavators had to cover up the pictures because they were so foul? Or, is it like the cells in the convent of San Marco at Florence, where Fra Angelico's holy and sweet genius has left on the bare walls, to be looked at, as he fancied, only by one devout brother in each cell, angel imaginings, and noble, pure celestial faces that calm and hallow those who gaze upon them? What are you doing, my brother, in the dark, in your chambers of imagery?II. Now look with me briefly at the second thought that I draw from this symbol, -- the idolatries of the dark chamber.All these seventy grey-bearded elders that were bowing there before the bestial gods which they had portrayed, had, no doubt, often stood in the courts of the Temple and there

made prayers to the God of Israel, with broad phylacteries, to be seen of men. Their true worship was their worship in the dark. The other was conscious or unconscious hypocrisy. And the very chamber in which they were gathered, according to the ideal representation of our text, was a chamber in, and therefore partaking of the consecration of, the Temple. So their worship was doubly criminal, in that it was sacrilege as well as idolatry. Both things are true about us.A man's true worship is not the worship which he performs in the public temple, but that which he offers down in that little private chapel, where nobody goes but himself. Worship is the attribution of supreme excellence to, and the entire dependence of the heart upon, a certain person. And the people or the things to which a man attributes the highest excellence, and on which he hangs his happiness and well-being, these be his gods, no matter what his outward profession is. You can find out what these are for you, if you will ask yourself, and honestly answer, one or two questions. What is that I want most? What is it which makes my ideal of happiness? What is that which I feel that I should be desperate without? What do I think about most naturally and spontaneously, when the spring is taken off, and my thoughts are allowed to go as they will? And if the answer to none of these questions is 'God!' then I do not know why you should call yourself a worshipper of God. It is of no avail that we pray in the temple, if we have a dark underground shrine where our true adoration is rendered.Oh, dear brethren! I am afraid there are a great many of us nominal Christians, connected with Christian Churches, posing before men as orthodox religionists, who keep this private chapel where we do our devotion to an idol and not to God. If our real gods could be made visible, what a pantheon they would make! All the foul forms painted on that cell of this vision would be paralleled in the creeping things, which crawl along the low earth and never soar nor even stand erect, and in the vile, bestial forms of passion to which some of us really bow down. Honour, wealth, literary or other distinction, the sweet sanctities of human love dishonoured and profaned by being exalted to the place which divine love should hold, ease, family, animal appetites, lust, drink -- these are the gods of some of us. Bear with my poor words and ask yourselves, not whom do you worship before the eye of men, but who is the God to whom in your inmost heart you bow down? What do you do in the dark? That is the question. Whom do you worship there? Your other worship is not worship at all. Do not forget that all such diversion of supreme love and dependence from God alone is like the sin of these men in our text, in that it is sacrilege. They had taken a chamber in the very Temple, and turned it into a temple of the false gods. Whom is your heart made to enshrine? Why! every stone, if I may so say, of the fabric of our being bears marked upon it that it was laid in order to make a dwelling-place for God. Whom are you meant to worship, by the witness of the very constitution of your nature and make of your spirits? Is there anybody but One who is worthy to receive the priceless gift of human love absolute and entire? Is there any but One to whom it is aught but degradation and blasphemy for a man to bow down? Is there any being but One that can still the tumult of my spirit, and satisfy the immortal yearnings of my soul? We were made for God, and whensoever we turn the hopes, the desires, the affections, the obedience, and that which is the root of them all, the confidence that ought to fix and fasten upon Him, to other creatures, we are guilty not only of idolatry but of sacrilege. We commit the sin of which that wild reveller in Babylon was guilty, when, at his great feast, in the very madness of his presumption he bade them bring forth the sacred vessels from the Temple at Jerusalem; 'and the king and his princes and his concubines drank in them and praised the gods.' So we take the sacred chalice of the human heart, on which there is marked the sign manual of Heaven, claiming it for God's, and fill it with the spiced and drugged draught of our

own sensualities and evils, and pour out libations to vain and false gods. Brethren! Render unto Him that which is His; and see even upon the walls scrabbled all over with the deformities that we have painted there, lingering traces, like those of some dropping fresco in a roofless Italian church, which suggest the serene and perfect beauty of the image of the One whose likeness was originally traced there, and for whose worship it was all built.III. And now, lastly, look at the sudden crashing in upon the cowering worshippers of the revealing light.Apparently the picture of my text suggests that these elders knew not the eyes that were looking upon them. They were hugging themselves in the conceit, 'the Lord seeth not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth.' And all the while, all unknown, God and His prophet stand in the doorway and see it all. Not a finger is lifted, not a sign to the foolish worshippers of His presence and inspection, but in stern silence He records and remembers.And does that need much bending to make it an impressive form of putting a solemn truth? There are plenty of us -- alas! alas! that it should be so -- to whom it is the least welcome of all thoughts that there in the doorway stand God and His Word. Why should it be, my brother, that the properly blessed thought of a divine eye resting upon you should be to you like the thought of a policeman's bull's-eye to a thief? Why should it not be rather the sweetest and the most calming and strength-giving of all convictions -- 'Thou God seest me'? The little child runs about the lawn perfectly happy as long as she knows that her mother is watching her from the window. And it ought to be sweet and blessed to each of us to know that there is no darkness where a Father's eye comes not. But oh! to the men that stand before bestial idols and have turned their backs on the beauty of the one true God, the only possibility of composure is that they shall hug themselves in the vain delusion: -- 'The Lord seeth not.'I beseech you, dear friends, do not think of His eye as the prisoner in a cell thinks of the pin-hole somewhere in the wall, through which a jailer's jealous inspection may at any moment be glaring in upon him, but think of Him your Brother, who 'knew what was in man,' and who knows each man, and see in Christ the all-knowing Godhood that loves yet better than it knows, and beholds the hidden evils of men's hearts, in order that it may cleanse and forgive all which it beholds.One day a light will flash in upon all the dark cells. We must all be manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ. Do you like that thought? Can you stand it? Are you ready for it? My friend! let Jesus Christ come to you with His light. Let Him come into the dark corners of your hearts. Cast all your sinfulness, known and unknown, upon Him that died on the Cross for every soul of man, and He will come; and His light, streaming into your hearts, like the sunbeam upon foul garments, will cleanse and bleach them white by its shining upon them. Let Him come into your hearts by your lowly penitence, by your humble faith, and all these vile shapes that you have painted on its walls will, like phosphorescent pictures in the daytime, pale and disappear when the 'Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His beams, floods your soul, leaving no part dark, and turning all into a temple of the living God.'

Chapter 2

A COMMON MISTAKE AND LAME EXCUSE

'... He prophesieth of the times that are far off.' -- EZEKIEL xii.27. Human nature was very much the same in the exiles that listened to Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar and in Manchester to-day. The same neglect of God's message was grounded then on the same misapprehension of its bearings which profoundly operates in the case of many people now. Ezekiel had been proclaiming the fall of Jerusalem to the exiles whose captivity preceded it by a few years; and he was confronted by the incredulity which fancied that it had a great many facts to support it, and so it generalised God's long-suffering delay in sending the threatened punishment into a scoffing proverb which said, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth.' To translate it into plain English, the prophets had cried 'Wolf! wolf!' so long that their alarms were disbelieved altogether. Even the people that did not go the length of utter unbelief in the prophetic threatening took the comfortable conclusion that these threatenings had reference to a future date, and they need not trouble themselves about them. And so they said, according to my text, 'They of the house of Israel say, The vision that he sees is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off.' 'It may be all quite true, but it lies away in the distant future there; and things will last our time, so we do not need to bother ourselves about what he says.' So the imagined distance of fulfilment turned the edge of the plainest denunciations, and was like wool stuffed in the people's ears to deaden the reverberations of the thunder. I wonder if there is anybody here now whom that fits, who meets the preaching of the gospel with a shrug, and with this saying, 'He prophesies of the times that are far off.' I fancy that there are a few; and I wish to say a word or two about this ground on which the widespread disregard of the divine message is based. I. First, then, notice that the saying of my text -- in the application which I now seek to make of it -- is a truth, but it is only half a truth. Of course, Ezekiel was speaking simply about the destruction of Jerusalem. If it had been true, as his hearers assumed, that that was not going to happen for a good many years yet, the chances were that it had no bearing upon them, and they were right enough in neglecting the teaching. And, of course, when I apply such a word as this in the direction in which I wish to do now, we do bring in a different set of thoughts; but the main idea remains the same. The neglect of God's solemn message by a great many people is based, more or less consciously, upon the notion that the message of Christianity -- or, if you like to call it so, of the gospel; or, if you like to call it more vaguely, religion -- has to do mainly with blessings and woes beyond the grave, and that there is plenty of time to attend to it when we get nearer the end. Now is it true that 'he prophesies of times that are far off'? Yes! and No! Yes! it is true, and it is the great glory of Christianity that it shifts the centre of gravity, so to speak, from this poor, transient, contemptible present, and sets it away out yonder in an august and infinite future. It brings to us not only knowledge of the future, but certitude, and takes the conception of another life out of the region of perhapses, possibilities, dreads, or hopes, as the case may be, and sets it in the sunlight of certainty. There is no more mist. Other faiths, even when they have risen to the height of some contemplation of a future, have always seen it wrapped in nebulous clouds of possibilities, but Christianity sets it clear, definite, solid, as certain as yesterday, as certain as to-day. It not only gives us the knowledge and the certitude of the times that are afar off, and that are not times but

eternities, but it gives us, as the all-important element in that future, that its ruling characteristic is retribution. It 'brings life and immortality to light,' and just because it does, it brings the dark orb which, like some of the double stars in the heavens, is knit to the radiant sphere by a necessary band. It brings to light, with life and immortality, death and woe. It is true -- 'he prophesies of times that are far off' and it is the glory of the gospel of Christ's revelation, and of the religion that is based thereon, that its centre is beyond the grave, and that its eye is so often turned to the clearly discerned facts that lie there. But is that all that we have to say about Christianity? Many representations of it, I am free to confess, from pulpits and books and elsewhere, do talk as if that was all, as if it was a magnificent thing to have when you came to die. As the play has it, 'I said to him that I hoped there was no need that he should think about God yet,' because he was not going to die. But I urge you to remember, dear brethren, that all that prophesying of times that are far off has the closest bearing upon this transient, throbbing moment, because, for one thing, one solemn part of the Christian revelation about the future is that Time is the parent of Eternity, and that, in like manner as in our earthly course 'the child is father of the man,' so the man as he has made himself is the author of himself as he will be through the infinite spaces that lie beyond the grave. Therefore, when a Christian preacher prophesies of times that are afar off, he is prophesying of present time, between which and the most distant eternity there is an iron nexus -- a band which cannot be broken. Nor is that all. Not only is the truth in my text but a half truth, if it is supposed that the main business of the gospel is to talk to us about heaven and hell, and not about the earth on which we secure and procure the one or the other; but also it is a half truth because, large and transcendent, eternal in their duration, and blessed beyond all thought in their sweetness as are the possibilities, the certainties that are opened by the risen and ascended Christ, and tremendous beyond all words that men can speak as are the alternative possibilities, yet these are not all the contents of the gospel message; but those blessings and penalties, joys and miseries, exaltations and degradations, which attend upon righteousness and sin, godliness and irreligion to-day are a large part of its theme and of its effects. Therefore, whilst on the one hand it is true, blessed be Christ's name! that 'he prophesies of times that are far off'; on the other hand it is an altogether inadequate description of the gospel message and of the Christian body of truth to say that the future is its realm, and not the present. II. So, then, in the second place, my text gives a very good reason for prizing and attending to the prophecy.If it is true that God, speaking through the facts of Christ's death and Resurrection and Ascension, has given to us the sure and certain hope of immortality, and has declared to us plainly the conditions upon which that immortality may be ours, and the woful loss and eclipse into the shadow of which we shall stumble darkling if it is not ours, then surely that is a reason for prizing and laying to heart, and living by the revelation so mercifully made. People do not usually kick over their telescopes, and neglect to look through them, because they are so powerful that they show them the craters in the moon and turn faint specks into blazing suns. People do not usually neglect a word of warning or guidance in reference to the ordering of their earthly lives because it is so comprehensive, and covers so large a ground, and is so certain and absolutely true. Surely there can be no greater sign of divine loving-kindness, of a Saviour's tenderness and care for us, than that He should come to each of us, as He does come, and say to each of us, 'Thou art to live for ever; and if thou wilt take Me for thy Life, thou shalt live for ever, blessed, calm, and pure.' And we listen, and say, 'He prophesies of times that are far off!' Oh! is that not rather a reason for coming very close to, and for grappling to our hearts and living always by the power of, that great revelation? Surely to announce the consequences of evil, and to

announce them so long beforehand that there is plenty of time to avoid them and to falsify the prediction, is the token of love.Now I wish to lay it on the hearts of you people who call yourselves Christians, and who are so in some imperfect degree, whether we do at all adequately regard, remember, and live by this great mercy of God, that He should have prophesied to us 'of the times that are far off.' Perhaps I am wrong, but I cannot help feeling that, for this generation, the glories of the future rest with God have been somewhat paled, and the terrors of the future unrest away from God have been somewhat lightened. I hope I am wrong, but I do not think that the modern average Christian thinks as much about heaven as his father did. And I believe that his religion has lost something of its buoyancy, of its power, of its restraining and stimulating energy, because, from a variety of reasons, the bias of this generation is rather to dwell upon, and to realise, the present social blessings of Christianity than to project itself into that august future. The reaction may be good. I have no doubt it was needed, but I think it has gone rather too far, and I would beseech Christian men and women to try and deserve more the sarcasm that is flung at us that we live for another world. Would God it were true -- truer than it is! We should see better work done in this world if it were. So I say, that 'he prophesieth of times that are far off' is a good reason for prizing and obeying the prophet.III. Lastly, this is a very common and a very bad reason for neglecting the prophecy.It does operate as a reason for giving little heed to the prophet, as I have been saying. In the old men-of-war, when an engagement was impending, they used to bring up the hammocks from the bunks and pile them into the nettings at the side of the ship, to defend it from boarders and bullets. And then, after these had served their purpose of repelling, they were taken down again and the crew went to sleep upon them. That is exactly what some of my friends do with that misconception of the genius of Christianity which supposes that it is concerned mainly with another world. They put it up as a screen between them and God, between them and what they know to be their duty -- viz., the acceptance of Christ as their Saviour. It is their hammock that they put between the bullets and themselves; and many a good sleep they get upon it!Now, that strange capacity that men have of ignoring a certain future is seen at work all round about us in every region of life. I wonder how many young men there are in Manchester to-day that have begun to put their foot upon the wrong road, and who know just as well as I do that the end of it is disease, blasted reputation, ruined prospects, perhaps an early death. Why! there is not a drunkard in the city that does not know that. Every man that takes opium knows it. Every unclean, unchaste liver knows it; and yet he can hide the thought from himself, and go straight on as if there was nothing at all of the sort within the horizon of possibility. It is one of the most marvellous things that men have that power; only beaten by the marvel that, having it, they should be such fools as to choose to exercise it. The peasants on the slopes of Vesuvius live very careless lives, and they have their little vineyards and their olives. Yes, and every morning when they come out, they can look up and see the thin wreath of smoke going up in the dazzling blue, and they know that some time or other there will be a roar and a rush, and down will come the lava. But 'a short life and a merry one' is the creed of a good many of us, though we do not like to confess it. Some of you will remember the strange way in which ordinary habits survived in prisons in the dreadful times of the French Revolution, and how ladies and gentlemen, who were going to have their heads chopped off next morning, danced and flirted, and sat at entertainments, just as if there was no such thing in the world as the public prosecutor and the tumbril, and the gaoler going about with a bit of chalk to mark each door where were the condemned for next day. That same strange power of ignoring a known future, which works so widely and so disastrously round about us, is especially manifested

in regard to religion. The great bulk of English men and women who are not Christians, and the little sample of such that I have in my audience now, as a rule believe as fully as we do the truths which they agree to neglect. Let me speak to them individually. You believe that death will introduce you into a world of two halves -- that if you have been a good, religious man, you will dwell in blessedness; that if you have not, you will not -- yet you never did a single thing, nor refrained from a single thing, because of that belief. And when I, and men of my profession, come and plead with you and try to get through that strange web of insensibility that you have spun round you, you listen, and then you say, with a shrug, 'He prophesies of things that are far off.' and you turn with relief to the trivialities of the day. Need I ask you whether that is a wise thing or not?Surely it is not wise for a man to ignore a future that is certain simply because it is distant. So long as it is certain, what in the name of common-sense has the time when it begins to be a present to do with our wisdom in regard to it? It is the uncertainty in future anticipations which makes it unwise to regulate life largely by them, and if you can eliminate that element of uncertainty -- which you can do if you believe in Jesus Christ -- then the question is not when is the prophecy going to be fulfilled, but is it true and trustworthy? The man is a fool who, because it is far off, thinks he can neglect it.Surely it is not wise to ignore a future which is so incomparably greater than this present, and which also is so connected with this present as that life here is only intelligible as the vestibule and preparation for that great world beyond.Surely it is not wise to ignore a future because you fancy it is far away, when it may burst upon you at any time. These exiles to whom Ezekiel spoke hugged themselves in the idea that his words were not to be fulfilled for many days to come; but they were mistaken, and the crash of the fall of Jerusalem stunned them before many months had passed by. We have to look forward to a future which must be very near to some of us, which may be nearer to others than they think, which at the remotest is but a little way from us, and which must come to us all. Oh, dear friends, surely it is not wise to ignore as far off that which for some of us may be here before this day closes, which will probably be ours in some cases before the fresh young leaves now upon the trees have dropped yellow in the autumn frosts, which at the most distant must be very near us, and which waits for us all.What would you think of the crew and passengers of some ship lying in harbour, waiting for its sailing orders, who had got leave on shore, and did not know but that at any moment the blue-peter might be flying at the fore -- the signal to weigh anchor -- if they behaved themselves in the port as if they were never going to embark, and made no preparations for the voyage? Let me beseech you to rid yourselves of that most unreasonable of all reasons for neglecting the gospel, that its most solemn revelations refer to the eternity beyond the grave.There are many proofs that man on the whole is a very foolish creature, but there is not one more tragical than the fact that believing, as many of you do, that 'the wages of sin is death, and the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ,' you stand aloof from accepting the gift, and risk the death.The 'times far off' have long since come near enough to those scoffers. The most distant future will be present to you before you are ready for it, unless you accept Jesus Christ as your All, for time and for eternity. If you do, the time that is near will be pure and calm, and the times that are far off will be radiant with unfading bliss.

Chapter 3

THE HOLY NATION

'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.26. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.27. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them.28. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God.29. I will also save you from all your

uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you.30. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.31. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.32. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.33. Thus saith the Lord God; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded.34. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereat; it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by.35. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited.36. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.37. Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.38. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the Lord.' -- EZEKIEL xxxvi.25-38. This great prophecy had but a partial fulfilment, though a real one, in the restored Israel. The land was given back, the nation was multiplied, fertility again blessed the smiling fields and vineyards, and, best of all, the people were cleansed 'from all their idols' by the furnace of affliction. Nothing is more remarkable than the transformation effected by the captivity, in regard to the idolatrous propensities of the people. Whereas before it they were always hankering after the gods of the nations, they came back from Babylon the resolute champions of monotheism, and never thereafter showed the smallest inclination for what had before been so irresistible. But the fulness of Ezekiel's prophecy is not realised until Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant is brought to pass. Nor does the state of the militant church on earth exhaust it. Future glories gleam through the words. They have a 'springing accomplishment' in the Israel of the restoration, a fuller in the New Testament church, and their ultimate realisation in the New Jerusalem, which shall yet descend to be the bride, the Lamb's wife. The principles involved in the prophecy belong to the region of purely spiritual religion, and are worth pondering, apart from any question of the place and manner of fulfilment. First comes the great truth that the foundation, so far as concerns the history of a soul or of a community, of all other good is divine forgiveness (v.25). Ezekiel, the priest, casts the promise into ceremonial form, and points to the sprinklings of the polluted under the law, or to the ritual of consecration to the priesthood. That

cleansing is the removal of already contracted defilement, especially of the guilt of idolatry. It is clearly distinguished from the operation on the inward nature which follows; that is to say, it is the promise of forgiveness, or of justification, not of sanctification. From what deep fountains in the divine nature that 'clean water' was to flow, Ezekiel does not know; but we have learned that a more precious fluid than water is needed, and have to think of Him 'who came not by water only, but by water and blood,' in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. But the central idea of this first promise is that it must be God's hand which sprinkles from an evil conscience. Forgiveness is a divine prerogative. He only can, and He will, cleanse from all filthiness. His pardon is universal. The most ingrained sins cannot be too black to melt away from the soul. The dye-stuffs of sin are very strong, but there is one solvent which they cannot resist. There are no 'fast colours' which God's 'clean water' cannot move. This cleansing of pardon underlies all the rest of the blessings. It is ever the first thing needful when a soul returns to God. Then follows an equally exclusively divine act, the impartation of a new nature, which shall secure future obedience (vs.26, 27). Who can thrust his hand into the depths of man's being, and withdraw one life-principle and enshrine another, while yet the individuality of the man remains untouched? God only. How profound the consciousness of universal obstinacy and insensibility which regards human nature, apart from such renewal, as possessing but a 'heart of stone'! There are no sentimental illusions about the grim facts of humanity here. Superficial views of sin and rose-tinted fancies about human nature will not admit the truth of the Scripture doctrine of sinfulness, alienation from God. They diagnose the disease superficially, and therefore do not know how to cure it. The Bible can venture to give full weight to the gravity of the sickness, because it knows the remedy. No surgery but God's can perform that operation of extracting the stony heart and inserting a heart of flesh. No system which cannot do that can do what men want. The gospel alone deals thoroughly with man's ills. And how does it effect that great miracle? 'I will put My Spirit within you.' The new life-principle is the effluence of the Spirit of God. The promise does not merely offer the influence of a divine spirit, working on men as from without, or coming down upon them as an afflatus, but the actual planting of God's Spirit in the deep places of theirs. We fail to apprehend the most characteristic blessing of the gospel if we do not give full prominence to that great gift of an indwelling Spirit, the life of our lives. Cleansing is much, but is incomplete without a new life-principle which shall keep us clean; and that can only be God's Spirit, enshrined and operative within us; for only thus shall we 'walk in His statutes, and keep His judgments.' When the Lawgiver dwells in our hearts, the law will be our delight; and keeping it will be the natural outcome and expression of our life, which is His life. Then follows the picture of the blessed effects of obedience (vs.28-30). These are cast into the form appropriate to the immediate purpose of the prophecy, and received fulfilment in the actual restoration to the land, which fulfilment, however, was imperfect, inasmuch as the obedience and renewal of the people's hearts were incomplete. These can only be complete under the gospel, and, in the fullest sense, only in another order than the present. When men fully keep God's judgments, they shall dwell permanently in a good land. Israel's hold on its country was its obedience, not its prowess. Our real hold on even earthly good is the choosing of God for our supreme good. In the measure in which we can say 'Thy law is within my heart,' all things are ours; and we may possess all things while having nothing in the vulgar world's sense of having. Similarly that obedience, which is the fruit of the new life of God's Spirit in our spirits, is the condition of close mutual possession in the blessed reciprocity of trust and faithfulness, love bestowing and love receiving, by which the quiet

heart knows that God is its, and it is God's. If stains and interruptions still sometimes break the perfectness of obedience and continuity of reciprocal ownership, there will be a further cleansing for such sins. 'If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin' (v.29). The lovely picture of the blessed dwellers in their good land is closed by the promise of abundant harvests from corn and fruit-tree; that is, all that nourishes or delights. The deepest truth taught thereby is that he who lives in God has no unsatisfied desires, but finds in Him all that can sustain, strengthen, and minister to growth, and all that can give gladness and delight. If we make God our heritage, we dwell secure in a good land; and 'the dust of that land is gold,' and its harvests ever plenteous. Very profoundly and beautifully does Ezekiel put as the last trait in his picture, and as the upshot of all this cornucopia of blessings, the penitent remembrance of past evils. Undeserved mercies steal into the heart like the breath of the south wind, and melt the ice. The more we advance in holiness and consequent blessed communion with God, the more clearly shall we see the evil of our past. Forgiven sin looks far blacker because it is forgiven. When we are not afraid of sin's consequences, we see more plainly its sinfulness. When we have tasted God's sweetness, we think with more shame of our ingratitude and folly. If God forgets, the more reason for us to remember our transgressions. The man who 'has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins' is in danger of finding out that he is not purged from them. There is no gnawing of conscience, nor any fearful looking for of judgment in such remembrance, but a wholesome humility passing into thankful wonder that such sin is pardoned, and such a sinner made God's friend. The deep foundation of all the blessedness is finally laid bare (v.32) as being God's undeserved mercy. 'For Mine holy name' (v.22) is God's reason. He is His own motive, and He wills that the world should know His name, -- that is, His manifested character, -- and understand how loving and long-suffering He is. So He wills, not because such knowledge adds to His glory, but because it satisfies His love, since it will make the men who know His name blessed. The truth that God's motive is His own name's sake may be so put as to be hideous and repellent; but it really proclaims that He is love, and that His motive is His poor creatures' blessing. To this great outline of the blessings of the restored nations are appended two subsidiary prophecies, marked by the recurring 'Thus saith the Lord.' The former of these (vs.33-36) deals principally with the new beauty that was to clothe the land. The day in which the inhabitants were cleansed from their sins was to be the day in which the land was to be raised from its ruin. Cities are to be rebuilt, the ground that had lain fallow and tangled with briers and thorns is to be tilled, and to bloom like Eden, a restored paradise. How far the fulfilment has halted behind the promise, the melancholy condition of Palestine to-day may remind us. Whether the literal fulfilment is to be anticipated or no seems less important than to note that the experience of forgiveness (and of the consequent blessings described above) is the precursor of this fair picture. Therefore, the Church's condition of growth and prosperity is its realisation in the persons of its individual members, of pardon, the renewal of the inner man by the indwelling Spirit, faithful obedience, communion with God, and lowly remembrance of past sins. Where churches are marked by such characteristics, they will grow. If they are not, all their 'evangelistic efforts' will be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.The second appended prophecy (vs.37, 38) is that of increase of population. The picture of the flocks of sheep for sacrifice, which thronged Jerusalem at the feasts, is given as a likeness of the swarms of inhabitants in the 'waste cities.' The point of comparison is chiefly the number. One knows how closely a flock huddles and seems to fill the road in endless procession. But the destination as well as the number comes into view. All these patient creatures, crowding the ways,

are meant for sacrifices. So the inhabitants of the land then shall all yield themselves to God, living sacrifices. The first words of our text point to the priesthood of all believers; the last words point to the sacrifice of themselves which they have to offer.'For this moreover will I be inquired of by the house of Israel.' The blessings promised do not depend on our merits, as we have heard, but yet they will not be given without our co-operation in prayer. God promises, and that promise is not a reason for our not asking the gifts from Him, but for our asking. Faith keeps within the lines of God's promise, and prayers which do not foot themselves on a promise are the offspring of presumption, not of faith. God 'lets Himself be inquired of' for that which is in accordance with His will; and, accordant with His will though it be, He will not 'do it for them,' unless His flock ask of Him the accomplishment of His own word.

Chapter 4

THE DRY BONES AND THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

1. The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, 2. And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.3. And He said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, Thou knowest.4. Again He said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.5. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: 6. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.7. So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.8. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.9. Then said He unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.10. So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.11. Then He said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.12. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.13. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves.14. And shall put My spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.' -- EZEKIEL xxxvii.1-14. This great vision apparently took its form from a despairing saying, which had become a proverb among the exiles, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost: we are clean cut off' (v.11). Ezekiel lays hold of the metaphor, which had been taken to express the hopeless destruction of Israel's national existence, and even from it wrings a message of hope. Faith has the prerogative of seeing possibilities of life in what looks to sense hopeless death. We may look at the vision from three points of view, considering its bearing on Israel, on the world, and on the resurrection of the body. I. The saying, already referred to, puts the hopelessness of the mass of the exiles in a forcible fashion. The only sense in which living men could say that their bones were dried up, and they cut off, is a figurative one, and obviously it is the national existence which they regarded as irretrievably ended. The saying gives us a glimpse into the despair which had settled down on the exiles, and against which Ezekiel had to contend, as he had also to contend against its apparently opposite and yet kindred feeling of presumptuous, misplaced hope. We observe that he begins by accepting fully the facts which bred despair, and even accentuating them. The true prophet never makes light of the miseries of which he knows the cure, and does not try to comfort by minimising the gravity of the evil. The bones are very many, and they are very dry. As far as outward resources are concerned, despair was rational, and hope as absurd as it would have been to expect that men, dead so long that their bones had been bleached by years of exposure to the weather, should live again. But

while Ezekiel saw the facts of Israel's powerlessness as plainly as the most despondent, he did not therefore despair. The question which rose in his mind was God's question, and the very raising it let a gleam of hope in. So he answered with that noble utterance of faith and submission, 'O Lord God, Thou knowest.' 'With God all things are possible.' Presumption would have said 'Yes'; Unbelief would have said 'No'; Faith says, 'Thou knowest.' The grand description of the process of resurrection follows the analogy of the order in the creation of man, giving, first, the shaping of the body, and afterwards the breathing into it of the breath which is life. Both stages are wholly God's work. The prophet's part was to prophesy to the bones first; and his word, in a sense, brought about the effect which it foretold, since his ministry was the most potent means of rekindling dying hopes, and bringing the disjecta membra of the nation together again. The vivid and gigantic imagination of the prophet gives a picture of the rushing together of the bones, which has no superior in any literature. He hears a noise, and sees a 'shaking' (by which is meant the motion of the bones to each other, rather than an 'earthquake,' as the Revised Version has it, which inserts a quite irrelevant detail), and the result of all is that the skeletons are complete. Then follows the gradual clothing with flesh. There they lie, a host of corpses. The second stage is the quickening of these bodies with life, and here again Ezekiel, as God's messenger, has power to bring about what he announces; for, at his command, the breath, or wind, or spirit, comes, and the stiff corpses spring to their feet, a mighty army. The explanation in the last verses of the text somewhat departs from the tenor of the vision by speaking of Israel as buried, but keeps to its substance, and point the despairing exiles to God as the source of national resurrection. But we must not force deeper meaning on Ezekiel's words than they properly bear. The spirit promised in them is simply the source of life, -- literally, of physical life; metaphorically, of national life. However that national restoration was connected with holiness, that does not enter into the prophet's vision. Israel's restoration to its land is all that Ezekiel meant by it. True, that restoration was to lead to clearer recognition by Israel of the name of Jehovah, and of all that it implied in him and demanded from them. But the proper scope of the vision is to assure despairing Israelites that God would quicken the apparently slain national life, and replace them in the land. II. We may extend the application of the vision to the condition of humanity and the divine intervention which communicates life to a dead world, but must remember that no such meaning was in Ezekiel's thoughts. The valley full of dry bones is but too correct a description of the aspect which a world 'dead in trespasses and sins' bears, when seen from the mountain-top by pure and heavenly eyes. The activities of godless lives mask the real spiritual death, which is the condition of every soul that is separate from God. Galvanised corpses may have muscular movements, but they are dead, notwithstanding their twitching. They that live without God are dead while they live. Again, we may learn from the vision the preparation needful for the prophet, who is to be the instrument of imparting divine life to a dead world. The sorrowful sense of the widespread deadness must enter into a man's spirit, and be ever present to him, in order to fit him for his work. A dead world is not to be quickened on easy terms. We must see mankind in some measure as God sees them if we are to do God's work among them. So-called Christian teachers, who do not believe that the race is dead in sin, or who, believing it, do not feel the tragedy of the fact, and the power lodged in their hands to bring the true life, may prophesy to the dry bones for ever, and there will be no shaking among them. The great work of the gospel is to communicate divine life. The details of the process in the vision are not applicable in this respect. As we have pointed out, they are shaped after the pattern of the creation of Adam, but the essential point is that what the world needs is the

impartation from God of His Spirit. We know more than Ezekiel did as to the way by which that Spirit is given to men, and as to the kind of life which it imparts, and as to the connection between that life and holiness. It is a diviner voice than Ezekiel's which speaks to us in the name of God, and says to us with deeper meaning than the prophet of the Exile dreamed of, 'I will put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live.' But we may note that it is possible to have the outward form of a living body, and yet to have no life. Churches and individuals may be perfectly organised and perfectly dead. Creeds may be articulated most correctly, every bone in its place, and yet have no vitality in them. Forms of worship may be punctiliously proper, and have no breath of life in them. Religion must have a body, but often the body is not so much the organ as the sepulchre of the spirit. We have to take heed that the externals do not kill the inward life. Again, we note that this great act of life-giving is God's revelation of His name, -- that is, of His character so far as men can know it. 'Ye shall know that I am the Lord' (vs.13, 14). God makes Himself known in His divinest glory when He quickens dead souls. The world may learn what He is therefrom, but they who have experienced the change, and have, as it were, been raised from the grave to new life, have personal experience of His power and faithfulness so sure and sweet that henceforward they cannot doubt Him nor forget His grace. III. As to the bearing of the vision on the doctrine of the resurrection little need be said. It does not necessarily presuppose the people's acquaintance with that doctrine, for it would be quite conceivable that the vision had revealed to the prophet the thought of a resurrection, which had not been in his beliefs before. The vision is so entirely figurative, that it cannot be employed as evidence that the idea of the resurrection of the dead was part of the Jewish beliefs at this date. It does, however, seem most natural to suppose that the exiles were familiar with the idea, though the vision cannot be taken as a revelation of a literal resurrection of dead men. For clear expectations of such a resurrection we must turn to such scriptures as Daniel xii.2, 13.

Chapter 5

THE RIVER OF LIFE

Waters issued out from under the threshold of the house ... EZEKIEL xlvii.1. Unlike most great cities, Jerusalem was not situated on a great river. True, the inconsiderable waters of Siloam -- 'which flow softly' because they were so inconsiderable -- rose from a crevice in the Temple rock, and beneath that rock stretched the valley of the Kedron, dry and bleached in the summer, and a rainy torrent during the rainy seasons; but that was all. So, many of the prophets, who looked forward to the better times to come, laid their finger upon that one defect, and prophesied that it should be cured. Thus we read in a psalm: 'There is a river, the divisions whereof make glad the City of our God.' Faith saw what sense saw not. Again, Isaiah says: 'There' -- that is to say, in the new Jerusalem -- 'the glorious Lord shall be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams.' And so, this prophet casts his anticipations of the abundant outpouring of blessing that shall come when God in very deed dwells among men, into this figure of a river pouring out from beneath the Temple-door, and spreading life and fertility wherever its waters come. I need not remind you how our Lord Himself uses the same figure, and modifies it, by saying that whosoever believeth on Him, 'out of him shall flow rivers of living waters'; or how, in the very last words of the Apocalyptic seer, we hear again the music of the ripples of the great stream, 'the river of the water of life proceeding out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb.' So then, all through Scripture, we may say that we hear the murmur of the stream, and can catch the line of verdure upon its banks. My object now is not only to deal with the words that I have read as a starting-point, but rather to seek to draw out the wonderful significance of this great prophetic parable. I. I notice, first, the source from which the river conies. I have already anticipated that in pointing out that it flows from the very Temple itself. The Prophet sees it coming out of the house -- that is to say, the Sanctuary. It flows across the outer court of the house, passes the altar, comes out under the threshold, and then pours itself down on to the plain beneath. This is the symbolical dress of the thought that all spiritual blessings, and every conceivable form of human good, take their rise in the fact of God's dwelling with men. From beneath the Temple threshold comes the water of life; and wherever it is true that in any heart -- or in any community -- God dwells, there will be heard the tinkling of its ripples, and freshness and fertility will come from the stream. The dwelling of God with a man, like the dwelling of God in humanity in the Incarnation of His own dear Son, is, as it were, the opening of the fountain that it may pour out into the world. So, if we desire to have the blessings that are possible for us, we must comply with the conditions, and let God dwell in our hearts, and make them His temples; and then from beneath the threshold of that temple, too, will pour out, according to Christ's own promise, rivers of living water which will be first for ourselves to drink of and be blessed by, and then will refresh and gladden others. Another thought connected with this source of the river of life is that all the blessings which, massed together, are included in that one word 'salvation' -- which is a kind of nebula made up of many unresolved stars -- take their rise from nothing else than the deep heart of God Himself. This river rose in the House of the Lord, and amidst the mysteries of the Divine Presence; it took its rise, one might say, from beneath the Mercy-seat where the brooding Cherubim sat in silence and poured itself into a world that had not asked for it, that did not expect it, that in many of its members did not desire it and would not have

it. The river that rose in the secret place of God symbolises for us the great thought which is put into plainer words by the last of the apostles when he says, 'We love Him because He first loved us.' All the blessings of salvation rise from the unmotived, self-impelled, self-fed divine love and purpose. Nothing moves Him to communicate Himself but His own delight in giving Himself to His poor creatures; and it is all of grace that it might be all through faith. Still further, another thought that may be suggested in connection with the source of this river is, that that which is to bless the world must necessarily take its rise above the world. Ezekiel has sketched, in the last portion of his prophecy, an entirely ideal topography of the Holy Land. He has swept away mountains and valleys, and levelled all out into a great plain, in the midst of which rises the mountain of the Lord's House, far higher than the Temple hill. In reality, opposite it rose the Mount of Olives, and between the two there was the deep gorge of the Valley of the Kedron. The Prophet smooths it all out into one great plain, and high above all towers the Temple-mount, and from it there rushes down on to the low levels the fertilising, life-giving flood. That imaginary geography tells us this, that what is to bless the world must come from above the world. There needs a waterfall to generate electricity; the power which is to come into humanity and deal with its miseries must have its source high above the objects of its energy and its compassion, and in proportion to the height from which it falls will be the force of its impact and its power to generate the quickening impulse. All merely human efforts at social reform, rivers that do not rise in the Temple, are like the rivers in Mongolia, that run for a few miles and then get sucked up by the hot sands and are lost and nobody sees them any more. Only the perennial stream, that comes out from beneath the Temple threshold, can sustain itself in the desert, to say nothing of transforming the desert into a Garden of Eden. So moral and social and intellectual and political reformers may well go to Ezekiel, and learn that the 'river of the water of life,' which is to heal the barren and refresh the thirsty land, must come from below the Temple threshold. II. Note the rapid increase of the stream. The Prophet describes how his companion, the interpreter, measured down the stream a thousand cubits -- about a quarter of a mile -- and the waters were ankle-deep another thousand, making half a mile from the start, and the water was knee-deep. Another thousand -- or three-quarters of a mile -- and the water was waist-deep; another thousand -- about a mile in all -- and the water was unfordable, 'waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.' Where did the increase come from? There were no tributaries. We do not hear of any side-stream flowing into the main body. Where did the increase come from? It came from the abundant welling-up in the sanctuary. The fountain was the mother of the river -- that is to say, God's ideal for the world, for the Church, for the individual Christian, is rapid increase in their experience of the depth and the force of the stream of blessings which together make up salvation. So we come to a very sharp testing question. Will anybody tell me that the rate at which Christianity has grown for these nineteen centuries corresponds with Ezekiel's vision -- which is God's ideal? Will any Christian man say, 'My own growth in grace, and increase in the depth and fulness of the flow of the river through my spirit and my life correspond to that ideal'? A mile from the source the river is unfordable. How many miles from the source of our first experience do we stand? How many of us, instead of having 'a river that could not be passed over, waters to swim in,' have but a poor and all but stagnant feeble trickle, as shallow as or shallower than it was at first? I was speaking a minute ago about Mongolian rivers. Australian rivers are more like some men's lives. A chain of ponds in the dry season -- nay! not even a chain, but a series, with no connecting channel of water between them. That is like a great many Christian people; they have isolated times when they feel the voice of Christ's love, and yield themselves to

the powers of the world to come, and then there are long intervals, when they feel neither the one nor the other. But the picture that ought to be realised by each of us is God's ideal, which there is power in the gospel to make real in the case of every one of us, the rapid and continuous increase in the depth and in the scour of 'the river of the water of life,' that flows through our lives. Luther used to say, 'If you want to clean out a dunghill, turn the Elbe into it.' If you desire to have your hearts cleansed of all their foulness, turn the river into it. But it needs to be a progressively deepening river, or there will be no scour in the feeble trickle, and we shall not be a bit the holier or the purer for our potential and imperfect Christianity. III. Lastly, note the effects of the stream. These are threefold: fertility, healing, life. Fertility. In the East one condition of fertility is water. Irrigate the desert, and you make it a garden. Break down the aqueduct, and you make the granary of the world into a waste. The traveller as he goes along can tell where there is a stream of water, by the verdure along its banks. You travel along a plateau, and it is all baked and barren. You plunge into a wady, and immediately the ground is clothed with under-growth and shrubs, and the birds of the air sing among the branches. And so, says Ezekiel, wherever the river comes there springs up, as if by magic, fair trees 'on the banks thereof, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed.'Fertility comes second, the reception of the fertilising agent comes first. It is wasted time to tinker at our characters unless we have begun with getting into our hearts the grace of God, and the new spirit that will be wrought out by diligent effort into all beauty of life and character. Ezekiel seems to be copying the first psalm, or vice versa, the Psalmist is copying Ezekiel. At any rate, there is a verbal similarity between them, in that both dwell upon the unfading leaf of the tree that grows planted by rivers of water. And our text goes further, and speaks about perennial fruitfulness month by month, all the year round. In some tropical countries you will find blossoms, buds in their earliest stage, and ripened fruit all hanging upon one laden branch. Such ought to be the Christian life -- continuously fruitful because dependent upon continual drawing into itself, by means of its roots and suckers, of the water of life by which we are fructified.There is yet another effect of the waters -- healing. As we said, Ezekiel takes great liberties with the geography of the Holy Land, levelling it all, so his stream makes nothing of the Mount of Olives, but flows due east until it comes to the smitten gorge of the Jordan, and then turns south, down into the dull, leaden waters of the Dead Sea, which it heals. We all know how these are charged with poison. Dip up a glassful anywhere, and you find it full of deleterious matter. They are the symbol of humanity, with the sin that is in solution all through it. No chemist can eliminate it, but there is One who can. 'He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' The pure river of the water of life will cast out from humanity the malignant components that are there, and will sweeten it all. Ay, all, and yet not all, for very solemnly the Prophet's optimism pauses, and he says that the salt marshes by the side of the sea are not healed. They are by the side of it. The healing is perfectly available for them, but they are not healed. It is possible for men to reject the influences that make for the destruction of sin and the establishment of righteousness. And although the waters are healed, there still remain the obstinate marshes with the white crystals efflorescing on their surface, and bringing salt and barrenness. You can put away the healing and remain tainted with the poison.And then the last thought is the life-giving influence of the river. Everything lived whithersoever it went. Contrast Christendom with heathendom. Admit all the hollowness and mere nominal Christianity of large tracts of life in so-called Christian countries, and yet why is it that on the one side you find stagnation and death, and on the other side mental and manifold activity and progressiveness? I

believe that the difference between 'the people that sit in darkness' and 'the people that walk in the light is that one has the light and the other has not, and activity befits the light as torpor befits the darkness.But there is a far deeper truth than that in the figure, a truth that I would fain lay upon the hearts of all my hearers, that unless we our own selves have this water of life which comes from the Sanctuary and is brought to us by Jesus Christ, 'we are dead in trespasses and sins.' The only true life is in Christ. 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'* * * * *

Chapter 6

YOUTHFUL CONFESSORS

'But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.9. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.10. And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink; for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.11. Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12. Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.13. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat; and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.14. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.15. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.16. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.17. As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.18. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.19. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore stood they before the king.20. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.21. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.' -- DANIEL i.8-21.Daniel was but a boy at the date of the Captivity, and little more at the time of the attempt to make a Chaldean of him. The last verse says that he 'continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus,' the date given elsewhere as the close of the Captivity (2 Chron. xxxvi.22; Ezra i.1; vi.3). From Daniel x.1 we learn that he lived on till Cyrus's third year, if not later; but the date in i.21 is probably given in order to suggest that Daniel's career covered the whole period of the Captivity, and burned like a star of hope for the exiles. The incident in our passage is a noble example of religious principle applied to small details of daily life, and shows how God crowns such conscientious self-restraint with success. The lessons which it contains are best gathered by following the narrative.I. The heroic determination of the boyish confessor is first set forth. The plan of taking leading young men from the newly captured nation and turning them into Babylonians was a stroke of policy as heartless and high-handed as might be expected from a great conqueror. In some measure, the same thing has been done by all nations who have built up a world-wide dominion. The new names given to the youths, the attaching of them to the court, their education in Babylonish fashion, all were meant for the same purpose, -- to denationalise them, and strip them of their religion, and thus to make them tools for more easily governing their countrymen.Most men would yield to the influences, and be so lapped in the comforts of their new position as to become pliable as wax in the conqueror's hands; but here and there he would come across a bit of stiffer stuff, which would break rather than bend. Such an obstinate piece of

humanity was found in the Hebrew youth, of some fifteen years, whose Hebrew name ('God is my judge') expressed a truth that ruled him, when the name was exchanged for one that invoked Bel. It took some firmness for a captive lad, without friends or influence, to take Daniel's stand; for the motive of his desire to be excused from taking the fare provided can only have been religious. He was determined, in his brave young heart, not to 'defile' himself with the king's meat. The phrase points to the pollution incurred by eating things offered to idols, and does not imply scrupulousness like that of Pharisaic times, nor necessarily suggest a late date for the book. Probably there had been some kind of religious consecration of the food to Babylonian gods, and Daniel, in his solitary faithfulness, was carrying out the same principles which Paul afterwards laid down for Corinthian Christians as to partaking of things offered to idols. Similar difficulties are sure to emerge in analogous cases, and do so, on many mission fields.The motive here, then, is distinctly religious. Common life was so woven in with idolatrous worship that every meal was in some sense a sacrifice. Therefore 'Touch not, taste not, handle not,' was the inevitable dictate for a devout heart. Daniel seems to have been the moving spirit; but as is generally the case, he was able to infuse his own strong convictions into his companions, and the four of them held together in their protest. The great lesson from the incident is that religion should regulate the smallest details of life, and that it is not narrow over-scrupulousness, but fidelity to the highest duty, when a man sets his foot down about any small matter, and says, 'No, I dare not do it, little as it is, and pleasant as it might be to sense, because I should thereby be mixed up in a practical denial of my God.' 'So did not I, because of the fear of God' (Neh. v.15), is a motto which will require from many a young man abstinence from many things which it would be much easier to accept. II. This young confessor was as prudent as he was brave; and the story goes on to show how wisely he played his part, and how willing he was to accept all working compromises which might smooth his way. He did not at all want to pose as a martyr, and had no pleasure in making a noise. The favour which he had won with the high officer who looked after the lads before their formal examination (graduation we might call it), is set down in the narrative to the divine favour; but that favour worked by means, and no doubt the lad had done his part to win the important good opinion of his superior. The more firm is our determination to take no step beyond the line of duty, the more conciliatory we should be. But many people seem to think that heroism is shown by rudeness, and that if we are afraid that we shall some time have to say 'No' very emphatically, we should prepare for it by a great many preliminary and unnecessary negatives. The very stern need for parting company, when conscience points one way and companions another, is a reason for keeping cordially together whenever we can.'The prince of the eunuchs' made a very reasonable objection. He had been appointed to see after the health of the lads, and had ample means at his disposal; and if they lost their health in this chase after what he could only think a superstitious fad, the despot whom he served would think nothing of making him answer with his head. His fear gives a striking side-light as to the conditions of service in such a court, where no man's head was firm between his shoulders. Why should the prince of the eunuchs have supposed that the diet asked for would not nourish the lads? It was that of the bulk of men everywhere, and he had only to go out into the streets or the nearest barrack in Babylon to see what thews and muscles could be nurtured on vegetable diet and water. But whatever the want of ground in his objection, it was enough that he made it. Note that he puts it entirely on possible harmful results to himself, and that silences Daniel, who had no right to ask another to run his head into the noose, into which he was ready to put his own, if necessary. Martyrs by proxy, who have such strong convictions that they think it

somebody else's duty to run risk for them, are by no means unknown.This boy was made of other metal. So, apparently he gives up the prince of the eunuchs, and turns to another of the friends whom he had made in his short captivity -- the person in whose more immediate charge he and his three friends were. He is named Melzar in the Authorised Version; but the Revised Version more accurately takes that to be a name of office, and translates it as 'steward.' He did the catering for them, and was sufficiently friendly to listen to Daniel's reasonable proposal to try the vegetable diet for 'ten days' -- probably meaning an indefinite period, sufficiently long to test results, which a literal ten days would perhaps scarcely be. So the good-natured steward let the lads have their way, much wondering in his soul, no doubt, why they should take as much trouble to avoid good living as most youths would have taken to get it.III. The success of the experiment comes next. We do not need to suppose a miracle as either wrought or suggested by the narrative. The issue might have taught the steward a wholesome lesson in dietetics, which he and a great many of us much need. 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,' and his bodily life consisteth not in the abundance and variety of the things that he eateth. The teaching of this lesson is, not that vegetarianism or total abstinence is obligatory, for diet is here regarded only as part of idolatrous worship; but certainly a secondary conclusion, fairly drawn from the story, is that vigorous health is best kept up on very simple fare. Many dinner-tables, over which God's blessing is formally asked, are spread in such a fashion as it is hard to suppose deserves His blessing. The simpler the fare, the fewer the wants: the fewer the wants, the greater the riches; the freer the life, the more leisure for higher pursuits, and the more sound the bodily health.But the rosy faces and vigorous health of Daniel and his friends may illustrate, by a picturesque example, a large truth -- that God suffers no man to be a loser by faithfulness, and more than makes up all that is surrendered for His sake. The blessing of God on small means makes them fountains of truer joy than large ones unblessed. No man hath left anything for Christ's sake but he receives a hundred-fold in this life, if not in the actual blessings surrendered, at all events in the peace and joy of heart of which they were supposed to be bearers. God fills places emptied by Himself, and those emptied by us for His sake.IV. The conscientious abstinence of Daniel had limits. The learning of the 'Chaldeans' was largely ritualistic, and magic, incantations, divination, and mythology constituted a most important part of it. Did not the conscience, which could not swallow idolatrous food, resent being forced to assimilate idolatrous learning? No; for all that learning could be acquired by a faithful monotheist, and could be used against the system which gave it birth. Like Moses, or like the young Pharisee Saul, these Jewish boys nurtured their faith by knowledge of their enemies' belief, and used their childhood's lessons as weapons in fighting for God's truth. It is not every man's duty to become familiar with error, or to master anti-Christian systems. But if it become ours, we are not to turn away from the task, nor to doubt that God will keep His own truth alight in our minds, if we realise the danger of the position, and seek to cling to Him. V. So we have the last scene in the youths' appearance before Nebuchadnezzar. A three years' curriculum was considered necessary to turn a Jewish boy into a Chaldean expert, fit to be a traitor to his nation, an apostate from his God, and a tool of the tyrant. So far as knowledge of the priestly and astronomical science went, the four Hebrews came out at the top of the lists. The great king himself, with that personal interference in all departments which makes a despot's life so burdensome, put them through their paces, and was satisfied. His object had been to get instruments with which he could work on the Captivity, and, no doubt, also to secure servants who had no links with anybody in Babylon. Foreigners, 'kinless loons,' are favourites with despots, for

plain reasons. But Nebuchadnezzar could not fathom the hearts of the lads. An incarnation of unbridled will would find it difficult to understand a life guided by conscience, and religious scruples would have sounded as an unknown tongue to him. But yet, as he and they stood face to face, who was stronger, the conqueror or the youths who feared God, and none besides? They were in their right place at the head of the examination lists. They had not said, 'We do not believe in all this rubbish, and we are not going to trouble ourselves to master it,' but they had set themselves determinedly to work, and been all the more persevering because of their objection to the diet. If a young man has to be singular by reason of his religion, let him be singularly diligent in his work, and seek to be first, not merely for his own glory, but for the sake of the religion which he professes.'Plain living and high thinking' ought to go together. England and America have many names carved high on their annals, and written deep on their citizens' hearts, who have nourished a sublime, studious youth in poverty, 'cultivating literature on a little oatmeal,' and who all their lives have 'scorned delights and lived laborious days.' It is the temper which is most likely to succeed, but which, whether it succeeds or not, brings the best blessings to those who cultivate it. Such a youth will generally be followed by an honoured manhood like Daniel's, but will, at all events, be its own reward, and have God's blessing.'Daniel continued unto the first year of king Cyrus.' These simple words contain volumes. During all the troubles of the nation, from the king's insanity, and the murders of his successors, amidst whirling intrigues, envies, plots, and persecutions, this one man stood firm, like a pillar amid blowing sands. So God keeps the steadfast soul which is fixed on Him; and while the world passeth away, and the fashion thereof, he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Chapter 7

THE IMAGE AND THE STONE

'This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.37. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.38. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath He given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.39. And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.40. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.41. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay.42. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.43. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.44. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.45. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.46. Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him.47. The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.48. Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.49. Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.' -- DANIEL ii.36-49. The colossal image, seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, was a reproduction of those which met his waking eyes, and still remain for our wonder in our museums. The mingled materials are paralleled in ancient art. The substance of the dream is no less natural than its form. The one is suggested by familiar sights; the other, by pressing anxieties. What more likely than that, 'in the second year of his reign' (v.1), waking thoughts of the future of his monarchy should trouble the warrior-king, scarcely yet firm on his throne, and should repeat themselves in nightly visions? God spoke through the dream, and He is not wont to answer questions before they are asked, nor to give revelations to men on points which they have not sought to solve. We may be sure that Nebuchadnezzar's dream met his need. The unreasonable demand that the 'Chaldeans' should show the dream as well as interpret it, fits the character of the king, as an imperious despot, intolerant of obstacles to his will, and holding human life very cheap. Daniel's knowledge of the dream and of its meaning is given to him in a vision by night, which is the method of divine illumination throughout the book, and may be regarded as a lower stage thereof than the

communications to prophets of 'the word of the Lord.' The passage falls into two parts: the image and the stone. I. The Image. It was a human form of strangely mingled materials, of giant size no doubt, and of majestic aspect. Barbarous enough it would have looked beside the marble lovelinesses of Greece, but it was quite like the coarser art which sought for impressiveness through size and costliness. Other people than Babylonian sculptors think that bigness is greatness, and dearness preciousness. This image embodied what is now called a philosophy of history. It set forth the fruitful idea of a succession and unity in the rise and fall of conquerors and kingdoms. The four empires represented by it are diverse, and yet parts of a whole, and each following on the other. So the truth is taught that history is an organic whole, however unrelated its events may appear to a superficial eye. The writer of this book had learned lessons far in advance of his age, and not yet fully grasped by many so-called historians. But, further, the human figure of the image sets forth all these kingdoms as being purely the work of men. Not that the overruling divine providence is ignored, but that the play of human passions, the lust of conquest and the like, and the use of human means, such as armies, are emphasised. Again, the kingdoms are seen in their brilliancy, as they would naturally appear to the thoughts of a conqueror, whose highest notion of glory was earthly dominion, and who was indifferent to the suffering and blood through which he waded to a throne. When the same kingdoms are shown to Daniel in chapter vii. they are represented by beasts. Their cruelty and the destruction of life which they caused were uppermost in a prophet's view; their vulgar splendour dazzled a king's sleeping eyes, because it had intoxicated his waking thoughts. Much worldly glory and many of its aims appear as precious metal to dreamers, but are seen by an illuminated sight to be bestial and destructive. Once more there is a steady process of deterioration in the four kingdoms. Gold is followed by silver, and that by brass, and that by the strange combination of iron and clay. This may simply refer to the diminution of worldly glory, but it may also mean deterioration, morally and otherwise. Is it not the teaching of Scripture that, unless God interpose, society will steadily slide downwards? And has not the fact been so, wherever the brake and lever of revelation have not arrested the decline and effected elevation? We are told nowadays of evolution, as if the progress of humanity were upwards; but if you withdraw the influence of supernatural revelation, the evidence of power in manhood to work itself clear of limitations and lower forms is very ambiguous at the best -- in reference to morals, at all events. Evil is capable of development, as well as good; and perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's colossus is a truer representation of the course of humanity than the dreams of modern thinkers who see manhood becoming steadily better by its own effort, and think that the clay and iron have inherent power to pass into fine gold. The question of the identification of these successive monarchies does not fall to be discussed here. But I may observe that the definite statement of verse 44 ('in the days of these kings') seems to date the rise of the everlasting kingdom of God in the period of the last of the four, and therefore that the old interpretation of the fourth kingdom as the Roman seems the most natural. The force of that remark may, no doubt, be weakened by the consideration that the Old Testament prophets' perspective of the future brought the coming of Messiah into immediate juxtaposition with the limits of their own vision; but still it has force. The allocation of each part of the symbol is of less importance for us than the lessons to be drawn from it as a whole. But the singular amalgam of iron and clay in the fourth kingdom is worth notice. No sculptor or metallurgist could make a strong unity out of such materials, of which the combination could only be apparent and superficial. The fact to which it points is the artificial unity into which the great conquering empires of old crushed their unfortunate subject peoples, who were

hammered, not fused, together. 'They shall mingle themselves with the seed of men' (ver.43), may either refer to the attempts to bring about unity by marriages among different races, or to other vain efforts to the same end. To obliterate nationalities has always been the conquering despot's effort, from Nebuchadnezzar to the Czar of Russia, and it always fails. This is the weakness of these huge empires of antiquity, which have no internal cohesion, and tumble to pieces as soon as some external bond is loosened. There is only one kingdom which has no disintegrating forces lodged in it, because it unites men individually to its king, and so binds them to one another; and that is the kingdom which Nebuchadnezzar saw in its destructive aspect.II. So we have now to think of the stone cut out without hands.Three things are specified with regard to it: its origin, its duration, and its destructive energy. The origin is heavenly, in sharp contrast to the human origin of the kingdoms symbolised in the colossal man. That idea is twice expressed: once in plain words, 'the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom'; and once figuratively as being cut out of the mountain without hands. By the mountain we are probably to understand Zion, from which, according to many a prophecy, the Messiah King was to rule the earth (Ps. ii.; Isa. ii.3).The fulfilment of this prediction is found, not only in the supernatural birth of Jesus Christ, but in the spread of the gospel without any of the weapons and aids of human power. Twelve poor men spoke, and the world was shaken and the kingdoms remoulded. The seer had learned the omnipotence of ideas and the weakness of outward force. A thought from God is stronger than all armies, and outconquers conquerors. By the mystery of Christ's Incarnation, by the power of weakness in the preachers of the Cross, by the energies of the transforming Spirit, the God of heaven has set up the kingdom. 'It shall never be destroyed.' Its divine origin guarantees its perpetual duration. The kingdoms of man's founding, whether they be in the realm of thought or of outward dominion, 'have their day, and cease to be,' but the kingdom of Christ lasts as long as the eternal life of its King. He cannot die any more, and He cannot live discrowned. Other forms of human association perish, as new conditions come into play which antiquate them; but the kingdom of Jesus is as flexible as it is firm, and has power to adapt to itself all conditions in which men can live. It will outlast earth, it will fill eternity; for when He 'shall have delivered up the kingdom to His Father,' the kingdom, which the God of heaven set up, will still continue.It 'shall not be left to other people.' By that, seems to be meant that this kingdom will not be like those of human origin, in which dominion passes from one race to another, but that Israel shall ever be the happy subjects and the dominant race. We must interpret the words of the spiritual Israel, and remember how to be Christ's subject is to belong to a nation who are kings and priests.The destructive power is graphically represented. The stone, detached from the mountain, and apparently self-moved, dashes against the heterogeneous mass of iron and clay on which the colossus insecurely stands, and down it comes with a crash, breaking into a thousand fragments as it falls. 'Like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors' (Daniel ii.35) is the debris, which is whirled out of sight by the wind. Christ and His kingdom have reshaped the world. These ancient, hideous kingdoms of blood and misery are impossible now. Christ and His gospel shattered the Roman empire, and cast Europe into another mould. They have destructive work to do yet, and as surely as the sun rises daily, will do it. The things that can be shaken will be shaken till they fall, and human society will never obtain its stable form till it is moulded throughout after the pattern of the kingdom of Christ.The vision of our passage has no reference to the quickening power of the kingdom; but the best way in which it destroys is by transformation. It slays the old and lower forms of society by substituting the purer which flow from possession of the one Spirit. That

highest glory of the work of Christ is but partially represented here, but there is a hint in Daniel ii.35, which tells that the stone has a strange vitality, and can grow, and does grow, till it becomes an earth-filling mountain.That issue is not reached yet; but 'the dream is certain.' The kingdom is concentrated in its King, and the life of Jesus, diffused through His servants, works to the increase of the empire, and will not cease till the kingdoms of the world are the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. That stone has vital power, and if we build on it we receive, by wonderful impartation, a kindred derived life, and become 'living stones.' It is laid for a sure foundation. If a man stumble over it while it lies there to be built upon, he will lame and maim himself. But it will one day have motion given to it, and, falling from the height of heaven, when He comes to judge the world which He rules and has redeemed, it will grind to powder all who reject the rule of the everlasting King of men.

Chapter 8

HARMLESS FIRES

'Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king.14. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? 15. Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? 16. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.17. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.18. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.19. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.20. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.21. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.22. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.23. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.24. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonied, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.25. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.' -- DANIEL iii.13-25. The way in which the 'Chaldeans' describe the three recusants, betrays their motive in accusing them. 'Certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon' could not but be envied and hated, since their promotion wounded both national pride and professional jealousy. The form of the accusation was skilfully calculated to rouse a despot's rage. 'They have not regarded thee' is the head and front of their offending. The inflammable temper of the king blazed up according to expectation, as is the way with tyrants. His passion of rage is twice mentioned (vs.13, 19), and in one of the instances, is noted as distorting his features. What a picture of ungoverned fury as of one who had never been thwarted! It is the true portrait of an Eastern despot. Where was Daniel in this hour of danger? His absence is not accounted for, and conjecture is useless; but the fact that he has no share in the incident seems to raise a presumption in favour of the disputed historical character of the Book, which, if it had been fiction, could scarcely have left its hero out of so brilliant an instance of faithfulness to Jehovah. Nebuchadnezzar's vehement address to the three culprits is very characteristic and instructive. Fixed determination to enforce his mandate, anger which breaks into threats that were by no means idle, and a certain wish to build a bridge for the

escape of servants who had done their work well, are curiously mingled in it. His question, best rendered as in the Revised Version, 'Is it of purpose ... that ye' do so and so? seems meant to suggest that they may repair their fault by pleading inadvertence, accident, or the like, and that He will accept the transparent excuse. The renewed offer of an opportunity of worship does not say what will happen should they obey; and the omission makes the clause more emphatic, as insisting on the act, and slurring over the self-evident result. On the other hand, in the next clause the act is slightly touched ('if ye worship not'); and all the stress comes on the grim description of the consequence. This monarch, who has been accustomed to bend men's wills like reeds, tries to shake these three obstinate rebels by terror, and opens the door of the furnace, as it were, to let them hear it roar. He finishes with a flash of insolence which, if not blasphemy, at least betrays his belief that he was stronger than any god of his conquered subject peoples. But the main point to notice in this speech is the unconscious revelation of his real motive in demanding the act of worship. The crime of the three was not that they worshipped wrongly, but that they disobeyed Nebuchadnezzar. He speaks of 'my gods', and of the 'image which I have set up.' Probably it was an image of the god of the Babylonian pantheon whom he took for his special patron, and was erected in commemoration of some victorious campaign. At all events, the worship required was an act of obedience to him, and to refuse it was rebellion. Idolatry is tolerant of any private opinions about gods, and intolerant of any refusal to obey authority in worship. So the early Christians were thrown to the lions, not because they worshipped Jesus, but because they would not sacrifice at the Emperor's command. It is not only heathen rulers who have confounded the spheres of civil and religious obedience. Nonconformity in England was long identified with disloyalty; and in many so-called Christian countries to-day a man may think what he likes, and worship as he pleases in his chamber, if only he will decently comply with authority and pretend to unite in religious ceremonies, which those who appoint and practise them observe with tongue in cheek. But we may draw another lesson from this truculent apostle of his god. He is not the only instance of apparent religious zeal which is at bottom nothing but masterfulness. 'You shall worship my god, not because he is God, but because he is mine.' That is the real meaning of a great deal which calls itself 'zeal for the Lord.' The zealot's own will, opinions, fancies, are crammed down other people's throats, and the insult in not thinking or worshipping as he does, is worse in his eyes than the offence against God. The kind of furnace in which recusants are roasted has changed since Nebuchadnezzar's time, and what is called persecution for religion is out of fashion now. But every advance in the application of Christian principle to social and civil life brings a real martyrdom on its advocates. Every audacious refusal to bow to the habits or opinions of the majority, is visited by consequences which only the martyr spirit will endure. Despots have no monopoly of imperious intolerance. A democracy is more cruel and more impatient of singularity, and especially of religious singularity, than any despot. England and America have no need to fear the old forms of religious persecution. In both, a man may profess and proclaim any kind of religion or of no religion. But in both, the advance guard of the Christian Church, which seeks to apply Christ's teachings more rigidly to individual and social life, has to face obloquy, ostracism, misrepresentation, from the world and the fossil church, for not serving their gods, nor worshipping the golden image which they have set up. Martyrs will be needed and persecutors will exist till the world is Christian. How did the three confessors meet this rumble of thunder about their ears? The quiet determination of their reply is very striking and beautiful. It is perfectly loyal, and perfectly unshaken. 'We have no need to answer thee' (Revised Version). 'It is ill sitting at

Rome and striving with the Pope.' Nebuchadnezzar's palace was not precisely the place to dispute with Nebuchadnezzar; and as his logic was only 'Do as I bid you, or burn,' the sole reply possible was, 'We will not do as you bid, and we will burn.' The 'If' which is immediately spoken is already in the minds of the speakers, when they say that they do not need to answer. They think that God will take up the taunt which ended the king's tirade. Beautifully they are silent, and refer the blusterer to God, whose voice they believe that He will hear in His deed. 'But Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me,' is the true temper of humble faith, dumb before power as a sheep before her shearers, and yet confident that the meek will not be left unvindicated. Let us leave ourselves in God's hands; and when conscience accuses, or the world maligns or threatens, let us be still, and feel that we have One to speak for us, and so we may hold our peace. The rendering of verse 17 is doubtful, but the general meaning is clear. The brave speakers have hope that God will rebuke the king's taunt, and will prove Himself to be able to deliver out of his hand. So they repeat his very words with singular boldness, and contradict him to his face. They have no absolute certainty of deliverance, but whether it comes or not will make no manner of difference to them. They have absolute certainty as to duty; and so they look the furious tyrant right in the eyes, and quietly say, 'We will not serve thy gods.' Nothing like that had ever been heard in those halls.Duty is sovereign. The obligation to resist all temptations to go against conscience is unaffected by consequences. There may be hope that God will not suffer us to be harmed, but whether He does or not should make no difference to our fixed resolve. That temper of lowly faith and inflexible faithfulness which these Hebrews showed in the supreme moment, when they took their lives in their hands, may be as nobly illustrated in the small difficulties of our peaceful lives. The same laws shape the curves of the tiny ripples in a basin and of the Atlantic rollers. No man who cannot say 'I will not' in the face of frowns and dangers, be they what they may, and stick to it, will do his part, He who has conquered regard for personal consequences, and does not let them deflect his course a hairsbreadth, is lord of the world.How small Nebuchadnezzar was by the side of his three victims! How empty his threats to men who cared nothing whether they burned or not, so long as they did not apostatise! What can the world do against a man who says, 'It is all one to me whether I live or die; I will not worship at your shrines?' The fire of the furnace is but painted flames to such an one.The savage punishment intended for the audacious rebels is abundantly confirmed as common in Babylon by the inscriptions, which may be seen quoted by many commentators. The narrative is exceedingly graphic. We see the furious king, with features inflamed with passion. We hear his hoarse, angry orders to heat the furnace seven times hotter, which he forgot would be a mercy, as shortening the victims' agonies. We see the swift execution of the commands, and the unresisting martyrs bound as they stood, and dragged away by the soldiers to the near furnace, the king following. Its shape is a matter of doubt. Probably the three were thrown in from above, and so the soldiers were caught by the flames.'And these three men ... fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace' Their helplessness and desperate condition are pathetically suggested by that picture, which might well be supposed to be the last of them that mortal eyes would see. Down into the glowing mass, like chips of wood into Vesuvius, they sank. The king sitting watching, to glut his fury by the sight of their end, had some way of looking into the core of the flames.The story shifts its point of view with very picturesque abruptness after verse 23. The vaunting king shall tell what he saw, and thereby convict himself of insolent folly in challenging 'any god' to deliver out of his hand. He alone seems to have seen the sight, which he tells to his courtiers. The bonds were gone, and the men walking free in the fire, as if it had been their

element. Three went in bound, four walk there at large; and the fourth is 'like a son of the gods,' by which expression Nebuchadnezzar can have meant nothing more than he had learned from his religion; namely, that the gods had offspring of superhuman dignity. He calls the same person an angel in Daniel iii.28. He speaks there as the three would have spoken, and here as Babylonian mythology spoke.But the great lesson to be gathered from this miracle of deliverance is simply that men who sacrifice themselves for God find in the sacrifice abundant blessing. They may, or may not, be delivered from the external danger. Peter was brought out of prison the night before his intended martyrdom; James, the brother of John, was slain with the sword, but God was equally near to both, and both were equally delivered from 'Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.' The disposal of the outward event is in His hands, and is a comparatively small matter. But no furnace into which a man goes because he will be true to God, and will not yield up his conscience, is a tenth part so hot as it seems, and it will do no real harm. The fire burns bonds, but not Christ's servants, consuming many things that entangled, and setting them free. 'I will walk at liberty: for I seek Thy precepts' -- even if we have to walk in the furnace. No trials faced in obedience to God will be borne alone. 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; ... when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned.'The form which Nebuchadnezzar saw amid the flame, as invested with more than human majesty, may have been but one of the ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the martyrs -- the embodiment of the divine power which kept the flames from kindling upon them. But we have Jesus for our Companion in all trials, and His presence makes it possible for us to pass over hot ploughshares with unblistered feet; to bathe our hands in fire and not feel the pain; to accept the sorest consequences of fidelity to Him, and count them as 'not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed,' and is made more glorious through these light afflictions. A present Christ will never fail His servants, and will make the furnace cool even when its fire is fiercest.

Chapter 9

MENE, TEKEL, PERES

'Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another: yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.18. O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: 19. And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.20. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: 21. And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.22. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this: 23. But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven: and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: 24. Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.25. And this is the writing that was written, 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.' 26. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.27. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.28. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.29. Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.30. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.31. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.' -- DANIEL v.17-31. Belshazzar is now conceded to have been a historical personage, the son of the last monarch of Babylon, and the other name in the narrative which has been treated as erroneous -- namely, Darius -- has not been found to be mentioned elsewhere, but is not thereby proved to be a blunder. For why should it not be possible for Scripture to preserve a name that secular history has not yet been ascertained to record, and why must it always be assumed that, if Scripture and cuneiform or other documents differ, it is Scripture that must go to the wall? We do not deal with the grim picture of the drunken orgy, turned into abject terror as 'the fingers of a man's hand' came forth out of empty air, and in the full blaze of 'the candlestick' wrote the illegible signs. There is something blood-curdling in the visibility of but a part of the hand and its busy writing. Whose was the body, and where was it? No wonder if the riotous mirth was frozen into awe, and the wine lost flavour. Nor need we do more than note the craven-hearted flattery addressed to Daniel by the king, who apparently had never heard of him till the queen spoke of him just before. We have to deal with the indictment, the sentence, and the execution. I. The indictment. Daniel's tone is noticeably stern. He has no reverential preface, no softening of his message. His words are as if cut with steel on the rock. He brushes aside the promises of vulgar decorations and honours with

undisguised contempt, and goes straight to his work of rousing a torpid conscience. Babylon was the embodiment and type of the godless world-power, and Belshazzar was the incarnation of the spirit which made Babylon. So Daniel's indictment gathers together the main forms of sin, which cleave to every godless national or individual life. And he begins with that feather-brained frivolity which will learn nothing by example. Nebuchadnezzar's fate might have taught his successors what came of God-forgetting arrogance, and attributing success to oneself; and his restoration might have been an object-lesson to teach that devout recognition of the Most High as sovereign was the beginning of a king's prosperity and sanity. But Belshazzar knew all this, and ignored it all. Was he singular in that? Is not the world full of instances of the ruin that attends godlessness, which yet do not check one godless man in his career? The wrecks lie thick on the shore, but their broken sides and gaunt skeletons are not warnings sufficient to keep a thousand other ships from steering right on to the shoals. Of these godless lives it is true, 'This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings,' and their doings, and say and do them over again. Incapacity to learn by example is a mark of godless lives. Further, Belshazzar 'lifted up' himself 'against the Lord of heaven,' and 'glorified not Him in whose hand was his breath and whose were all his ways.' The very essence of all sin is that assertion of self as Lord, as sufficient, as the director of one's path. To make myself my centre, to depend on myself, to enthrone my own will as sovereign, is to fly in the face of nature and fact, and is the mother of all sin. To live to self is to die while we live; to live to God is to live even while we die. Nations and individuals are ever tempted thus to ignore God, and rebelliously to say, 'Who is Lord over us?' or presumptuously to think themselves architects of their own fortunes, and sufficient for their own defence. Whoever yields to that temptation has let the 'prince of the devils' in, and the inferior evil spirits will follow. Positive acts are not needed; the negative omission to 'glorify' the God of our life binds sin on us. Further, Belshazzar, the type of godlessness, had desecrated the sacrificial vessels by using them for his drunken carouse, and therein had done just what we do when we take the powers of heart and mind and will, which are meant to be filled with affections, thoughts, and purposes, that are 'an odour of a sweet smell, well-pleasing to God,' and desecrate them by pouring from them libations before creatures. Is not love profaned when it is lavished on men or women without one reference to God? Is not the intellect desecrated when its force is spent on finite objects of thought, and never a glance towards God? Is not the will prostituted from its high vocation when it is used to drive the wheels of a God-ignoring life? The coin bears the image and superscription of the true king. It is treason to God to render it to any paltry 'Caesar' of our own coronation. Belshazzar was an avowed idolater, but many of us are worshipping gods 'which see not, nor hear, nor know' as really as he did. We cannot but do so, if we are not worshipping God; for men must have some person or thing which they regard as their supreme good, to which the current of their being sets, which, possessed, makes them blessed; and that is our god, whether we call it so or not. Further, Belshazzar was carousing while the Medes and Persians were ringing Babylon round, and his hand should have been grasping a sword, not a wine-cup. Drunkenness and lust, which sap manhood, are notoriously stimulated by peril, as many a shipwreck tells when desperate men break open the spirit casks, and go down to their death intoxicated, and as many an epidemic shows when morality is flung aside, and mad vice rules and reels in the streets before it sinks down to die. A nation or a man that has shaken off God will not long keep sobriety or purity. II. After the stern catalogue of sins comes the tremendous sentence. Daniel speaks like an embodied conscience, or like an avenging angel, with no word of pity, and no effort to soften or dilute the awful truth. The

day for wrapping up grim facts in muffled words was past. Now the only thing to be done was to bare the sword, and let its sharp edge cut. The inscription, as given in verse 25, is simply 'Numbered, numbered, weighed and breakings.' The variation in verse 28 (Peres) is the singular of the noun used in the plural in verse 25, with the omission of 'U,' which is merely the copulative 'and.' The disjointed brevity adds to the force of the words. Apparently, they were not written in a character which 'the king's wise men' could read, and probably were in Aramaic letters as well as language, which would be familiar to Daniel. Of course, a play on the word 'Peres' suggests the Persian as the agent of the breaking. Daniel simply supplied the personal application of the oracular writing. He fits the cap on the king's head. 'God hath numbered thy kingdom ... thou art weighed ... thy kingdom is divided' (broken). These three fatal words carry in them the summing up of all divine judgment, and will be rung in the ears of all who bring it on themselves. Belshazzar is a type of the end of every godless world-power and of every such individual life. 'Numbered' -- for God allows to each his definite time, and when its sum is complete, down falls the knife that cuts the threads. 'Weighed' -- for 'after death the judgment,' and a godless life, when laid in the balance which His hand holds, is 'altogether lighter than vanity.' 'Breakings' -- for not only will the godless life be torn away from its possessions with much laceration of heart and spirit, but the man himself will be broken like some earthen vessel coming into sharp collision with an express engine. Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the same night in which it was carried out in act; we see it long before, and we can read it. But some of us are mad enough to sit unconcerned at the table, and go on with the orgy, though the legible letters are gleaming plain on the wall. III. The execution of the sentence need not occupy us long. Belshazzar so little realised the facts, that he issued his order to deck out Daniel in the tawdry pomp he had promised him, as if a man with such a message would be delighted with purple robes and gold chains, and made him third ruler of the kingdom which he had just declared was numbered and ended by God. The force of folly could no further go. No wonder that the hardy invaders swept such an Imbecile from his throne without a struggle! His blood was red among the lees of the wine-cups, and the ominous writing could scarcely have faded from the wall when the shouts of the assailants were heard, the palace gates forced, and the half-drunken king, alarmed too late, put to the sword. 'He that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.'

Chapter 10

A TRIBUTE FROM ENEMIES

Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.' -- DANIEL vi.5. Daniel was somewhere about ninety years old when he was cast to the lions. He had been for many years the real governor of the whole empire; and, of course, in such a position had incurred much hatred and jealousy. He was a foreigner and a worshipper of another God, and therefore was all the more unpopular, as a Brahmin would be in England if he were a Cabinet Minister. He was capable and honest, and therefore all the incompetent and all the knavish officials would recognise in him their natural enemy. So, hostile intrigues, which grow quickly in courts, especially in Eastern courts, sprung up round him, and his subordinates laid their heads together in order to ruin him. They say, in the words of my text, 'We cannot find any holes to pick. There is only one way to put him into antagonism to the law, and that is by making a law which shall be in antagonism to God's law.' And so they scheme to have the mad regulation enacted, which, in the sequel of the story, we find was enforced. These intriguers say, 'We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.' Now, then, if we look at that confession, wrung from the lips of malicious observers, we may, I think, get two or three lessons. I. First, note the very unfavourable soil in which a character of singular beauty and devout consecration may be rooted and grow. What sort of a place was that court where Daniel was? Half shambles and half pigsty. Luxury, sensuality, lust, self-seeking, idolatry, ruthless cruelty, and the like were the environment of this man. And in the middle of these there grew up that fair flower of a character, pure and stainless, by the acknowledgment of enemies, and in which not even accusers could find a speck or a spot. There are no circumstances in which a man must have his garments spotted by the world. However deep the filth through which he has to wade, if God sent him there, and if he keeps hold of God's hand, his purity will be more stainless by reason of the impurity round him. There were saints in Caesar's household, and depend upon it, they were more saintly saints just because they were in Caesar's household. You will always find that people who have any goodness in them, and who live in conditions unusually opposed to goodness, have a clearer faith, and a firmer grasp of their Master, and a higher ideal of Christian life, just because of the foulness in which they have to live. It may sound a paradox, but it is a deep truth that unfavourable circumstances are the most favourable for the development of Christian character. For that development comes, not by what we draw from the things around, but by what we draw from the soil in which we are rooted, even God Himself, in whom the roots find both anchorage and nutriment. And the more we are thrown back upon Him, and the less we find food for our best selves in the things about us, the more likely is our religion to be robust and thorough-going, and conscious ever of His presence. Resistance strengthens muscles, and the more there is need for that in our Christian lives, the manlier and the stronger and the better shall we probably be. Let no man or woman say, 'If only circumstances were more favourable, oh, what a saint I could be; but how can I be one, with all these unfavourable conditions? How can a man keep the purity of his Christian life and the fervour of his Christian communion amidst the tricks and chicanery and small things of Manchester business? How can a woman find time to hold fellowship with God, when all day long she is distracted in her

nursery with all these children hanging on her to look after? How can we, in our actual circumstances, reach the ideal of Christian character?' Ah, brother, if the ideal's being realised depends on circumstances, it is a poor affair. It depends on you, and he that has vitality enough within him to keep hold of Jesus Christ, has thereby power enough within him to turn enemies into friends, and unfavourable circumstances into helps instead of hindrances. Your ship can sail wonderfully near to the wind if you trim the sails rightly, and keep a good, strong grip on the helm, and the blasts that blow all but in your face, may be made to carry you triumphantly into the haven of your desire. Remember Daniel, in that godless court reeking with lust and cruelty, and learn that purity and holiness and communion with God do not depend on environment, but upon the inmost will of the man. II. Notice the keen critics that all good men have to face. In this man's case, of course, their eyesight was mended by the microscope of envy and malice. That is no doubt the case with some of us too. But whether that be so or no, however unobtrusive and quiet a Christian person's life may be, there will be some people standing close by who, if not actually watching for his fall, are at least by no means indisposed to make the worst of a slip, and to rejoice over an inconsistency. We do not need to complain of that. It is perfectly reasonable and perfectly right. There will always be a tendency to judge men, who by any means profess that they are living by the highest law, with a judgment that has very little charity in it. And it is perfectly right that it should be so. Christian people need to be trained to be indifferent to men's opinions, but they also need to be reminded that they are bound, as the Apostle says, to 'provide things honest in the sight of all men.' It is a reasonable and right requirement that they should 'have a good report of them that are without.' Be content to be tried by a high standard, and do not wonder, and do not forget that there are keen eyes watching your conduct, in your home, in your relations to your friends, in your business, in your public life, which would weep no tears, but might gleam with malicious satisfaction, if they saw inconsistencies in you. Remember it, and shape your lives so that they may be disappointed. If a minister falls into any kind of inconsistency or sin, if a professing Christian makes a bad failure in Manchester, what a talk there is, and what a pointing of fingers! We sometimes think it is hard; it is all right. It is just what should be meted out to us. Let us remember that unslumbering tribunal which sits in judgment upon all our professions, and is very ready to condemn, and very slow to acquit. III. Notice, again, the unblemished record.These men could find no fault, 'forasmuch as Daniel was faithful.' Neither was there any error' -- of judgment, that is, -- 'or fault' -- dereliction of duty, that is, -- 'found in him.' They were very poor judges of his religion, and they did not try to judge that; but they were very good judges of his conduct as prime minister, and they did judge that. The world is a very poor critic of my Christianity, but it is a very sufficient one of my conduct. It may not know much about the inward emotions of the Christian life, and the experiences in which the Christian heart expatiates and loves to dwell, but it knows what short lengths, and light weights, and bad tempers, and dishonesty, and selfishness are. And it is by our conduct, in the things that they and we do together, that worldly men judge what we are in the solitary depths where we dwell in communion with God. It is useless for Christians to be talking, as so many of them are fond of doing, about their spiritual experiences and their religious joy, and all the other sweet and sacred things which belong to the silent life of the spirit in God, unless, side by side with these, there is the doing of the common deeds which the world is actually able to appraise in such a fashion as to extort, even from them, the confession, 'We find no occasion against this man.'You remember the pregnant, quaint old saying, 'If a Christian man is a shoeblack, he ought to be the best shoeblack in the parish.' If we call ourselves Christians, we are

bound, by the very name, to live in such a fashion as that men shall have no doubt of the reality of our profession and of the depth of our fellowship with Christ. It is by our common conduct that they judge us. And the 'Christian Endeavourer' needs to remember, whether he or she be old or young, that the best sign of the reality of the endeavour is the doing of common things with absolute rightness, because they are done wholly for Christ's sake.It is a sharp test, and I wonder how many of us would like to go out into the world, and say to all the irreligious people who know us, 'Now come and tell me what the faults are that you have seen in me.' There would be a considerable response to the invitation, and perhaps some of us would learn to know ourselves rather better than we have been able to do. 'We shall not find any occasion in this Daniel' -- I wonder if they would find it in that Daniel -- 'except we find it concerning the law of his God.' There is a record for a man!IV. Lastly, note obedient disobedience.The plot goes on the calculation that, whatever happens, this man may be trusted to do what his God tells him, no matter who tells him not to do it. And so on that calculation the law, surely as mad a one as any Eastern despot ever hatched, is passed that, for a given space of time, nobody within the dominions of this king, Darius, is to make any petition or request of any man or god, save of the king only. It was one of the long series of laws that have been passed in order to be broken, and being broken, might be an instrument to destroy the men that broke it. It was passed with no intention of getting obedience, but only with the intention of slaying one faithful man, and the plot worked according to calculation.What did it matter to Daniel what was forbidden or commanded? He needed to pray to God, and nothing shall hinder him from doing that. And so, obediently disobedient, he brushes the preposterous law of the poor, shadowy Darius on one side, in order that he may keep the law of his God.Now I do not need to remind you how obedience to God has in the past often had to be maintained by disobedience to law. I need not speak of martyrs, nor of the great principle laid down so clearly by the apostle Peter, 'We ought to obey God rather than man.' Nor need I remind you that if a man, for conscience sake, refuses to render active obedience to an unrighteous law, and unresistingly accepts the appointed penalty, he is not properly regarded as a law-breaker.If earthly authorities command what is clearly contrary to God's law, a Christian is absolved from obedience, and cannot be loyal unless he is a rebel. That is how our forefathers read constitutional obligations. That is how the noble men on the other side of the Atlantic, fifty years ago, read their constitutional obligations in reference to that devilish institution of slavery. And in the last resort -- God forbid that we should need to act on the principle -- Christian men are set free from allegiance when the authority over them commands what is contrary to the will and the law of God.But all that does not touch us. But I will tell you what does touch us. Obedience to God needs always to be sustained -- in some cases more markedly, in some cases less so -- but always in some measure, by disobedience to the maxims and habits of most men round about us. If they say 'Do this,' and Jesus Christ says 'Don't,' then they may talk as much as they like, but we are bound to turn a deaf ear to their exhortations and threats. 'He is a slave that dare not be

In the right with two or three,'as that peaceful Quaker poet of America sings.And for us, in our little lives, the motto, 'This did not I, because of the fear of the Lord,' is absolutely essential to all noble Christian conduct. Unless you are prepared to be in the minority, and now and then to be called 'narrow,' 'fanatic,' and to be laughed at by men because you will not do what they do, but abstain and resist, then there is little chance of your ever making much of your Christian profession.These people calculated upon Daniel, and they had a right to calculate upon him. Could the world calculate upon us, that we would rather go to the lions' den than conform to what God and our

consciences told us to be a sin? If not, we have not yet learned what it means to be a disciple. The commandment comes to us absolutely, as it came to the servants in the first miracle, 'Whatsoever He saith unto you' -- that, and that only -- 'whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.'

Chapter 11

FAITH STOPPING THE MOUTHS OF LIONS

'Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee.17. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.18. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him.19. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.20. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? 21. Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.22. My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt, 23. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.24. And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.25. Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.26. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end.27. He delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.28. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.' -- DANIEL vi.16-28. Daniel was verging on ninety when this great test of his faithfulness was presented to him. He had been honoured and trusted through all the changes in the kingdom, and, when the Medo-Persian conquest came, the new monarch naturally found in him, as a foreigner, a more reliable minister than in native officials. 'Envy doth merit as its shade pursue,' and the crafty trick by which his subordinates tried to procure his fall, was their answer to Darius's scheme of making him prime minister. Our passage begins in the middle of the story, but the earlier part will come into consideration in the course of our remarks. I. We note, first, the steadfast, silent confessor and the weak king. Darius is a great deal more conspicuous in the narrative than Daniel. The victim of injustice is silent. He does not seem to have been called on to deny or defend the indictment. His deed was patent, and the breach of the law flagrant. He, too, was 'like a sheep before the shearers,' dumb. His silence meant, among other things, a quiet, patient, fixed resolve to bear all, and not to deny his God. Weak men bluster. Heroic endurance has generally little to say. Without resistance, or a word, the old man, an hour ago the foremost in the realm, is hauled off and flung into the pit or den. It is useless and needless to ask its form. The entrance was sealed with two seals, one the king's, one the conspirators', that neither party might steal a march on the other. Fellows in iniquity do not trust each other. So, down

in the dark there, with the glittering eyeballs of the brutes round him, and their growls in his ears, the old man sits all night long, with peace in his heart, and looking up trustfully, through the hole in the roof, to his Protector's stars, shining their silent message of cheer. The passage dwells on the pitiable weakness and consequent unrest of the king. He had not yielded Daniel to his fate without a struggle, which the previous narrative describes in strong language. 'Sore displeased,' he 'set his heart' on delivering him, and 'laboured' to do so. The curious obstacle, limiting even his power, is a rare specimen of conservatism in its purest form. So wise were our ancestors, that nothing of theirs shall ever be touched. Infallible legislators can make immutable laws; the rest of us must be content to learn by blundering, and to grow by changing. The man who says, 'I never alter my opinions,' condemns himself as either too foolish or too proud to learn. But probably, if the question had been about a law that was inconvenient to Darius himself, or to these advocates of the constitution as it has always been, some way of getting round it would have been found out. If the king had been bold enough to assert himself, he could have walked through the cobweb. But this is one of the miseries of yielding to evil counsels, that one step taken calls for another. 'In for a penny, in for a pound.' Therefore let us all take heed of small compliances, and be sure that we can never say about any doubtful course, 'Thus far will I go, and no farther.' Darius was his servants' servant when once he had put his name to the arrogant decree. He did not know the incidence of his act, and we do not know that of ours; therefore let us take heed of the quality of actions and motives, since we are wholly incapable of estimating the sweep of their consequences. Darius's conduct to Daniel was like Herod's to John the Baptist and Pilate's to Jesus. In all the cases the judges were convinced of the victim's innocence, and would have saved him; but fear of others biassed justice, and from selfish motives, they let fierce hatred have its way. Such judges are murderers. From all come the old lessons, never too threadbare to be dinned into the ears, especially of the young, that to be weak is, in a world so full of temptation, the same as to be wicked, and that he who has a sidelong eye to his supposed interest, will never see the path of duty plainly. What a feeble excuse to his own conscience was Darius's parting word to Daniel! 'Thy God, whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee!' And was flinging him to the lions the right way to treat a man who served God continually? Or, what right had Darius to expect that any god would interfere to stop the consequences of his act, which he thus himself condemned? We are often tempted to think, as he did, that a divine intervention will come in between our evil deeds and their natural results. We should be wiser if we did not do the things that, by our own confession, need God to avert their issues. But that weak parting word witnessed to the impression made by the lifelong consistency of Daniel. He must be a good man who gets such a testimony from those who are harming him. The busy minister of state had done his political work so as to extort that tribute from one who had no sympathy with his religion. Do we do ours in that fashion? How many of our statesmen 'serve God continually' and obviously in their public life? What a contrast between the night passed in the lions' den and the palace! 'Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage,' and soft beds and luxurious delights of sense bring no ease to troubled consciences. Daniel is more at rest, though his 'soul is among lions,' than Darius in his palace. Peter sleeps soundly, though the coming morning is to be his last. Better to be the victim than the doer of injustice! The verdict of nightly thoughts on daily acts is usually true, and if our deeds do not bear thinking of 'on our beds,' the sooner we cancel them by penitence and reversed conduct, the better. But weak men are often prone to swift and shallow regrets, which do not influence their future any more than a stone thrown into the sea makes a permanent gap. Why

should Darius have waited for morning, if his penitence had moved him to a firm resolution to undo the evil done? He had better have sprung from his bed, and gone with his guards to open the den in the dark. Feeble lamentations are out of place when it is still time to act. The hurried rush to the den in the morning twilight, and the 'lamentable voice,' so unlike royal impassiveness, indicate the agitation of an impulsive nature, accustomed to let the feeling of the moment sway it unchecked. Absolute power tends to make that type of man. The question thrown into the den seems to imply that its interior was not seen. If so, the half-belief in Daniel's survival is remarkable. It indicates, as before, the impression of steadfast devoutness made by the old man's life, and also a belief that his God was possibly a true and potent divinity. Such a belief was quite natural, but it does not mean that Darius was prepared to accept Daniel's God as his god. His religion was probably elastic and hospitable enough to admit that other nations might have other gods. But his thoughts about this 'living God' are a strange medley. He is not sure whether He is stronger than the royal lions, and he does not seem to feel that if a god delivers, his own act in surrendering a favoured servant of such a god looks very black. A half-belief blinds men to the opposition between their ways and God's, and to the certain issue of their going in one direction and God in another. If Daniel be delivered, what will become of Darius? But, like most men, he is illogical, and that question does not seem to have occurred to him. Surely this man may sit for a portrait of a weak, passionate nature, in the feebleness of his resistance to evil, the half hopes that wrong would be kept from turning out so badly as it promised, the childish moanings over wickedness that might still have been mended, and the incapacity to take in the grave, personal consequences of his crime.II. We next note the great deliverance. The king does not see Daniel, and waits in sickening doubt whether any sound but the brutes' snarl at the disturber of their feast will be heard. There must have been a sigh of relief when the calm accents were audible from the unseen depth. And what dignity, respect, faith, and innocence are in them! Even in such circumstances the usual form of reverential salutation to the king is remembered. That night's work might have made a sullen rebel of Daniel, and small blame to him if he had had no very amiable feelings to Darius; but he had learned faithfulness in a good school, and no trace of returning evil for evil was in his words or tones.The formal greeting was much more than a form, when it came up from among the lions. It heaped coals of fire on the king's head, let us hope, and taught him, if he needed the lesson, that Daniel's disobedience had not been disloyalty. The more religion compels us to disregard the authority and practices of others, the more scrupulously attentive should we be to demonstrate that we cherish all due regard to them, and wish them well. How simply, and as if he saw nothing in it to wonder at, he tells the fact of his deliverance! 'My God has sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths.' He had not been able to say, as the king did before the den was opened, 'Thy God will deliver thee'; but he had gone down into it, knowing that He was able, and leaving himself in God's care. So it was no surprise to him that he was safe. Thankfulness, but not astonishment, filled his heart. So faith takes God's gifts, however great and beyond natural possibility they may be; for the greatest of them are less than the Love which faith knows to move all things, and whatsoever faith receives is just like Him.Daniel did not say, as Darius did, that he served God continually, but he did declare his own innocency in God's sight and unimpeachable fidelity to the king. His reference is probably mainly to his official conduct; but the characteristic tone of the Old Testament saint is audible, which ventured on professions of uprightness, accordant with an earlier stage of revelation and religious consciousness, but scarcely congruous with the deeper and more inward sense of sin produced by the full revelation in Christ. But if the tone of the latter

part of verse 22 is somewhat strange to us, the historian's summary in verse 23 gives the eternal truth of the matter: 'No manner of hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God.' That is the basis of the reference in Hebrews xi.33: 'Through faith ... stopped the mouths of lions.'Simple trust in God brings His angel to our help, and the deliverance, which is ultimately to be ascribed to His hand muzzling the gaping beasts of prey, may also be ascribed to the faith which sets His hand in motion. The true cause is God, but the indispensable condition without which God will not act, and with which He cannot but act, is our trust. Therefore all the great things which it is said to do are due, not to anything in it, but wholly to that of which it lays hold. A foot or two of lead pipe is worth little, but if it is the channel through which water flows into a city, it is priceless.Faith may or may not bring external deliverances, such as it brought to Daniel; but the good cheer which this story brings us does not depend on these. When Paul lay in Rome, shortly before his martyrdom, the experience of Daniel was in his mind, as he thankfully wrote to Timothy, 'I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.' He adds a hope which contrasts strangely, at first sight, with the clear expectation of a speedy and violent death, expressed a moment or two before ('I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come') when he says, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work'; but he had learned that it was possible to pass through the evil and yet to be delivered from it, and that a man might be thrown to the lions and devoured by them, and yet be truly shielded from all harm from them. So he adds, 'And will save me unto His heavenly kingdom,' thereby teaching us that the true deliverance is that which carries us into, or something nearer towards, the eternal home. Thus understood, the miracle of Daniel's deliverance is continually repeated to all who partake of Daniel's faith, 'Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation ... thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder.' The savage vengeance on the conspirators and the proclamation of Darius must be left untouched. The one is a ghastly example of retributive judgment, in which, as sometimes is the case even now, men fall into the pit they have digged for others, and it shows the barbarous cruelty of that gorgeous civilisation. The other is an example of how far a man may go in perceiving and acknowledging the truth without its influencing his heart. The decree enforces recognition of Daniel's God, in language which even prophets do not surpass; but it is all lip-reverence, as evanescent as superficial. It takes more than a fright caused by a miracle to make a man a true servant of the living God.The final verse of the passage implies Daniel's restoration to rank, and gives a beautiful, simple picture of the old man's closing days, which had begun so long before, in such a different world as Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and closed in Cyrus's, enriched with all that should accompany old age -- honour, obedience, troops of friends. 'When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.'

Chapter 12

A NEW YEARS MESSAGE

'But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.' -- DANIEL xii.13. Daniel had been receiving partial insight into the future by the visions recorded in previous chapters. He sought for clearer knowledge, and was told that the book of the future was sealed and closed, so that no further enlightenment was possible for him. But duty was clear, whatever might be dark; and there were some things in the future certain, whatever might be problematic. So he is bidden back to the common paths of life, and is enjoined to pursue his patient course with an eye on the end to which it conducts, and to leave the unknown future to unfold itself as it may. I do not need, I suppose, to point the application. Anticipations of what may be before us have, no doubt, been more or less in the minds of all of us in the last few days. The cast of them will have been very different, according to age and present circumstances. But bright or dark, hopes or dreads, they reveal nothing. Sometimes we think we see a little way ahead, and then swirling mists hide all. So I think that the words of my text may help us not only to apprehend the true task of the moment, but to discriminate between the things in the unknown future that are hidden and those that stand clear. There are three points, then, in this message -- the journey, the pilgrim's resting-place, and the final home. 'Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.' Let us, then, look at these three points briefly. I. The journey. That is a threadbare metaphor for life. But threadbare as it is, its significance is inexhaustible. But before I deal with it, note that very significant 'but' with which my text begins. The Prophet has been asking for a little more light to shine on the dark unknown that stretches before him. And his request is negatived -- 'But go thou thy way.' In the connection that means, 'Do not waste your time in dreaming about, or peering into, what you can never see, but fill the present with strenuous service.' 'Go thou thy way.' Never mind the far-off issues; the step before you is clear, and that is all that concerns you. Plod along the path, and leave to-morrow to take care of itself. There is a piece of plain practical wisdom, none the less necessary for us to lay to heart because it is so obvious and commonplace. And then, if we turn to the emblem with which the continuity of daily life and daily work is set forth here, as the path along which we travel, how much wells up in the shape of suggestion, familiar, it may be, but very needful and wholesome for us all to lay to heart! The figure implies perpetual change. The landscape glides past us, and we travel on through it. How impossible it would be for us older people to go back to the feelings, to the beliefs, to the tone and the temper with which we used to look at life thirty or forty years ago! Strangely and solemnly, like the silent motion of some gliding scene in a theatre, bit by bit, inch by inch, change comes over all surroundings, and, saddest of all, in some aspects, over ourselves. 'We all are changed, by still degrees,

All but the basis of the soul.' And it is foolish for us ever to forget that we live in a state of things in which constant alteration is the law, as surely as, when the train whizzes through the country, the same landscape never meets the eye twice, as the traveller looks through the windows. Let us, then, accept the fact that nothing abides with us, and so not be bewildered nor swept away from our moorings, nor led to vain regrets and paralysing retrospects when the changes that must come

do come, sometimes slowly and imperceptibly, sometimes with stunning suddenness, like a bolt out of the blue. If life is truly represented under the figure of a journey, nothing is more certain than that we sleep in a fresh hospice every night, and leave behind us every day scenes that we shall never traverse again. What madness, then, to be putting out eager and desperate hands to clutch what must be left, and so to contradict the very law under which we live! Then another of the well-worn commonplaces which are so believed by us all that we never think about them, and therefore need to be urged, as I am trying, poorly enough, to do now -- another of the commonplaces that spring from this image is that life is continuous. Geologists used to be divided into two schools, one of whom explained everything by invoking great convulsions, the other by appealing to the uniform action of laws. There are no convulsions in life. To-morrow is the child of to-day, and yesterday was the father of this day. What we are, springs from what we have been, and settles what we shall be. The road leads somewhither, and we follow it step by step. As the old nursery rhyme has it -- 'One foot up and one foot down,

That's the way to London town.'We make our characters by the continual repetition of small actions. Let no man think of his life as if it were a heap of unconnected points. It is a chain of links that are forged together inseparably. Let no man say, 'I do this thing, and there shall be no evil consequences impressed upon my life as results of it.' It cannot be. 'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' We shall to-morrow be more of everything that we are to-day, unless by some strong effort of repentance and change we break the fatal continuity, and make a new beginning by God's grace. But let us lay to heart this, as a very solemn truth which lifts up into mystical and unspeakable importance the things that men idly call trifles, that life is one continuous whole, a march towards a definite end.And therefore we ought to see to it that the direction in which our life runs is one that conscience and God can approve. And, since the rapidity with which a body falls increases as it falls, the more needful that we give the right direction and impulses to the life. It will be a dreadful thing if our downward course acquires strength as it travels, and being slow at first, gains in celerity, and accrues to itself mass and weight, like an avalanche started from an Alpine summit, which is but one or two bits of snow and ice at first, and falls at last into the ravine, tons of white destruction. The lives of many of us are like it.Further, the metaphor suggests that no life takes its fitting course unless there is continuous effort. There will be crises when we have to run with panting breath and strained muscles. There will be long stretches of level commonplace where speed is not needed, but 'pegging away' is, and the one duty is persistent continuousness in a course. But whether the task of the moment is to 'run and not be weary,' or to 'walk and not faint,' crises and commonplace stretches of land alike require continuous effort, if we are to 'run with patience the race that is set before us.'Mark the emphasis of my text, 'Go thy way till the end.' You, my contemporaries, you older men! do not fancy that in the deepest aspect any life has ever a period in it in which a man may 'take it easy.' You may do that in regard to outward things, and it is the hope and the reward of faithfulness in youth and middle age that, when the grey hairs come to be upon us, we may slack off a little in regard to outward activity. But in regard to all the deepest things of life, no man may ever lessen his diligence until he has attained the goal.Some of you will remember how, in a stormy October night, many years ago, the Royal Charter went down when three hours from Liverpool, and the passengers had met in the saloon and voted a testimonial to the captain because he had brought them across the ocean in safety. Until the anchor is down and we are inside the harbour, we may be shipwrecked, if we are careless in our navigation. 'Go thou thy way until the end.' And remember, you older people, that

until that end is reached you have to use all your power, and to labour as earnestly, and guard yourself as carefully, as at any period before.And not only 'till the end,' but 'go thou thy way to the end.' That is to say, let the thought that the road has a termination be ever present with us all. Now, there is a great deal of the so-called devout contemplation of death which is anything but wholesome. People were never meant to be always looking forward to that close. Men may think of 'the end' in a hundred different connections. One man may say, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' Another man may say, 'I have only a little while to master this science, to make a name for myself, to win wealth. Let me bend all my efforts in a fierce determination -- made the fiercer because of the thought of the brevity of life -- to win the end.' The mere contemplation of the shortness of our days may be an ally of immorality, of selfishness, of meanness, of earthly ambitions, or it may lay a cooling hand on fevered brows, and lessen the pulsations of hearts that throb for earth.But whilst it is not wholesome to be always thinking of death, it is more unwholesome still never to let the contemplation of that end come into our calculations of the future, and to shape our lives in an obstinate blindness to what is the one certain fact which rises up through the whirling mists of the unknown future, like some black cliff from the clouds that wreath around it. Is it not strange that the surest thing is the thing that we forget most of all? It sometimes seems to me as if the sky rained down opiates upon people, as if all mankind were in a conspiracy of lunacy, because they, with one accord, ignore the most prominent and forget the only certain fact about their future; and in all their calculations do not' so number their days' as to 'apply' their 'hearts unto wisdom.' 'Go thou thy way until the end,' and let thy way be marked out with a constant eye towards the end. II. Note, again, the resting-place.'Go thou thy way, for thou shalt rest.' Now, I suppose, to most careful readers that clearly is intended as a gracious, and what they call a euphemistic way of speaking about death. 'Thou shalt rest'; well, that is a thought that takes away a great deal of the grimness and the terror with which men generally invest the close. It is a thought, of course, the force of which is very different in different stages and conditions of life. To you young people, eager, perhaps ambitious, full of the consciousness of inward power, happy, and, in all human probability, with the greater portion of your lives before you in which to do what you desire, the thought of 'rest' comes with a very faint appeal. And yet I do not suppose that there is any one of us who has not some burden that is hard to carry, or who has not learned what weariness means.But to us older people, who have tasted disappointments, who have known the pressure of grinding toil for a great many years, whose hearts have been gnawed by harassments and anxieties of different kinds, whose lives are apparently drawing nearer their end than the present moment is to their beginning, the thought, 'Thou shalt rest,' comes with a very different appeal from that which it makes to these others.'There remaineth a rest for the people of God,

And I have had trouble enough for one,'says our great modern poet; and therein he echoes the deepest thoughts of most of this congregation. That rest is the cessation of toil, but the continuance of activity -- the cessation of toil, and anxiety, and harassment, and care, and so the darkness is made beautiful when we think that God draws the curtain, as a careful mother does in her child's chamber, that the light may not disturb the slumberer.But, dear friends, that final cessation of earthly work has a double character. 'Thou shalt rest' was said to this man of God. But what of people whom death takes away from the only sort of work that they are fit to do? It will be no rest to long for the occupations which you never can have any more. And if you have been living for this wretched present, to be condemned to have nothing to do any more in it and with it will be torture, and not repose. Ask yourselves how you would like to be taken out of your shop, or

your mill, or your study, or your laboratory, or your counting-house, and never be allowed to go into it again. Some of you know how wearisome a holiday is when you cannot get to your daily work. You will get a very long holiday after you are dead. And if the hungering after the withdrawn occupation persists, there will be very little pleasure in rest. There is only one way by which we can make that inevitable end a blessing, and turn death into the opening of the gate of our resting-place; and that is by setting our heart's desires and our spirit's trust on Jesus Christ, who is the 'Lord both of the dead and of the living.' If we do that, even that last enemy will come to us as Christ's representative, with Christ's own word upon his lip, 'Come unto Me, ye that are weary and are heavy laden, and I' -- because He has given Me the power -- 'I will give you rest.''Sleep, full of rest, from head to foot;

Lie still, dry dust, secure of change.'III. That leads me to the last thought, the home.'Thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days.' 'Stand' -- that is Daniel's way of preaching, what he has been preaching in several other parts of his book, the doctrine of the resurrection. 'Thou shalt stand in thy lot.' That is a reference to the ancient partition of the land of Canaan amongst the tribes, where each man got his own portion, and sat under his own vine and fig-tree. And so there emerge from these symbolical words thoughts upon which, at this stage of my sermon, I can barely touch. First comes the thought that, however sweet and blessed that reposeful state may be, humanity has not attained its perfection until once again the perfected spirit is mated with, and enclosed within, its congenial servant, a perfect body. 'Corporeity is the end of man.' Body, soul, and spirit partake of the redemption of God.But then, apart from that, on which I must not dwell, my text suggests one or two thoughts. God is the true inheritance. Each man has his own portion of the common possession, or, to put it into plainer words, in that perfect land each individual has precisely so much of God as he is capable of possessing. 'Thou shalt stand in thy lot,' and what determines the lot is how we wend our way till that other end, the end of life. 'The end of the days' is a period far beyond the end of the life of Daniel. And as the course that terminated in repose has been, so the possession of 'the portion of the inheritance of the saints in light' shall be, for which that course has made men meet. Destiny is character worked out. A man will be where he is fit for, and have what he is fit for. Time is the lackey of eternity. His life here settles how much of God a man shall be able to hold, when he stands in his lot at the 'end of the days,' and his allotted portion, as it stretches around him, will be but the issue and the outcome of his life here on earth. Therefore, dear brethren, tremendous importance attaches to each fugitive moment. Therefore each act that we do is weighted with eternal consequences. If we will put our trust in Him, 'in whom also we obtain the inheritance,' and will travel on life's common way in cheerful godliness, we may front all the uncertainties of the unknown future, sure of two things -- that we shall rest, and that we shall stand in our lot. We shall all go where we have fitted ourselves, by God's grace, to go; get what we have fitted ourselves to possess; and be what we have made ourselves. To the Christian man the word comes, 'Thou shalt stand in thy lot.' And the other word that was spoken about one sinner, will be fulfilled in all whose lives have been unfitting them for heaven: 'Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.' He, too, stands in his lot. Now settle which lot is yours.* * * * *

Chapter 13

THE VALLEY OF ACHOR

'I will give her ... the valley of Achor for a door of hope.' -- HOSEA II.15.The Prophet Hosea is remarkable for the frequent use which he makes of events in the former history of his people. Their past seems to him a mirror in which they may read their future. He believes that 'which is to be hath already been,' the great principles of the divine government living on through all the ages, and issuing in similar acts when the circumstances are similar. So he foretells that there will yet be once more a captivity and a bondage, that the old story of the wilderness will be repeated once more. In that wilderness God will speak to the heart of Israel. Its barrenness shall be changed into the fruitfulness of vineyards, where the purpling clusters hang ripe for the thirsty travellers. And not only will the sorrows that He sends thus become sources of refreshment, but the gloomy gorge through which they journey -- the valley of Achor -- will be a door of hope.One word is enough to explain the allusion. You remember that after the capture of Jericho by Joshua, the people were baffled in their first attempt to press up through the narrow defile that led from the plain of Jordan to the highlands of Canaan. Their defeat was caused by the covetousness of Achan, who for the sake of some miserable spoil which he found in a tent, broke God's laws, and drew down shame on Israel's ranks When the swift, terrible punishment on him had purged the camp, victory again followed their assault, and Achan lying stiff and stark below his cairn, they pressed on up the glen to their task of conquest. The rugged valley, where that defeat and that sharp act of justice took place, was named in memory thereof, the valley of Achor, that is, trouble; and our Prophet's promise is that as then, so for all future ages, the complicity of God's people with an evil world will work weakness and defeat, but that, if they will be taught by their trouble and will purge themselves of the accursed thing, then the disasters will make a way for hope to come to them again. The figure which conveys this is very expressive. The narrow gorge stretches before us, with its dark overhanging cliffs that almost shut out the sky; the path is rough and set with sharp pebbles; it is narrow, winding, steep; often it seems to be barred by some huge rock that juts across it, and there is barely room for the broken ledge yielding slippery footing between the beetling crag above and the steep slope beneath that dips so quickly to the black torrent below. All is gloomy, damp, hard; and if we look upwards the glen becomes more savage as it rises, and armed foes hold the very throat of the pass. But, however long, however barren, however rugged, however black, however trackless, we may see if we will, a bright form descending the rocky way with radiant eyes and calm lips, God's messenger, Hope; and the rough rocks are like the doorway through which she comes near to us in our weary struggle. For us all, dear friends, it is true. In all our difficulties and sorrows, be they great or small; in our business perplexities; in the losses that rob our homes of their light; in the petty annoyances that diffuse their irritation through so much of our days; it is within our power to turn them all into occasions for a firmer grasp of God, and so to make them openings by which a happier hope may flow into our souls.But the promise, like all God's promises, has its well-defined conditions. Achan has to be killed and put safe out of the way first, or no shining Hope will stand out against the black walls of the defile. The tastes which knit us to the perishable world, the yearnings for Babylonish garments and wedges of gold, must be coerced and subdued. Swift, sharp, unrelenting justice must be done on the lust of the flesh, and

the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, if our trials are ever to become doors of hope. There is no natural tendency in the mere fact of sorrow and pain to make God's love more discernible, or to make our hope any firmer. All depends on how we use the trial, or as I say -- first stone Achan, and then hope!So, the trouble which detaches us from earth gives us new hope. Sometimes the effect of our sorrows and annoyances and difficulties is to rivet us more firmly to earth. The eye has a curious power, which they call persistence of vision, of retaining the impression made upon it, and therefore of seeming to see the object for a definite time after it has really been withdrawn. If you whirl a bit of blazing stick round, you will see a circle of fire though there is only a point moving rapidly in the circle. The eye has its memory like the soul. And the soul has its power of persistence like the eye, and that power is sometimes kindled into activity by the fact of loss. We often see our departed joys, and gaze upon them all the more eagerly for their departure. The loss of dear ones should stamp their image on our hearts, and set it as in a golden glory. But it sometimes does more than that; it sometimes makes us put the present with its duties impatiently away from us. Vain regret, absorbed brooding over what is gone, a sorrow kept gaping long after it should have been healed, like a grave-mound off which desperate love has pulled turf and flowers, in the vain attempt to clasp the cold hand below -- in a word, the trouble that does not withdraw us from the present will never be a door of hope, but rather a grim gate for despair to come in at. The trouble which knits us to God gives us new hope. That bright form which comes down the narrow valley is His messenger and herald -- sent before His face. All the light of hope is the reflection on our hearts of the light of God. Her silver beams, which shed quietness over the darkness of earth, come only from that great Sun. If our hope is to grow out of our sorrow, it must be because our sorrow drives us to God. It is only when we by faith stand in His grace, and live in the conscious fellowship of peace with Him, that we rejoice in hope. If we would see Hope drawing near to us, we must fix our eyes not on Jericho that lies behind among its palm-trees, though it has memories of conquests, and attractions of fertility and repose, nor on the corpse that lies below that pile of stones, nor on the narrow way and the strong enemy in front there; but higher up, on the blue sky that spreads peaceful above the highest summits of the pass, and from the heavens we shall see the angel coming to us. Sorrow forsakes its own nature, and leads in its own opposite, when sorrow helps us to see God. It clears away the thick trees, and lets the sunlight into the forest shades, and then in time corn will grow. Hope is but the brightness that goes before God's face, and if we would see it we must look at Him.The trouble which we bear rightly with God's help, gives new hope. If we have made our sorrow an occasion for learning, by living experience, somewhat more of His exquisitely varied and ever ready power to aid and bless, then it will teach us firmer confidence in these inexhaustible resources which we have thus once more proved, 'Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.' That is the order. You cannot put patience and experience into a parenthesis, and omitting them, bring hope out of tribulation. But if, in my sorrow, I have been able to keep quiet because I have had hold of God's hand, and if in that unstruggling submission I have found that from His hand I have been upheld, and had strength above mine own infused into me, then my memory will give the threads with which Hope weaves her bright web. I build upon two things -- God's unchangeableness, and His help already received; and upon these strong foundations I may wisely and safely rear a palace of Hope, which shall never prove a castle in the air. The past, when it is God's past, is the surest pledge for the future. Because He has been with us in six troubles, therefore we may be sure that in seven He will not forsake us. I said that the light of hope was the brightness from the face of

God. I may say again, that the light of hope which fills our sky is like that which, on happy summer nights, lives till morning in the calm west, and with its colourless, tranquil beauty, tells of a yesterday of unclouded splendour, and prophesies a to-morrow yet more abundant. The glow from a sun that is set, the experience of past deliverances, is the truest light of hope to light our way through the night of life.One of the psalms gives us, in different form, a metaphor and a promise substantially the same as that of this text. 'Blessed are the men who, passing through the valley of weeping, make it a well.' They gather their tears, as it were, into the cisterns by the wayside, and draw refreshment and strength from their very sorrows, and then, when thus we in our wise husbandry have irrigated the soil with the gathered results of our sorrows, the heavens bend over us, and weep their gracious tears, and 'the rain also covereth it with blessings.' No chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.'Then, dear friends, let us set ourselves with our loins girt to the road. Never mind how hard it may be to climb. The slope of the valley of trouble is ever upwards. Never mind how dark is the shadow of death which stretches athwart it. If there were no sun there would be no shadow; presently the sun will be right overhead, and there will be no shadow then. Never mind how black it may look ahead, or how frowning the rocks. From between their narrowest gorge you may see, if you will, the guide whom God has sent you, and that Angel of Hope will light up all the darkness, and will only fade away when she is lost in the sevenfold brightness of that upper land, whereof our 'God Himself is Sun and Moon' -- the true Canaan, to whose everlasting mountains the steep way of life has climbed at last through valleys of trouble, and of weeping, and of the shadow of death.

Chapter 14

'LET HIM ALONE'

'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.' -- HOSEA iv.17. The tribe of Ephraim was the most important member of the kingdom of Israel; consequently its name was not unnaturally sometimes used in a wider application for the whole of the kingdom, of which it was the principal part. Being the 'predominant partner,' its name was used alone for that of the whole firm, just as in our own empire, we often say 'England,' meaning thereby the three kingdoms: England, Scotland, and Ireland. So 'Ephraim' here does not mean the single tribe, but the whole kingdom of Israel. Now Hosea himself was a Northerner, a subject of that kingdom; and its iniquities and idolatries weighed heavily on his heart, and were ripped up and brought to light with burning eloquence in his prophecies. The words of my text have often, and terribly, been misunderstood. And I wish now to try to bring out their true meaning and bearing. They have a message for us quite as much as they had for the people who originally received them. I. I must begin by explaining what, in my judgment, this text does not mean. First, it is not what it is often taken to be, a threatening of God's abandoning of the idolatrous nation. I dare say we have all heard grim sermons from this text, which have taken that view of it, and have tried to frighten men into believing now, by telling them that, perhaps, if they do not, God will never move on their hearts, or deal with them any more, but withdraw His grace, and leave them to insensibility. There is not a word of that sort in the text. Plainly enough it is not so, for this vehement utterance of the Prophet is not a declaration as to God, and what He is going to do, but it is a commandment to some men, telling them what they are to do. 'Let him alone' does not mean the same thing as 'I will let him alone'; and if people had only read with a little more care, they would have been delivered from perpetrating a libel on the divine loving-kindness and forbearance. It is clear enough, too, that such a meaning as that which has been forced upon the words of my text, and is the common use of it, I believe, in many evangelical circles, cannot be its real meaning, because the very fact that Hosea was prophesying to call Ephraim from his sin showed that God had not let Ephraim alone, but was wooing him by His prophet, and seeking to win him back by the words of his mouth. God was doing all that He could do, rising early and sending His messenger and calling to Ephraim: 'Turn ye! Turn ye! why will ye die?' For Hosea, in the very act of pleading with Israel on God's behalf, to have declared that God had abandoned it, and ceased to plead, would have been a palpable absurdity and contradiction. But beyond considerations of the context, other reasons conclusively negative such an interpretation of this text. I, for my part, do not believe that there are any bounds or end to God's forbearing pleading with men in this life. I take, as true, the great words of the old Psalm, in their simplest sense -- 'His mercy endureth for ever'; and I fall back upon the other words which a penitent had learned to be true by reflecting on the greatness of his own sin: 'With Him are multitudes of redemptions'; and I turn from psalmists and prophets to the Master who showed us God's heart, and knew what He spake when He laid it down as the law and the measure of human forgiveness which was moulded upon the pattern of the divine, that it should be 'seventy times seven' -- the multiplication of both the perfect numbers into themselves -- than which there can be no grander expression for absolute innumerableness and unfailing continuance. No, no! men may say to God, 'Speak no more to us'; or they may get so far away from Him, as that they only hear

God's pleading voice, dim and faint, like a voice in a dream. But surely the history of His progressive revelation shows us that, rather than such abandonment of the worst, the law of the divine dealing is that the deafer the man, the more piercing the voice beseeching and warning. The attraction of gravitation decreases as distance increases, but the further away we are from Him, the stronger is the attraction which issues from Him, and would draw us to Himself. Clear away, then, altogether out of your minds any notion that there is here declared what, in my judgment, is not declared anywhere in the Bible, and never occurs in the divine dealings with men. Be sure that He never ceases to seek to draw the most obstinate, idolatrous, and rebellious heart to Himself. That divine charity 'suffereth long, and is kind' ... 'hopeth all things, and beareth all things.' Again, let me point out that the words of my text do not enjoin the cessation of the efforts of Christian people for the recovery of the most deeply sunken in sin. 'Let him alone' is a commandment, and it is a commandment to God's Church, but it is not a commandment to despair of any that they may be brought into the fold, or to give up efforts to that end. If our Father in heaven never ceases to bear in His heart His prodigal children, it does not become those prodigals, who have come back, to think that any of their brethren are too far away to be drawn by their loving proclamation of the Father's heart of love.There is the glory of our Gospel, that, taking far sadder, graver views of what sin and alienation from God are, than the world's philosophers and philanthropists do, it surpasses them just as much as in the superb confidence with which it sets itself to the cure of the disease as in the unflinching clearness with which it diagnoses the disease as fatal, if it be not dealt with by the all-healing Gospel. All other methods for the restoration and elevation of mankind are compelled to recognise that there is an obstinate residuum that will not and cannot be reached by their efforts. It used to be said that some old cannon-balls, that had been brought from some of the battlefields of the Peninsula, resisted all attempts to melt them down; so there are 'cannon-balls,' as it were, amongst the obstinate evil-doers, and the degraded and 'dangerous' classes, which mark the despair of our modern reformers and civilisers and elevators, for no fire in their furnaces can melt down their hardness. No; but there is the furnace of the Lord in Jerusalem, and the fire of God in Zion, which can melt them down, and has done so a hundred and a thousand times, and is as able to do it again to-day as it ever was. Despair of no human soul. That boundless confidence in the power of the Gospel is the duty of the Christian Church. 'The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth!' They laughed Him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. But He put out His hand, and said unto her 'Talitha cumi, I say unto thee, Arise!' When we stand on one side of the bed with your social reformers on the other, and say 'The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth,' they laugh us to scorn, and bid us try our Gospel upon these people in our slums, or on those heathens in the New Hebrides. We have the right to answer, 'We have tried it, and man after man, and woman after woman have risen from the sick-bed, like Peter's wife's mother; and the fever has left them, and they have ministered unto Him. There are no people in the world about whom Christians need despair, none that Christ's Gospel cannot redeem. Whatever my text means, it does not mean cowardly and unbelieving doubt as to the power of the Gospel on the most degraded and sinful. II. So, the text enjoins on the Christian Church separation from an idolatrous world.'Ephraim is joined to idols.' Do you 'let him alone.' Now, there has been much harm done by misreading the force of the injunction of separation from the world. There is a great deal of union and association with the most godless people in our circle, which is inevitable. Family bonds, business connections, civic obligations -- all these require that the Church shall not withdraw from the world. There is the wide common ground

of Politics and Art and Literature, and a hundred other interests, on which it does Christian men no good, and the world much harm, if the former withdraw to themselves, and on the plea of superior sanctity, leave these great departments of interest and influence to be occupied only by non-Christians.Then, besides these thoughts of necessary union and association upon common ground, there is the other consideration that absolute separation would defeat the very purpose for which Christian people are here. 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' said Christ. Yes, and if you keep the meat on one plate and the salt on another, what good will the salt be? It has to be rubbed in particle by particle, and brought into contact over all the surface, and down into the depths of the meat that it is to preserve from putrefaction. And no Christian churches or individuals do their duty, and fulfil their function on earth, unless they are thus closely associated and intermingled with the world that they should be trying to leaven and save. A cloistered solitude, or a proud standing apart from the ordinary movements of the community, or a neglect, on the plea of our higher duties, of the duties of the citizen of a free country -- these are not the ways to fulfil the exhortation of my text. 'Let the dead bury their dead,' said Christ; but He did not mean that His Church was to stand apart from the world, and let it go its own way. It is a bad thing for both when little Christian coteries gather themselves together, and talk about their own goodness and religion, and leave the world to perish. Clotted blood is death; circulated, it is life.But, whilst all this is perfectly true -- and there are associations that we must not break if we are to do our work as Christian people -- it is also true that it is possible, in the closest unions with men who do not share our faith, to do the same thing that they are doing, with a difference which separates us from them, even whilst we are united with them. They tell us that, however dense any material substance may seem to be, there is always a film of air between contiguous particles. And there should be a film between us and our Christless friends and companions and partners, not perceptible perhaps to a superficial observer, but most real. If we do our common work as a religious duty, and in the exercise of all our daily occupations 'set the Lord always before' us, however closely we may be associated with people who do not so live, they will know the difference; never fear! And you will know the difference, and will not be identified with them, but separate in a wholesome fashion from them.And, dear brethren, if I may go a step further, I would venture to say that it seems to me that our Christian communities want few things more in this day than the reiteration of the old saying, 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.' There is so much in this time to break down the separation between him that believeth in Christ and him that doth not; narrowness has come to be thought such an enormous wickedness, and liberality is so lauded by all sorts of superficial people, that Christian men need to be summoned back to their standard. 'Being let go, they went to their own company' -- there is a natural affinity which should, and will, if our faith is vital, draw us to those who, on the gravest and solemnest things, have the same thoughts, the same hopes, the same faith. I do not urge you, God knows, to be bigoted and narrow, and shut yourselves up in your faith, and leave the world to go to the devil; but I do not wish, either, that Christian people should fling themselves into the arms and nestle in the hearts of persons who do not share with them 'like precious faith.'I am sure that there are many Christian people, old and young, who are suffering in their religious life because they are neglecting this commandment of my text. 'Let him alone.' There can be no deep affection, and, most of all -- if I may venture on such ground -- no wedded love worth the name, where there is not unanimity in regard to the deepest matters. It does not say much for the religion of a professing Christian who finds his heart's friends and his chosen companions in people that have no sympathy with the

religion which he professes. It does not say much for you if it is so with you, for the Christian, whom you like least, is nearer you in the depths of your true self than is the non-Christian whom you love most. Be sure, too, that if we mix ourselves up with Ephraim, we shall find ourselves grovelling beside him before his idols ere long. Godlessness is infectious. Many a young woman, a professing Christian, has married a godless man in the fond hope that she might win him. It is a great deal more frequently the case that he perverts her than that she converts him. Do not let us knit ourselves in these close bonds with the worshippers of idols, lest we 'learn their ways, and get a snare into our souls.' 'Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers. What fellowship hath light with darkness? Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord. Touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and My daughters.'

Chapter 15

'PHYSICIANS OF NO VALUE'

'When Ephralm saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to Assyria, and sent to king Jareb: but he is not able to heal you, neither shall he cure you of your wound.' -- HOSEA v.13 (R.V.). The long tragedy which ended in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyrian invasion was already beginning to develop in Hosea's time. The mistaken politics of the kings of Israel led them to seek an ally where they should have dreaded an enemy. As Hosea puts it in figurative fashion, Ephraim's discovery of his 'sickness' sent him in the vain quest for help to the apparent source of the 'sickness,' that is to Assyria, whose king in the text is described by a name which is not his real name, but is a significant epithet, as the margin puts it, 'a king that should contend'; and who, of course, was not able to heal nor to cure the wounds which he had inflicted. Ephraim's suicidal folly is but one illustration of a universal madness which drives men to seek for the healing of their misery, and the alleviation of their discomfort, in the repetition of the very acts which brought these about. The attempt to get relief in such a fashion, of course, fails; for as the verse before our text emphatically proclaims, it is God who has been 'as a moth unto Ephraim,' gnawing away his strength: and it is only He who can heal, since in reality it is He, and not the quarrelsome king of Assyria, who has inflicted the sickness. Thus understood, the text carries wide lessons, and may serve us as a starting-point for considering man's discovery of his 'sickness,' man's mad way of seeking healing, God's way of giving it. I. First, then, man's discovery of his sickness. The greater part of most lives is spent in mechanical, unreflecting repetition of daily duties and pleasures. We are all apt to live on the surface, and it requires an effort, which we are too indolent to make except under the impulse of some arresting motive, to descend into the depths of our own souls, and there to face the solemn facts of our own personality. The last place with which most of us are familiar, is our innermost self. Men are dimly conscious that things within are not well with them; but it is only one here and there that says so distinctly to himself, and takes the further step of thoroughly investigating the cause. But that superficial life is at the mercy of a thousand accidents, each one of which may break through the thin film, and lay bare the black depths. But there is another aspect of this discovery of sickness, far graver than the mere consciousness of unrest. Ephraim does not see his sickness unless he sees his sin. The greater part of every life is spent without that deep, all-pervading sense of discord between itself and God. Small and recurrent faults may evoke recurring remonstrances of conscience, but that is a very different thing from the deep tones and the clear voice of condemnation in respect to one's whole life and character which sounds in a heart that has learned how 'deceitful and desperately wicked' it is. Such a conviction may flash upon a man at any moment, and from a hundred causes. A sorrow, a sunset-sky, a grave, a sermon, may produce it. But even when we have come to recognise clearly our unrest, we have gone but part of the way, we have become conscious of a symptom, not of the disease. Why is it that man is alone among the creatures in that discontent with externals, and that dissatisfaction with himself? 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have roosting-places': why is it that amongst all God's happy creatures, and God's shining stars, men stand 'strangers in a strange land,' and are cursed with a restlessness which has not 'where to lay its head'? The consciousness of unrest is but the agitation of the limbs which indicates

disease. That disease is the twitching paralysis of sin. Like 'the pestilence that walketh in darkness,' it has a fell power of concealing itself, and the man whose sins are the greatest is always the least conscious of them. He dwells in a region where the malaria is so all-pervading that the inhabitants do not know what the sweetness of an unpoisoned atmosphere is. If there is a 'worst man' in the world, we may be very sure that no conscience is less troubled than his is. So the question may well be urged on those so terribly numerous amongst us, whose very unconsciousness of their true condition is the most fatal symptom of their fatal disease. What is the worth of a peace which is only secured by ignoring realities, and which can be shattered into fragments by anything that compels a man to see himself as he is? In such a fool's paradise thousands of us live. 'Use and wont,' the continual occupation with the trifles of our daily lives, the fleeting satisfactions of our animal nature, the shallow wisdom which bids us 'let sleeping dogs lie,' all conspire to mask, to many consciences, their unrest and their sin. We abstain from lifting the curtain behind which the serpent lies coiled in our hearts, because we dread to see its loathly length, and to rouse it to lift its malignant head, and to strike with its forked tongue. But sooner or later -- may it not be too late -- we shall be set face to face with the dark recess, and discover the foul reptile that has all the while been coiled there. II. Man's mad way of seeking healing. Can there be a more absurd course of action than that recorded in our text? 'When Ephraim saw his sickness, then went Ephraim to Assyria.' The Northern Kingdom sought for the healing of their national calamities from the very cause of their national calamities, and in repetition of their national sin. A hopeful policy, and one which speedily ended in the only possible result! But that insanity was but a sample of the infatuation which besets us all. When we are conscious of our unrest, are we not all tempted to seek to conceal it with what has made it? Take examples from the grosser forms of animal indulgence. The drunkard's vulgar proverb recommending 'a hair of the dog that bit you,' is but a coarse expression of a common fault. He is wretched until 'another glass' steadies, for a moment, his trembling hand, and gives a brief stimulus to his nerves. They say that the Styrian peasants, who habitually eat large quantities of arsenic, show symptoms of poison if they leave it off suddenly. These are but samples, in the physical region, of a tendency which runs through all lire, and leads men to drown thought by plunging into the thick of the worldly absorptions that really cause their unrest. The least persistent of men is strangely obstinate in his adherence to old ways, in spite of all experience of their crooked slipperiness. We wonder at the peasants who have their cottages and vineyards on the slopes of Vesuvius, and who build them, and plant them, over and over again after each destructive eruption. The tragedy of Israel is repeated in many of our lives; and the summing up of the abortive efforts of one of its kings to recover power by following the gods that had betrayed him, might be the epitaph of the infatuated men who see their sickness and seek to heal it by renewed devotion to the idols who occasioned it: 'They were the ruin of him and of all Israel.' The experience of the woman who had 'spent all her living on physicians, and was nothing the better, but rather the worse,' sums up the sad story of many a life. But again the sense of sin sometimes seeks to conceal itself by repetition of sin. When the dormant snake begins to stir, it is lulled to sleep again by absorption of occupations, or by an obstinate refusal to look inwards, and often by plunging once more into the sin which has brought about the sickness. To seek thus for ease from the stings of conscience, is like trying to silence a buzzing in the head by standing beside Niagara thundering in our ears. They used to beat the drums when a martyr died, in order to drown his testimony; and so foolish men seek to silence the voice of conscience by letting passions shout their loudest. It needs no words to demonstrate the

incurable folly of such conduct; but alas, it takes many words far stronger than mine to press home the folly upon men. The condition of such a half-awakened conscience is very critical if it is soothed by any means by which it is weakened and its possessor worsened. In the sickness of the soul homoeopathic treatment is a delusion. Ephraim may go to Assyria, but there is no healing of him there. III. God's way of giving true healing.Ephraim thought that, because the wounds were inflicted by Assyria, it was the source to which to apply for bandages and balm. If it had realised that Assyria was but the battle-axe wherewith the hand of God struck it, it would have learned that from God alone could come healing and health. The unrest which betrays the presence in our souls of a deep-seated sin, is a divine messenger. We terribly misinterpret the true source of all that disturbs us when we attribute it only to the occasions which bring it about; for the one purpose of all our restlessness is to drive us nearer to God, and to wrench us away from our Assyria. The true issue of Ephraim's sickness would have been the penitent cry, 'Come, let us return to the Lord our God, for He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.' It is in the consciousness of loving nearness to Him that all our unrest is soothed, and the heaving ocean in our hearts becomes as a summer's sea and 'birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed waves.' It is in that same consciousness that conscience ceases to condemn, and loses its sting. The prophet from whom our text is taken ends his wonderful ministry, that had been full of fiery denunciations and dark prophecies, with words that are only surpassed in their tenderness and the outpouring of the heart of God, by the fuller revelation in Jesus Christ: 'O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God. Take with you words, and return unto the Lord, and say unto Him: Assyria shall not save us, for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy.' The divine answer which he was commissioned to bring to the penitent Israel -- 'I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely; if Mine anger is turned away from Me' -- is, in all its wealth of forgiving love but an imperfect prophecy of the great Physician, from the hem of whose garment flowed out power to one who 'had spent all her living on physicians and could not be healed of any,' and who confirmed to her the power which she had thought to steal from Him unawares by the gracious words which bound her to Him for ever -- 'Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.'

Chapter 16

'FRUIT WHICH IS DEATH'

'Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images.2. Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: He shall break down their altars, He shall spoil their images.3. For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the Lord; what then should a king do to us? 4. They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.5. The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof that rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it.6. It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.7. As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water.8. The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.9. O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them.10. It is in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows.11. And Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn; but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods.12. Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.13. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.14. Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children.15. So shall Beth-el do unto you because of your great wickedness: in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off.' -- HOSEA x.1-15. The prophecy of this chapter has two themes -- Israel's sin, and its punishment. These recur again and again. Reiteration, not progress of thought, characterises Hosea's fiery stream of inspired eloquence. Conviction of sin and prediction of judgment are his message. We trace a fourfold repetition of it here, and further note that in each case there is a double reference to Israel's sin as consisting in the rebellion which set up a king and in the schism which established the calf worship; while there is also a double phase of the punishment corresponding to these, in the annihilation of the kingdom and the destruction of the idols. The first section may be taken to be verses 1-3. The image of a luxuriant vine laden with fruit is as old as Jacob's blessing of the tribes (Gen. xlix.22), where it is applied to Joseph, whose descendants were the strength of the Northern Kingdom. Hosea has already used it, and here it is employed to set forth picturesquely the material prosperity of Israel. Probably the period referred to is the successful reign of Jeroboam II. But prosperity increased sin. The more fruit or material wealth, the more altars; the better the harvests, the more the obelisks or pillars to gods, falsely supposed to be the authors of the blessings. The words are as condensed as a proverb, and are as true to-day as ever. Israel had attributed its prosperity to Baal (Hosea ii.8). The misuse of worldly wealth and the tendency of success to draw

us away from God, and to blind to the true source of all blessing, are as rife now as then. The root of the evil was, as always, a heart divided -- that is, between God and Baal -- or, perhaps, 'smooth'; that is, dissimulating and insincere. In reality, Baal alone possesses the heart which its owner would share between him and Jehovah. 'All in all, or not at all,' is the law. Whether Baals or calves were set beside God, He was equally deposed. Then, with a swift turn, Hosea proclaims the impending judgment, setting himself and the people as if already in the future. He hears the first peal of the storm, and echoes it in that abrupt 'now.' The first burst of the judgment shatters dreams of innocence, and the cowering wretches see their sin by the lurid light. That discovery awaits every man whose heart has been 'divided.' To the gazers and to himself masks drop, and the true character stands out with appalling clearness. What will that light show us to be? An unnamed hand overthrows altars and pillars. No need to say whose it is. One half of Israel's sin is crushed at a blow, and the destruction of the other follows immediately. They themselves abjure their allegiance; for they have found out that their king is a king Log, and can do them no good. A king, set up in opposition to God's will, cannot save. The ruin of their projects teaches godless men at last that they have been fools to take their own way; for all defences, recourses, and protectors, chosen in defiance of God, prove powerless when the strain comes. The annihilation of one half of their sin sickens them of the other. The calves and the monarchy stood or fell together. It is a dismal thing to have to bear the brunt of chastisement for what we see to have been a blunder as well as a crime. But such is the fate of those who seek other gods and another king. In verse 4 Hosea recurs to Israel's crime, and appends a description of the chastisement, substantially the same as before, but more detailed, which continues till verse 8. The sin now is contemplated in its effects on human relations. Before, it was regarded in relation to God. But men who are wrong with Him cannot be right with one another. Morality is rooted in religion, and if we lie to God, we shall not be true to our brother. Hence, passing over all other sins for the present, Hosea fixes upon one, the prevalence of which strikes at the very foundation of society. What can be done with a community in which lying has become a national characteristic, and that even in formal agreements? Honey-combed with falsehood, it is only fit for burning. Sin is bound by an iron link to penalty. Therefore, says Hosea, God's judgment springs up, like a bitter plant (the precise name of which is unknown) in the furrows, where the farmer did not know that its seeds lay. They little dreamed what they were sowing when they scattered abroad their lies, but this is the fruit of these. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'; and whatever other crop we may hope to gather from our sins, we shall gather that bitter one which we did not expect. The inevitable connection of sin and judgment, the bitterness of its results, the unexpectedness of them, are all here, and to be laid to heart by us. Then verses 5 and 6 dilate with keen irony on the fate of the first half of Israel's sin -- the calf. It was thought a god, but its worshippers shall be in a fright for it. 'Calves,' says Hosea, though there was but one at Beth-el; and he uses the feminine, as some think, depreciatingly. 'Beth-aven' or the 'house of vanity,' he says, instead of Beth-el, 'the house of God.' A fine god whose worshippers had to be alarmed for its safety! 'Its people' -- what a contrast to the name they might have borne, 'My people'! God disowns them, and says, 'They belong to it, not to Me.' The idolatrous priests of the calf worship will tremble when that image, which had been shamefully their 'glory,' is carried off to Assyria, and given as a present to 'king Jareb' -- a name for the king of Assyria meaning the fighting or quarrelsome king. The captivity of the god is the shame of the worshippers. To be 'ashamed of their own counsel' is the certain fate of all who depart from God; for, sooner or later, experience will demonstrate to the blindest that their refuges of lies can

neither save themselves nor those who trust in them. But shame is one thing and repentance another; and many a man will say, 'I have been a great fool, and my clever policy has all crumbled to pieces,' who will only therefore change his idols, and not return to God. Verse 7 recurs to the political punishment of the civil rebellion. The image for the disappearance of the king is striking, whether we render 'foam' or 'chip,' but the former has special beauty. In the one case we see the unsubstantial bubble, 'A moment white, then melts for ever'; and in the other, the helpless twig swept down by the stream. Either brings vividly before us the powerlessness of Israel against the roaring torrent of Assyrian power; and the figure may be widened out to teach what is sure to become of all man-made and self-chosen refuges when the floods of God's judgments sweep over the world. The captivity of the idol and the burst bubble of the monarchy bid us all make Jehovah our God and King. The vacant shrine and empty throne are followed by utter and long-continued desolation. Thorns and thistles have time to grow on the altars, and no hand cuts them down. What of the men thus stripped of all in which they had trusted? Desperate, they implore the mountains to fall on them, as preferring to die, and the hills to cover them, as willing to be crushed, if only they may be hidden. That awful cry is heard again in our Lord's predictions of judgment, and in the Apocalypse. Therefore this prophecy foreshadows, in the destruction of Israel's confidences and in their shame and despair, a more dreadful coming day, in which we shall be concerned.Verses 9 to 11 again give the sin and its punishment. 'The days of Gibeah' recall the hideous story of lust and crime which was the low-water mark of the lawless days of old. That crime had been avenged by merciless war. But its taint had lived on, and the Israel of Hosea's day 'stood,' obstinately persistent, just where the Benjamites had been then, and set themselves in dogged resistance, as these had done, 'that the battle against the children of unrighteousness might not touch them.'Stiff-necked setting oneself against God's merciful fighting with evil lasts for a little while, but verse 10 tells how soon and easily it is annihilated. God's 'desire' brushes away all defences, and the obstinate sinners are like children, who are whipped when their father wills, let them struggle as they may. The instruments of chastisement are foreign armies, and the chastisement itself is described with a striking figure as 'binding them to their two transgressions'; that is, the double sin which is the keynote of the chapter. Punishment is yoking men to their sins, and making them drag the burden like bullocks in harness. What sort of load are we getting together for ourselves? When we have to drag the consequences of our doings behind us, how shall we feel?The figure sets the Prophet's imagination going, and he turns it another way, comparing Israel to a heifer, broken in, and liking the easy work of threshing, in which the unmuzzled ox could eat its fill, but now set to harder tasks in the fields. Judah, too, is to share in the punishment. If men will not serve God in and because of prosperous ease, He will try what toil and privation will do. Abused blessings are withdrawn, and the abundance of the threshing-floor is changed for dragging a heavy plough or harrow.Verse 12 still deals with the figure suggested in the close of the previous verse. It is the only break in the clouds in this chapter. It is a call to amendment, accompanied by a promise of acceptance. If we 'sow for righteousness' -- that is, if our efforts are directed to embodying it in our lives -- we 'shall reap according to mercy.' That is true universally, whether it is taken to mean God's mercy to us, or ours to others. The aim after righteousness ever secures the divine favour, and usually ensures the measure which we mete being measured to us again.But sowing is not all; thorns must be grubbed up. We must not only turn over a new leaf, but tear out the old one. The old man must be slain if the new man is to live. The call to amend finds its warrant in the assurance that there is still time to seek the Lord, and

that, for all His threatenings, He is ready to rain blessings upon the seekers. The unwearying patience of God, the possibility of the worst sinner's repentance, the conditional nature of the threatenings, the possibility of breaking the bond between sin and sorrow, the yet deeper thought that righteousness must come from above, are all condensed in this brief gospel before the Gospel.But that bright gleam passes, and the old theme recurs. Once more we have sin and punishment exhibited in their organic connection in verses 13 and 14. Israel's past had been just the opposite of sowing righteousness and reaping mercy. Wickedness ploughed in, iniquity will surely be its fruit. Sin begets sin, and is its own punishment. What fruit have we of doing wrong? 'Lies'; that is, unfulfilled expectations of unrealised satisfaction. No man gets the good that he aimed at in sinning, or he gets something more that spoils it. At last the deceitfulness of sin will be found out, but we may be sure of it now. The root of all Israel's sin was the root of ours; namely, trust in self, and consequent neglect of God. The first half of verse 13 is an exhaustive analysis of the experience of every sinful life; the second, a penetrating disclosure of the foundation of it.Then the whole closes with the repeated threatening, dual as before, and illustrated by the forgotten horrors of some dreadful siege, one of the 'unhappy, far-off things,' fallen silent now. A significant variation occurs in the final threatening, in which Beth-el is set forth as the cause, rather than as the object, of the destruction. 'They were the ruin of him and of all Israel.' Our vices are made the whips to scourge us. Our idols bring us no help, but are the causes of our misery. The Prophet ends with the same double reference which prevails throughout, when he once more declares the annihilation of the monarchy, which, rather than a particular person, is meant by 'the king.' 'In the morning' is enigmatical. It may mean 'prematurely,' or 'suddenly,' or 'in a time of apparent prosperity,' or, more probably, the Prophet stands in vision in that future day of the Lord, and points to 'the king' as the first victim. The force of the prophecy does not depend on the meaning of this detail. The teaching of the whole is the certainty that suffering dogs sin, but yet does so by no iron, impersonal law, but according to the will of God, who will rain righteousness even on the sinner, being penitent, and will endow with righteousness from above every lowly soul that seeks for it.

Chapter 17

DESTRUCTION AND HELP

'O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help.' -- HOSEA xiii.9 (A.V.). 'It is thy destruction, O Israel, that thou art against Me, against thy Help' (R.V.). These words are obscure by reason of their brevity. Literally they might be rendered, 'Thy destruction for, in, or against Me; in, or against thy Help.' Obviously, some words must be supplied to bring out any sense. Our Authorised Version has chosen the supplement 'is,' which fails to observe the second occurrence with 'thy Help' of the preposition, and is somewhat lax in rendering the 'for' of the second clause by the neutral 'but.' It is probably better to read, as the Revised Version, with most modern interpreters, 'Thou art against Me, against thy Help,' and to find in the second clause the explanation, or analysis, of the destruction announced in the first. So we have here the wail of the parental love of God over the ruin which Israel has brought on itself, and that parental love is setting forth Israel's true condition, in the hope that they may discern it. Thus, even the rebuke holds enclosed a promise and a hope. Since God is their help, to depart from Him has been ruin, and the return to Him will be life. Hosea, or rather the Spirit that spake through Hosea, blended wonderful tenderness with unflinching decision in rebuke, and unwavering certainty in foretelling evil with unfaltering hope in the promise of possible blessing. His words are set in the same key as the still more wonderfully tender ones that Jesus uttered as He looked across the valley from Olivet to the gleaming city on the other side, and wailed, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Therefore your house is left unto you desolate.' We may note here I. The loving discovery of ruin. It is strange that men should need to be told, and that with all emphasis, the evil case in which they are; and stranger still that they should resent the discovery and reject it. This pathetic pleading is the voice of a divine Father trying to convince His son of misery and danger; and the obscurity of the text is as if that voice was choked with sobs, and could only speak in broken syllables the tragical word in which all the evil of Israel's sin is gathered up -- 'his destruction,' or 'corruption.' It gathers up in one terrible picture the essential nature of sin and the death of the soul, which is its wages -- inward misery and unrest, outward sorrows, the decay of mental and moral powers, the spreading taint which eats its way through the whole personality of a man who has sinned, and pauses not till it has reduced his corpse to putrefaction. All these, and a hundred more effects of sin, are crowded together in that one word 'thy destruction.' It is strange that it needs God's voice, and that in its most piercing tones, to convince men of ruin brought by sin. A mortifying limb is painless. There is no consciousness in the drugged sleep which becomes heavier and heavier till it ends in death. There is no surer sign of the reality and extent of the corruption brought about by sin, than man's ignorance of it. There is no more tragical proof that a man is 'wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked' than his vehement affirmation, 'I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing,' and his self-complacent rejection of the counsel to 'buy refined gold, and white garments, and eye-salve to anoint his eyes.' So obstinately unconscious are we of our ruin that even God's voice, whether uttered in definite words, or speaking in sharp sorrows and punitive acts, but too often fails to pierce the thick layer of self complacency in which we wrap ourselves, and to pierce the heart with the arrow of conviction.

Indeed we may say that the whole process of divine education of a soul, conducted through many channels of providences, has for its end mainly this -- to convince His wandering children that to be against Him, against their Help, is their destruction. But, perhaps, the strangest of all is the attitude which we often take up of resenting the love that would reveal our ruin. It is stupid of the ox to kick against its driver's goad; but that is wise in comparison with the action of the man who is angry with God because He warns that departure from Him is ruin. Many of us treat Christianity as if it had made the mischief which it reveals, and would fain mend; and we all need to be reminded that it is cruel kindness to conceal unpleasant truths, and that the Gospel is no more to be blamed for the destruction which it declares than is the signalman with his red flag responsible for the broken-down viaduct to which the train is rushing that he tries to save. II. The loving appeal to conscience as to the cause. Israel's destruction arose from the fact of Israel having turned against God, its Help. Sin is suicide. God is our Help, and only Help. His will is love and blessing. His only relation to our sin is to hate it, and fight against it. In conflict of love with lovelessness one of His chiefest weapons is to drive home to our consciousness the conviction of our sin. When He is driven to punish, it is our wrongdoing that forces Him to what Isaiah calls, 'His strange act.' The Heavenly Father is impelled by His love not to spare the rod, lest the sparing spoil the child. An earthly father suffers more punishment than he inflicts upon the little rebel whom, unwillingly and with tears, he may chastise; and God's love is more tender, as it is more wise, than that of the fathers of our flesh who corrected us. 'He doth not willingly afflict nor is soon angry'; and of all the mercies which He bestows upon us, none is more laden with His love than the discipline by which He would make us know, through our painful experience, that it is 'an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord, and that His fear is not in us.' In its essence and depth, separation from God is death to the creature that wrenches itself away from the source of life; and all the weariness and pains of a godless life are, if we take them as He meant them, the very angels of His presence. Just as the sole reason for our sorrows lies in our wrongdoing, the sole cause of our wrongdoing is in ourselves. It is because 'Israel is against Me' that Israel's destruction rushes down upon it. It could have defended its hankering after Assyria and idols, by wise talk about political exigencies and the wisdom of trying to turn possibly powerful enemies into powerful allies, and the folly of a little nation, on a narrow strip of territory between the desert and the sea, fancying itself able to sustain itself uncrushed between the upper millstone of Assyria on the north, and the under one, Egypt, on the south. But circumstances are never the cause, though they may afford the excuse of rebellion against our Helper, God; and all the modern talk about environments and the like, is merely a cloak cast round, but too scanty to conceal the ugly fact of the alienated will. All the excuses for sin, which either modern scientific jargon about 'laws,' or hyper-Calvinistic talk about 'divine decrees,' alleges, are alike shattered against the plain fact of conscience, which proclaims to every evil-doer, 'Thou art the man!' We shall get no further and no deeper than the truth of our text: 'It is thy destruction that thou art against Me.' The pleading God has from the beginning spoken words as tender as they are stern, and as stern as they are tender. His voice to the sons of men has from of old asked the unanswerable question, 'Why should ye be stricken any more?' and has answered it, so far as answer is possible, by the fact, which is as mysterious as it is undeniable, 'Ye will revolt more and more.' God calls upon man to judge between Him and His vineyard, and asks, 'What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done unto it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?' The fault lay not in the vine-dresser, but in some evil influence that had found its way into the life and sap of

the vine, and bore fruits in an unnatural product, which could not have been traced to the vine-dresser's action. So God stands, as with clean hands, declaring that 'He is pure from the blood of all men; that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked'; and His word to the men on whom falls the whole weight of His destroying power is, 'Thou hast procured this unto thyself.'III. The loving forbearance which still offers restoration.He still claims to be Israel's Help. Separation from Him has all but destroyed the rebellious; but it has not in the smallest degree affected the fulness of His power, nor the fervency of His desire to help. However earth may be shaken by storms, or swathed in mist that darkens all things and shuts out heaven, the sun is still in its tabernacle and pouring down its rays through the cloudless blue that is above the enfolding cloud. Our text has wrapped up in it the broad gospel that all our self-inflicted destruction may be arrested, and all the evil which brought it about swept away. God is ready to prove Himself our true and only Helper in that, as our prophet says, 'He will ransom us from the power of the grave'; and, even when death has laid its cold hand upon us, will redeem us from it, and destroy the destruction which had fixed its talons in us. All the guilt is ours; all the help is His; His work is to conquer and cast out our sins, to heal our sicknesses, to soothe our sorrows. And He has Himself vindicated His great name of our Help when He has revealed Himself as 'the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'

Chapter 18

ISRAEL RETURNING

'O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.2. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.3. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.4. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from Him.5. I will be as the dew unto Israel: He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth His roots as Lebanon.6. His branches shall spread, and His beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and His smell as Lebanon.7. They that dwell under His shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.8. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard Him, and observed Him: I am like a green fir-tree. From me is thy fruit found.9. Who is wise, and He shall understand these things? prudent, and He shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.' -- HOSEA xiv.1-9. Hosea is eminently the prophet of divine love and of human repentance. Both streams of thought are at their fullest in this great chapter. In verses 1 to 3 the very essence of true return to God is set forth in the prayer which Israel is exhorted to offer, while in verses 4 to 8 the forgiving love of God and its blessed results are portrayed with equal poetical beauty and spiritual force. Verse 9 closes the chapter and the book with a kind of epilogue. I. The summons to repentance. 'Israel,' of course, here means the Northern Kingdom, with which Hosea's prophecies are chiefly occupied. 'Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity' -- that is the lesson taught by all its history, and in a deeper sense it is the lesson of all experience. Sin brings ruin for nations and individuals, and the plain teachings of each man's own life exhort each to 'return unto the Lord.' We have all proved the vanity and misery of departing from Him; surely, if we are not drawn by His love, we might be driven by our own unrest, to go back to God. The Prophet anticipates the clear accents of the New Testament call to repentance in his expansion of what he meant by returning. He has nothing to say about sacrifices, nor about self-reliant efforts at moral improvement. 'Take with you words,' not 'the blood of bulls and goats.' Confession is better than sacrifice. What words are they which will avail? Hosea teaches the penitent's prayer. It must begin with the petition for forgiveness, which implies recognition of the petitioner's sin. The cry, 'Take away all iniquity,' does not specify sins, but masses the whole black catalogue into one word. However varied the forms of our transgressions, they are in principle one, and it is best to bind them all into one ugly heap, and lay it at God's feet. We have to confess not only sins, but sin, and the taking away of it includes divine cleansing from its power, as well as divine forgiveness of its guilt. Hosea bids Israel ask that God would take away all iniquity; John pointed to 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' But beyond forgiveness and cleansing, the penitent heart will seek that God would 'accept the good' in it, which springs up by His grace, when the evil has been washed from it, like flowers that burst from soil off which the matted under-growth of poisonous jungle has been cleared. Mere negative absence of 'evil' is not all that we should desire or exhibit; there must be positive good; and however sinful may have been the past, we are not too bold when we ask and expect that we may be made able to produce

'good,' which shall be fragrant as sweet incense to God. Petitions are followed by vows. On the one hand, the experience of forgiveness and cleansing will put a new song in our mouths, and instead of animal sacrifices, we shall render the praise which is better than 'calves' laid on the altar. Perhaps the Septuagint rendering of that difficult phrase 'the calves of our lips,' which is given in Hebrews xiii.15, 'the fruit of our lips,' is preferable. In either case, the same thought appears -- that the penitent's experience of forgiving and restoring love makes 'the tongue of the dumb sing,' and it will bind men's hearts more closely to God than anything besides can do, so that their old inclinations to false reliances and idolatries drop away from them. The old fable tells us that the storm made the traveller wrap his cloak closer round him, but the sunshine made him throw it off. Judgments often make men cling more closely to their sins, but forgiving mercy makes them 'cast off the works of darkness.' The men who had experienced that in God, the Israel, which by its sins had brought down the punishment of His repudiation of being its father (i.9), had found mercy, would no longer feel temptation to turn to Assyria for help, nor to seek protection from Egypt's cavalry, nor to debase their manhood by calling stocks and stones, the work of their own hands, their gods. What earthly sweetness will tempt, or what earthly danger will affright, the heart that is feeling the bliss of union with God? Would Judas's thirty pieces of silver attract the disciple reclining on Jesus' bosom? We are most firmly bound to God, not by our resolves, but by our experience of His all-sufficient mercy. Fill the heart with that wine of the kingdom, and bitter or poisonous draughts will find no entrance into the cup. II. God's welcoming answer. The very abruptness of its introduction, without any explanation as to the speaker, suggests how swiftly and joyfully the Father hastens to meet the returning prodigal while he is yet afar off. Like pent-up waters rushing forth as soon as a barrier is taken away, God's love pours itself out immediately. His answer ever gives more than the penitent asks -- robe and ring and shoes, and a feast to him who dared not expect more than a place among the hired servants. He gives not by drops, but in floods, answering the prayer for the taking away of iniquity by the promise to heal backsliding, going beyond desires and hopes in the gift of love which asks for no recompense, is drawn forth by no desert, but wells up from the depths of God's heart, and strengthens the new, tremulous trust of the penitent by the assurance that every trace of anger is effaced from God's heart. The blessings consequent on the gift of God's love are described in lovely imagery, drawn, like Hosea's other abundant similes, from nature, and especially from trees and flowers. The source of all fruitfulness is a divine influence, which comes silently and refreshing as the 'dew,' or, rather, as the 'night mist,' a phenomenon occurring in Palestine in summer, and being, accurately, rolling masses of vapour brought from the Mediterranean, which counteract the dry heat and keep vegetation alive. The influences which refresh and fructify our souls must fall in many a silent hour of meditation and communion. They will effloresce into manifold shapes of beauty and fruitfulness, of which the Prophet signalises three. The lily may stand for beauty of purity, though botanists differ as to the particular flower meant. Christians should present to the world 'whatsoever things are lovely,' and see to it that their goodness is attractive. But the fragrant, pure lily has but shallow roots, and beauty is not all that a character needs in this world of struggle and effort. So there are to be both the lily's blossom and roots like Lebanon. The image may refer to the firm buttresses of the widespread foot-hills, from which the sovereign summits of the great mountain range rise, or, as is rather suggested by the accompanying similes from the vegetable world, it may refer to the cedars growing there. Their roots are anchored deep and stretch far underground; therefore they rear towering heads, and spread broad shelves of dark foliage, safe from any blast. Our lives must

be deep rooted in God if they are to be strong. Boots generally spread beneath the soil about as far as branches extend above it. There should be at least as much underground, 'hid with Christ in God,' as is visible to the world. But beauty and strength are not all. So Hosea thinks of yet another of the characteristic growths of Palestine, the olive, which is not strikingly beautiful in form, with its strangely gnarled, contorted stem, its feeble branches, and its small, pointed, pale leaves, but has the beauty of fruitfulriess, and is green when other trees are bare. Such 'beauty' should be ours, and will be if the 'dew' falls on us. In verse 7 there are difficulties, both as to the application of the 'his,' and as to the reading and rendering of some of the words. But the general drift is clear. It prolongs the tones of the foregoing verses, keeping to the same class of images, and expressing fruitfulness, abundant as the corn and precious as the grape, and fragrance like the 'bouquet' of the choicest wine. Verse 8 offers great difficulties on any interpretation. The supplement 'shall say' is questionable, and it is doubtful whether Ephraim is the speaker at all, and whether, if so, he speaks all the four clauses, and who speaks any or all of them, if not he. To the present writer, it seems best to take the supplement as right, and possible to regard the whole verse as spoken by Ephraim, though perhaps the last clause is meant to be God's utterance. The meaning will then come out as follows. The penitent Israel again speaks, after the gracious promises preceding. The tribal name is, as usual in Hosea, equivalent to Israel, whose penitent cry we heard at the beginning of the passage. Now we hear his glad response to God's abundant answer. 'What have I to do any more with idols?' He had vowed (verse 3) to have no more to do with them, and the resolve is deepened by the rich grace held forth to him. Hosea had lamented Ephraim's mad adherence to 'his idols' (iv.17), but now the union is dissolved, and by penitence and reception of God's grace, he is joined to the Lord, and parted from them. His renunciation of idolatry is based, in the second clause, on his experience of what God can do, and on his having heard God's gracious voice of pardon and promise. If a man hears God, he will not be drawn to worship at any idol's shrine.Further, in the third clause, Ephraim is joyfully conscious of the change that has passed on him, in accordance with the great promises just spoken, and with grateful astonishment that such verdure should have burst out from the dry and rotten stump of his own sinful nature, exclaims, 'I am like a green fir-tree.' That is another reason why he will have no more to do with idols. They could never have made his sapless nature break into leafage. But what of the fourth clause -- 'From Me is thy fruit found'? Can we understand that to mean that Ephraim still speaks, keeping up the image of the previous clause, and declaring that all the new fruitfulness which he finds in himself he recognises to be God's, both in the sense that, in reality, it is produced by Him, and that it belongs to Him? He comes seeking fruit, and He finds it. All our good is His, and we shall be happy, productive, and wise, in proportion as we offer all our works to Him, and feel that, after all, they are not ours, but the works of that Spirit which dwells in penitent and believing hearts. Some have thought that this last clause must be taken as spoken by God; but, even if so taken, it conveys substantially the same thought as to the divine origin of man's fruitfulness.The last verse is rather a general reflection summing up the whole than an integral part of this wonderful representation of penitence, pardon, and fruitfulness. It declares the great truth that the knowledge of the pardoning mercy of God, and of the ways by which He weans men from sin and makes them fruitful of good, makes us truly wise. That knowledge is more than intellectual apprehension; it is experience. Providence has its mysteries, but they who keep near to God, and are 'just' because they do, will find the opportunity of free, unfettered activity in God's ways, and transgressors will stumble therein. Therefore wisdom and safety lie in penitence and confession,

which will ever be met by gracious pardon and showers of blessing that will cause our hearts, which sin has made desert, to rejoice and blossom like the rose.

Chapter 19

THE DEW AND THE PLANTS

'I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.6. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree ...' -- Hosea xiv.5, 6. Like his brethren, Hosea was a poet as well as a prophet. His little prophecy is full of similes and illustrations drawn from natural objects; scarcely any of them from cities or from the ways of men; almost all of them from Nature, as seen in the open country, which he evidently loved, and where he had looked upon things with a clear and meditative eye. This whole chapter is full of emblems drawn from the vegetable world. The lily, the cedar, the olive, are in my text. And there follow, in the subsequent verses, the corn, and the vine, and the green fir-tree. The words which I have read, no doubt originally had simply a reference to the numerical increase of the people and their restoration to their land, but they may be taken by us quite fairly as having a very much deeper and more blessed reference than that. For they describe the uniform condition of all spiritual life and growth,' I will be as the dew unto Israel'; and then they set forth some of the manifold aspects of that growth, and the consequences of receiving that heavenly dew, under the various metaphors to which I have referred. It is in that higher signification that I wish to look at them now. I. The first thought that comes out of the words is that for all life and growth of the spirit there must be a bedewing from God. 'I will be as the dew unto Israel.' Now, scholars tell us that the kind of moisture that is meant in these words is not what we call dew, of which, as a matter of fact, there falls, in Palestine, little or none at the season of the year referred to in my text, but that the word really means the heavy night-clouds that come upon the wings of the south-west wind, to diffuse moisture and freshness over the parched plains, in the very height and fierceness of summer. The metaphor of my text becomes more beautiful and striking, if we note that, in the previous chapter, where the Prophet was in his threatening mood, he predicts that 'an east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness' -- the burning sirocco, with death upon its wings -- 'and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up.' We have then to imagine the land gaping and parched, the hot air having, as with invisible tongue of flame, licked streams and pools dry, and having shrunken fountains and springs. Then, all at once there comes down upon the baking ground and on the faded, drooping flowers that lie languid and prostrate on the ground in the darkness, borne on the wings of the wind, from the depths of the great unfathomed sea, an unseen moisture. You cannot call it rain, so gently does it diffuse itself; it is liker a mist, but it brings life and freshness, and everything is changed. The dew, or the night mist, as it might more properly be rendered, was evidently a good deal in Hosea's mind; you may remember that he uses the image again in a remarkably different aspect, where he speaks of men's goodness as being like 'a morning cloud, and the early dew that passes away.' The natural object which yields the emblem was all inadequate to set forth the divine gift which is compared to it, because as soon as the sun has risen, with burning heat, it scatters the beneficent clouds, and the 'sunbeams like swords' threaten to slay the tender green shoots. But this mist from God that comes down to water the earth is never dried up. It is not transient. It may be ours, and live in our hearts. Dear brethren, the prose of this sweet old promise is 'If I depart, I will send Him unto you.' If we are Christian people, we have the perpetual dew of that divine Spirit, which falls on our leaves

and penetrates to our roots, and communicates life, freshness, and power, and makes growth possible -- more than possible, certain -- for us. 'I' -- Myself through My Son, and in My Spirit -- 'I will be' -- an unconditional assurance -- 'as the dew unto Israel.' Yes! That promise is in its depth and fulness applicable only to the Christian Israel, and it remains true to-day and for ever. Do we see it fulfilled? One looks round upon our congregations, and into one's own heart, and we behold the parable of Gideon's fleece acted over again -- some places soaked with the refreshing moisture, and some as hard as a rock and as dry as tinder and ready to catch fire from any spark from the devil's forge and be consumed in the everlasting burnings some day. It will do us good to ask ourselves why it is that, with a promise like this for every Christian soul to build upon, there are so few Christian souls that have anything like realised its fulness and its depth. Let us be quite sure of this -- God has nothing to do with the failure of His promise, and let us take all the blame to ourselves. 'I will be as the dew unto Israel.' Who was Israel? The man that wrestled all night in prayer with God, and took hold of the angel and prevailed and wept and made supplication to Him. So Hosea tells us; and as he says in the passage where he describes the Angel's wrestling with Jacob at Peniel, 'there He spake with us' -- when He spake, He spake with him who first bore the name. Be you Israel, and God will surely be your dew; and life and growth will be possible. That is the first lesson of this great promise. II. The second is, that a soul thus bedewed by God will spring into purity and beauty. We go back to Hosea's vegetable metaphors. 'He shall grow as the lily' is his first promise. If I were addressing a congregation of botanists, I should have something to say about what kind of a plant is meant, but that is quite beside the mark for my present purpose. It is sufficient to notice that in this metaphor the emphasis is laid upon the two attributes which I have named -- beauty and purity. The figure teaches us that ugly Christianity is not Christ's Christianity. Some of us older people remember that it used to be a favourite phrase to describe unattractive saints that they had 'grace grafted on a crab stick.' There are a great many Christian people whom one would compare to any other plant rather than a lily. Thorns and thistles and briers are a good deal more like what some of them appear to the world. But we are bound, if we are Christian people, by our obligations to God, and by our obligations to men, to try to make Christianity look as beautiful in people's eyes as we can. That is what Paul said, 'Adorn the teaching'; make it look well, inasmuch as it has made you look attractive to men's eyes. Men have a fairly accurate notion of beauty and goodness, whether they have any goodness or any beauty in their own characters or not. Do you remember the words: 'Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, whatsoever things are venerable ... if there be any praise' -- from men -- 'think on these things'? If we do not keep that as the guiding star of our lives, then we have failed in one very distinct duty of Christian people -- namely, to grow more like a lily, and to be graceful in the lowest sense of that word, as well as grace full in the highest sense of it. We shall not be so in the lower, unless we are so in the higher. It may be a very modest kind of beauty, very humble, and not at all like the flaring reds and yellows of the gorgeous flowers that the world admires. These are often like a great sunflower, with a disc as big as a cheese. But the Christian beauty will be modest and unobtrusive and shy, like the violet half buried in the hedge-bank, and unnoticed by careless eyes, accustomed to see beauty only in gaudy, flaring blooms. But unless you, as a Christian, are in your character arrayed in the "beauty of holiness," and the holiness of beauty, you are not quite the Christian that Jesus Christ wants you to be; setting forth all the gracious and sweet and refining influences of the Gospel in your daily life and conduct. That is the second lesson of our text. III. The third is, that a God-bedewed soul that has been made fair and pure by communion

with God, ought also to be strong. He "shall cast forth his roots like Lebanon." Now I take it that simile does not refer to the roots of that giant range that slope away down under the depths of the Mediterranean. That is a beautiful emblem, but it is not in line with the other images in the context. As these are all dependent on the promise of the dew, and represent different phases of the results of its fulfilment, it is natural to expect thus much uniformity in their variety, that they shall all be drawn from plant-life. If so, we must suppose a condensed metaphor here, and take "Lebanon" to mean the forest which another prophet calls "the glory of Lebanon." The characteristic tree in these, as we all know, was the cedar.It is named in Hebrew by a word which is connected with that for "strength." It stands as the very type and emblem of stability and vigour. Think of its firm roots by which it is anchored deep in the soil. Think of the shelves of massive dark foliage. Think of its unchanged steadfastness in storm. Think of its towering height; and thus arriving at the meaning of the emblem, let us translate it into practice in our own lives. "He shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon." Beauty? Yes! Purity? Yes! And braided in with them, if I may so say, the strength which can say "No!" which can resist, which can persist, which can overcome; power drawn from communion with God. "Strength and beauty" should blend in the worshippers, as they do in the "sanctuary" in God Himself. There is nothing admirable in mere force; there is often something sickly and feeble, and therefore contemptible in mere beauty. Many of us will cultivate the complacent and the amiable sides of the Christian life, and be wanting in the manly "thews that throw the world," and can fight to the death. But we have to try and bring these two excellences of character together, and it needs an immense deal of grace and wisdom and imitation of Jesus Christ, and a close clasp of His hand, to enable us to do that. Speak we of strength? He is the type of strength. Of beauty? He is the perfection of beauty. And it is only as we keep close to Him that our lives will be all fair with the reflected loveliness of His, and strong with the communicated power of His grace -- "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."Brethren, if we are to set forth anything, in our daily lives, of this strength, remember that our lives must be rooted in, as well as bedewed by, God. Hosea's emblems, beautiful and instructive as they are, do not reach to the deep truth set forth in still holier and sweeter words; "I am the Vine, ye are the branches." The union of Christ and His people is closer than that between dew and plant. Our growth results from the communication of His own life to us. Therefore is the command stringent and obedience to it blessed, "Abide in Me, for apart from Me ye can do" -- and are -- "nothing."Let us remember that the loftier the top of the tree and the wider the spread of its shelves of dark foliage, if it is steadfastly to stand, unmoved by the loud winds when they call, the deeper must its roots strike into the firm earth. If your life is to be a fair temple-palace worthy of God's dwelling in, if it is to be impregnable to assault, there must be quite as much masonry underground as above, as is the case in great old buildings and palaces. And such a life must be a life "hid with Christ in God," then it will be strong. When we strike our roots deep into Him, our branch also shall not wither, and our leaf shall be green, and all that we do shall prosper. The wicked are not so. They are like chaff -- rootless, fruitless, lifeless, which the wind driveth away.IV. Lastly, the God-bedewed soul, beautiful, pure, strong, will bear fruit.That is the last lesson from these metaphors. "His beauty shall be as the olive-tree." Anybody that has ever seen a grove of olives knows that their beauty is not such as strikes the eye. If it was not for the blue sky overhead, that rays down glorifying light, they would not be much to look at or talk about. The tree has a gnarled, grotesque trunk which divides into insignificant branches, bearing leaves mean in shape, harsh in texture, with a silvery underside. It gives but a quivering shade and has no massiveness, nor symmetry. Ay! but there

are olives on the branches. And so the beauty of the humble tree is in what it grows for man's good. After all, it is the outcome in fruitfulness which is the main thing about us. God's meaning, in all His gifts of dew, and beauty, and purity, and strength, is that we should be of some use in the world.The olive is crushed into oil, and the oil is used for smoothing and suppling joints and flesh, for nourishing and sustaining the body as food, for illuminating darkness as oil in the lamp. And these three things are the three things for which we Christian people have received all our dew, and all our beauty, and all our strength -- that we may give other people light, that we may be the means of conveying to other people nourishment, that we may move gently in the world as lubricating, sweetening, soothing influences, and not irritating and provoking, and leading to strife and alienation. The question after all is, Does anybody gather fruit off us, and would anybody call us 'trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified'? That is lesson four from this text. May we all open our hearts for the dew from heaven, and then use it to produce in ourselves beauty, purity, strength, and fruitfulness! * * * * *

Chapter 20

A PAIR OF FRIENDS

'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?'-AMOS III.8.They do not need to be agreed about everything. They must, however, wish to keep each others company, and they must be going by the same road to the same place. The application of the parable is very plain, though there are differences of opinion as to the bearing of the whole context which need not concern us now. The 'two,' whom the Prophet would fain see walking together, are God and Israel, and his question suggests not only the companionship and communion with God which are the highest form of religion and the aim of all forms and ceremonies of worship, but also the inexorable condition on which alone that height of communion can be secured and sustained. Two may walk together, though the one be God in heaven and the other be I on earth. But they have to be agreed thus far, at any rate, that both shall wish to be together, and both be going the same road.I. So I ask you to look, first, at that possible blessed companionship which may cheer a life.There are three phrases in the Old Testament, very like each other, and yet presenting different facets or aspects of the same great truth. Sometimes we read about 'walking before God' as Abraham was bid to do. That means ordering the daily life under the continual sense that we are 'ever in the great Taskmaster's eye' Then there is 'walking after God,' and that means conforming the will and active efforts to the rule that He has laid down, setting our steps firm on the paths that He has prepared that we should walk in them, and accepting His providences. But also, high above both these conceptions of a devout life is the one which is suggested by my text, and which, as you remember, was realised in the case of the patriarch Enoch -- 'walking with God.' For to walk before Him may have with it some tremor, and may be undertaken in the spirit of the slave who would be glad to get away from the jealous eye that rebukes his slothfulness; and 'walking after Him' may be a painful and partial effort to keep His distant figure in sight; but to 'walk with Him' implies a constant, quiet sense of His Divine Presence which forbids that I should ever be lonely, which guides and defends, which floods my soul and fills my life, and in which, as the companions pace along side by side, words may be spoken by either, or blessed silence may be eloquent of perfect trust and rest.But, dear brother, far above us as such experience seems to sound, such a life is a possibility for every one of us. We may be able to say, as truly as our Lord said it, 'I am not alone, for the Father is with me.' It is possible that the dreariest solitude of a soul, such as is not realised when the body is removed from men, but is felt most in the crowded city where there is none that loves or fathoms and sympathises, may be turned into blessed fellowship with Him. Yes, but that solitude will not be so turned unless it is first painfully felt. As Daniel said, 'I was left alone, and I saw the great vision.' We need to feel in our deepest hearts that loneliness on earth before we walk with God.If we are so walking, it is no piece of fanaticism to say that there will be mutual communications. Do you not believe that God knows His way into the spirits that He has endowed with conscious life? Do you not believe that He speaks now to people as truly as He did to prophets and Apostles of old? as truly; though the results of His speech to us of to-day be not of the same authority for others as the words that He spoke to a Paul or a John. The belief in God's communications as for ever sounding in the depths of the Christian spirit does not at all obliterate the distinction between the kind of inspiration which produced the New Testament and that which is realised by all believing and

obedient souls. High above all our experience of hearing the words of God in our hearts stands that of those holy men of old who heard God's message whispered in their ears, that they might proclaim it on the housetops to all the world through all generations. But though they and we are on a different level, and God spoke to them for a different purpose, He speaks in our spirits, if we will comply with the conditions, as truly as He did in theirs. As really as it was ever true that the Lord spoke to Abraham, or Isaiah, or Paul, it is true that He now speaks to the man who walks with Him. Frank speech on both sides beguiles many a weary mile, when lovers or friends foot it side by side; and this pair of friends of whom our text speaks have mutual intercourse. God speaks with His servant now, as of old, 'as a man speaketh with his friend'; and we on our parts, if we are truly walking with Him, shall feel it natural to speak frankly to God. As two friends on the road will interchange remarks about trifles, and if they love each other, the remarks about the trifles will be weighted with love, so we can tell our smallest affairs to God; and if we have Him for our Pilgrim-Companion, we do not need to lock up any troubles or concerns of any sort, big or little, in our hearts, but may speak them all to our Friend who goes with us. The two may walk together. That is the end of all religion. What are creeds for? What are services and sacraments for? What is theology for? What is Christ's redeeming act for? All culminate in this true, constant fellowship between men and God. And unless, in some measure, that result is arrived at in our cases, our religion, let it be as orthodox as you like, our faith in the redemption of Jesus Christ, let it be as real as you will, our attendances on services and sacraments, let them be as punctilious and regular as may be, are all 'sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.' Get side by side with God; that is the purpose of all these, and fellowship with Him is the climax of all religion.It is also the secret of all blessedness, the only thing that will make a life absolutely sovereign over sorrow, and fixedly unperturbed by all tempests, and invulnerable to all 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.' Hold fast by God, and you have an amulet against every evil, and a shield against every foe, and a mighty power that will calm and satisfy your whole being. Nothing else, nothing else will do so. As Augustine said, 'O God! Thou hast made us for Thyself, and in Thyself only are we at rest.' If the Shepherd is with us we will fear no evil.II. Now, a word, in the next place, as to the sadly incomplete reality, in much Christian experience, which contrasts with this possibility.I am afraid that very, very few so-called Christian people habitually feel, as they might do, the depth and blessedness of this communion. And sure I am that only a very small percentage of us have anything like the continuity of companionship which my text suggests as possible. There may be, and therefore there should be, running unbroken through a Christian life one long, bright line of communion with God and happy inspiration from the sense of His presence with us. Is it a line in my life, or is there but a dot here, and a dot there, and long breaks between? The long, embarrassed pauses in a conversation between two who do not know much of, or care much for, each other are only too like what occurs in many professing Christians' intercourse with God. Their communion is like those time-worn inscriptions that archaeologists dig up, with a word clearly cut and then a great gap, and then a letter or two, and then another gap, and then a little bit more legible, and then the stone broken, and all the rest gone. Did you ever read the meteorological reports in the newspapers and observe a record like this, 'Twenty minutes' sunshine out of a possible eight hours'? Do you not think that such a state of affairs is a little like the experience of a great many Christian people in regard to their communion with God? It is broken at the best, and imperfect at the completest, and shallow at the deepest. O, dear brethren! rise to the height of your possibilities, and live as close to God as He lets you live, and nothing will much trouble you.III. And

now, lastly, a word about the simple explanation of the failure to realise this continual presence.'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' Certainly not. Our fathers, in a sterner and more religious age than ours, used to be greatly troubled how to account for a state of Christian experience which they supposed to be due to God's withdrawing of the sense of His presence from His children. Whether there is any such withdrawal or not, I am quite certain that that is not the cause of the interrupted communion between God and the average Christian man.I make all allowance for the ups and downs and changing moods which necessarily affect us in this present life, and I make all allowance, too, for the pressure of imperative duties and distracting cares which interfere with our communion, though, if we were as strong as we might be, they would not wile us away from, but drive us to, our Father in heaven. But when all such allowances have been made, I come back to my text as the explanation of interrupted communion. The two are not agreed; and that is why they are not walking together. The consciousness of God's presence with us is a very delicate thing. It is like a very sensitive thermometer, which will drop when an iceberg is a league off over the sea, and scarcely visible. We do not wish His company, or we are not in harmony with His thoughts, or we are not going His road, and therefore, of course, we part. At bottom there is only one thing that separates a soul from God, and that is sin -- sin of some sort, like tiny grains of dust that get between two polished plates in an engine that ought to move smoothly and closely against each other. The obstruction may be invisible, and yet be powerful enough to cause friction, which hinders the working of the engine and throws everything out of gear. A light cloud that we cannot see may come between us and a star, and we shall only know it is there, because the star is not visibly there. Similarly, many a Christian, quite unconsciously, has something or other in his habits, or in his conduct, or in his affections, which would reveal itself to him, if he would look, as being wrong, because it blots out God. Let us remember that very little divergence will, if the two paths are prolonged far enough, part their other ends by a world. Our way may go off from the ways of the Lord at a very acute angle. There may be scarcely any consciousness of parting company at the beginning. Let the man travel on upon it far enough, and the two will be so far apart that he cannot see God or hear Him speak. Take care of the little divergences which are habitual, for their accumulated results will be complete separation. There must be absolute surrender if there is to be uninterrupted fellowship.Such, then, is the direction in which we are to look for the reasons for our low and broken experiences of communion with God. Oh, dear friends! when we do as we sometimes do, wake with a start, like a child that all at once starts from sleep and finds that its mother is gone -- when we wake with a start to feel that we are alone, then do not let us be afraid to go straight back. Only be sure that we leave behind us the sin that parted us.You remember how Peter signalised himself on the lake, on the occasion of the second miraculous draught of fishes, when he floundered through the water and clasped Christ's feet. He did not say then, 'Depart from Me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' He had said that before on a similar occasion, when he felt his sin less, but now he knew that the best place for the denier was with his head on Christ's bosom. So, if we have parted from our Friend, there should be no time lost ere we go back. May it be true of us that we walk with God, so that at last the great promise may be fulfilled about us, 'that we shall walk with Him in white,' being by His love accounted 'worthy,' and so 'follow' and keep company with, 'the Lamb whithersoever He goeth!'

Chapter 21

SMITTEN IN VAIN

'Come to Beth-el, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: 5. And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings; for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God.6. And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.7. And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered.8. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.9. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens, and your vineyards, and your fig-trees, and your olive-trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.10. I have sent among you the pestilence, after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.11. I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.12. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.13. For, lo, He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The Lord, The God of hosts, is His name.' -- AMOS iv.4-13. The reign of Jeroboam II. was one of brilliant military success and of profound moral degradation. Amos was a simple, hardy shepherd from the southern wilds of Judah, and his prophecies are redolent of his early life, both in their homely imagery and in the wholesome indignation and contempt for the silken-robed vice of Israel. No sterner picture of an utterly rotten social state was ever drawn than this book gives of the luxury, licentiousness, and oppressiveness of the ruling classes. This passage deals rather with the religious declension underlying the moral filth, and sets forth the self-willed idolatry of the people (vs.4, 5), their obstinate resistance to God's merciful chastisement (vs.6-11), and the heavier impending judgment (vs.12, 13). I. Indignant irony flashes in that permission or command to persevere in the calf worship. The seeming command is the strongest prohibition. There can be no worse thing befall a man than that he should be left to go on forwardly in the way of his heart. The real meaning is sufficiently emphasised by that second verb, 'and transgress'. 'Flock to one temple after another, and heap altars with sacrifices which you were never bid to offer, but understand that what you do is not worship, but sin.' That is a smiting sentence to pass upon elaborate ceremonial. The word literally means treason or rebellion, and by it Amos at one blow shatters the whole fabric. Note, too, that the offering of tithes was not called for by Mosaic law, 'every three days' (Revised Version), and that the use of leaven in burnt offerings was prohibited by it, and also that to call for freewill offerings was to turn spontaneousness into something like compulsion, and to bring ostentation into worship. All these characteristics spoiled the apparent religiousness, over and above the initial evil of disobedience, and warrant Amos's crushing

equation, 'Your worship = rebellion.' All are driven home by the last words of verse 5, 'So ye love it.' The reason for all this prodigal ostentatious worship was to please themselves, not to obey God. That tainted everything, and always does. The lessons of this burst of sarcasm are plain. The subtle influence of self creeps in even in worship, and makes it hollow, unreal, and powerless to bless the worshipper. Obedience is better than costly gifts. The beginning and end of all worship, which is not at same time 'transgression' is the submission of tastes, will, and the whole self. Again, men will lavish gifts far more freely in apparent religious service, which is but the worship of their reflected selves, than in true service of God. Again, the purity of willing offerings is marred when they are given in response to a loud call, or, when given, are proclaimed with acclamations. Let us not suppose that all the brunt of Amos's indignation fell only on these old devotees. The principles involved in it have a sharp edge, turned to a great deal which is allowed and fostered among ourselves. II. The blaze of indignation changes in the second part of the passage into wounded tenderness, as the Prophet speaks in the name of God, and recounts the dreary monotony of failure attending all God's loving attempts to arrest Israel's departure by the mercy of judgment. Mark the sad cadence of the fivefold refrain, 'Ye have not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.' The 'unto' implies reaching the object to which we turn, and is not the less forcible but more usual word found in this phrase, which simply means 'towards' and indicates direction, without saying anything as to how far the return has gone. So there may have been partial moments of bethinking themselves, when the chastisement was on Israel; but there had been no thorough 'turning,' which had landed them at the side of God. Many a man turns towards God, who, for lack of resolved perseverance, never so turns as to get to God. The repeated complaint of the inefficacy of chastisements has in it a tone of sorrow and of wonder which does not belong only to the Prophet. If we remember who it was who was 'grieved at the blindness of their heart,' and who 'wondered at their unbelief' we shall not fear to recognise here the attribution of the same emotions to the heart of God. To Amos, famine, drought, blasting, locusts, pestilence, and probably earthquake, were five messengers of God, and Amos was taught by God. If we looked deeper, we should see more clearly. The true view of the relation of all material things and events to God is this which the herdsman of Tekoa proclaimed. These messengers were not 'miracles,' but they were God's messengers all the same. Behind all phenomena stands a personal will, and they are nearer the secret of the universe who see God working in it all, than they who see all forces except the One which is the only true force. 'I give cleanness of teeth. I have withholden the rain. I have smitten. I have sent the pestilence. I have overthrown some of you.' To the Prophet's eye the world is all aflame with a present God. Let no scientific views, important and illuminating as these may be, hide from us the deeper truth, which lies beyond their region. The child who says 'God,' has got nearer the centre than the scientist who says 'Force.' But Amos had another principle, that God sent physical calamities because of moral delinquencies and for moral and religious ends. These disasters were meant to bring Israel back to God, and were at once punishments and reformatory methods. No doubt the connection between sin and material evils was closer under the Old Testament than now. But if we may not argue as Amos did, in reference to such calamities as drought, and failures of harvests, and the like, as these affect communities, we may, at all events, affirm that, in the case of the individual, he is a wise man who regards all outward evil as having a possible bearing on his bettering spiritually. 'If a drought comes, learn to look to your irrigation, and don't cut down your forests so wantonly,' say the wise men nowadays; 'if pestilence breaks out, see to your drainage.' By all means. These things, too, are God's commandments, and we have

no right to interpret the consequences of infraction of physical laws as being meant to punish nations for their breach of moral and religious ones. If we were prophets, we might, but not else. But still, is God so poor that He can have but one purpose in a providence? Every sorrow, of whatever sort, is meant to produce all the good effects which it naturally tends to produce; and since every experience of pain and loss and grief naturally tends to wean us from earth, and to drive us to find in God what earth can never yield, all our sorrows are His messengers to draw us back to Him. Amos' lesson as to the purpose of trials is not antiquated. But he has still another to teach us; namely, the awful power which we have of resisting God's efforts to draw us back. 'Our wills are ours, we know not how,' but alas! it is too often not 'to make them Thine.' This is the true tragedy of the world that God calls, and we do refuse, even as it is the deepest mystery of sinful manhood that God calls and we can refuse. What infinite pathos and grieved love, thrown back upon itself, is in that refrain, 'Ye have not returned unto Me!' How its recurrence speaks of the long-suffering which multiplied means as others failed, and of the divine charity, which 'suffered long, was not soon angry, and hoped all things!' How vividly it gives the impression of the obstinacy that to all effort opposed insensibility, and clung the more closely and insanely to the idolatry which was its crime and its ruin! The very same temper is deep in us all. Israel holds up the mirror in which we may see ourselves. If blows do not break iron, they harden it. A wasted sorrow -- that is, a sorrow which does not drive us to God -- leaves us less impressible than it found us. III. Again the mood changes, and the issue of protracted resistance is prophesied (vs.12, 13). 'Therefore' sums up the instances of refusal to be warned, and presents them as the cause of the coming evil. The higher the dam is piled, the deeper the water that is gathered behind it, and the surer and more destructive the flood when it bursts. Long-delayed judgments are severe in proportion as they are slow. Note the awful vagueness of threatening in that emphatic 'thus,' as if the Prophet had the event before his eyes. There is no need to specify, for there can be but one result from such obstinacy. The 'terror of the Lord' is more moving by reason of the dimness which wraps it. The contact of divine power with human rebellion can only end in one way, and that is too terrible for speech. Conscience can translate 'thus.' The thunder-cloud is all the more dreadful for the vagueness of its outline, where its livid hues melt into formless black. What bolts lurk in its gloom? The certainty of judgment is the basis of a call to repentance, which may avert it. The meeting with God for which Israel is besought to prepare, was, of course, not judgment after death, but the impending destruction of the Northern Kingdom. But Amos's prophetic call is not misapplied when directed to that final day of the Lord. Common-sense teaches preparation for a certain future, and Amos's trumpet-note is deepened and re-echoed by Jesus: 'Be ye ready also, for ... the Son of man cometh.' Note, too, that Israel's peculiar relation to God is the very ground of the certainty of its punishment, and of the appeal for repentance. Just because He is 'thy God,' will He assuredly come to judge, and you may assuredly prepare, by repentance, to meet Him. The conditions of meeting the Judge, and being 'found of Him in peace,' are that we should be 'without spot, and blameless'; and the conditions of being so spotless and uncensurable are, what they were in Amos's day, repentance and trust. Only we have Jesus as the brightness of the Father's glory to trust in, and His all-sufficient work to trust to, for pardon and purifying. The magnificent proclamation of the name of the Lord which closes the passage, is meant as at once a guarantee of His judgment and an enforcement of the call to be ready to meet Him. He in creation forms the solid, changeless mountains and the viewless, passing wind. The most stable and the most mobile are His work. He reads men's hearts, and can tell them their thoughts afar off. He is the Author of

all changes, both in the physical and the moral world, bringing the daily wonder of sunrise and the nightly shroud of darkness, and with like alternation blending joy and sorrow in men's lives. He treads 'on the high places of the earth,' making all created elevations the path of His feet, and crushing down whatever exalts itself. Thus, in creation almighty, in knowledge omniscient, in providence changing all things and Himself the same, subjugating all, and levelling a path for His purposes across every opposition, He manifests His name, as the living, eternal Jehovah, the God of the Covenant, and therefore of judgment on its breakers, and as the Commander and God of the embattled forces of the universe. Is this a God whose coming to judge is to be lightly dealt with? Is not this a God whom it is wise for us to be ready to meet?

Chapter 22

THE SINS OF SOCIETY

'For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me, and ye shall live: 5. But seek not Beth-el, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beer-sheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nought.6. Seek the Lord, and ye shall live; lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el.7. Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, 8. Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The Lord is His name: 9. That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress.10. They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.11. Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them.12. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right 13. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time.14. Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken.15. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.' -- AMOS v.4-15. The reign of Jeroboam II, in which Amos prophesied, was a period of great prosperity and of great corruption. Amos, born in the Southern Kingdom, and accustomed to the simple life of a shepherd, blazed up in indignation at the signs of misused wealth and selfish luxury that he saw everywhere, in what was to him almost a foreign country. If one fancies a godly Scottish Highlander sent to the West end of London, or a Bible-reading New England farmer's man sent to New York's 'upper ten,' one will have some notion of this prophet, the impressions made, and the task laid on him. He has a message to our state of society which, in many particulars, resembles that which he had to rebuke. There seems to be a slight dislocation in the order of the verses of the passage, for verse 7 comes in awkwardly, breaking the connection between verses 6 and 8, and itself cut off from verse 10, to which it belongs. If we remove the intruding verse to a position after verse 9, the whole passage is orderly and falls into three coherent parts: an exhortation to seek Jehovah, enforced by various considerations (vs.4-9); a vehement denunciation of social vices (vs.7, 10-13); and a renewed exhortation to seek God by doing right to man (vs.14, 15). Amos's first call to Israel is but the echo of God's to men, always and everywhere. All circumstances, all inward experiences, joy and sorrow, prosperity and disaster, our longings and our fears, they all cry aloud to us to seek His face. That loving invitation is ever sounding in our ears. And the promise which Amos gave, though it may have meant on his lips the continuance of national life only, yet had, even on his lips, a deeper meaning, which we now cannot but hear in it. For, just as to 'seek the Lord' means more to us than it did to Israel, so the consequent life has greatened, widened, deepened into life eternal. But Amos's narrower, more external promise is true still, and there is no surer way of promoting true well-being than seeking God. 'With Thee is the fountain of life,' in all senses of the word, from the lowest purely physical to

the highest, and it is only they who go thither to draw that will carry away their pitchers full of the sparkling blessing. The fundamental principle of Amos's teaching is an eternal truth, that to seek God is to find Him, and to find Him is life. But Amos further teaches us that such seeking is not real nor able to find, unless it is accompanied with turning away from all sinful quests after vanities. We must give up seeking Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba, seats of the calf worship, if we are to seek God to purpose. The sin of the Northern Kingdom was that it wanted to worship Jehovah under the symbol of the calves, thus trying to unite two discrepant things. And is not a great deal of our Christianity of much the same quality? Too many of us are doing just what Elijah told the crowds on Carmel that they were doing, trying to 'shuffle along on both knees.' We would seek God, but we would like to have an occasional visit to Bethel. It cannot be done. There must be detachment, if there is to be any real attachment. And the certain transiency of all creatural objects is a good reason for not fastening ourselves to them, lest we should share their fate. 'Gilgal shall go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought,' therefore let us join ourselves to the Eternal Love and we shall abide, as it abides, for ever. The exhortation is next enforced by presenting the consequences of neglecting it. To seek Him is life, not to seek Him incurs the danger of finding Him in unwelcome ways. That is for ever true. We do not get away from God by forgetting Him, but we run the risk of finding in Him, not the fire which vitalises, purifies, melts, and gladdens, but that which consumes. The fire is one, but its effects are twofold. God is for us either that fire into which it is blessedness to be baptized, or that by which it is death to be burned up. And what can Bethel, or calves, or all the world do to quench it or pluck us out of it? Once more the exhortation is urged, if we link verse 8 with verse 6, and supply 'Seek ye' at its beginning. Here the enforcement is drawn from the considerations of God's workings in nature and history. The shepherd from Tekoa had often gazed up at the silent splendours of the Pleiades and Orion, as he kept watch over his flocks by night, and had seen the thick darkness on the wide uplands thinning away as the morning stole op over the mountains across the Dead Sea, and the day dying as he gathered his sheep together. He had cowered under the torrential rains which swept across his exposed homeland, and had heard God's voice summoning the obedient waters of the sea, that He might pour them down in rain. But the moral government of the world also calls on men to seek Jehovah. 'He causeth destruction to flash forth on the strong, so that destruction cometh upon the fortress.' High things attract the lightning. Godless strength is sure, sooner or later, to be smitten down, and no fortress is so impregnable that He cannot capture and overthrow it. Surely wisdom bids us seek Him that does all these wonders, and make Him our defence and our high tower. The second part gives a vivid picture of the vices characteristic of a prosperous state of society which is godless, and therefore selfishly luxurious. First, civil justice is corrupted, turned into bitterness, and prostrated to the ground. Then bold denouncers of national sins are violently hated. Do we not know that phase of an ungodly and rich society? What do the newspapers say about Christians who try to be social reformers? Are the epithets flung at them liker bouquets or rotten eggs? 'Fanatics and faddists' are the mildest of them. Then the poor are trodden down and have to give large parts of their scanty harvests to the rich. Have capital and labour just proportions of their joint earnings? Would a sermon on verse 11 be welcome in the suburbs of industrial centres, where the employers have their 'houses of hewn stone'? Such houses, side by side with the poor men's huts, struck the eye of the shepherd from Tekoa as the height of sinful luxury, and still more sinful disproportion in the social condition of the two classes. What would he have said if he had lived in England or America? Justice, too, was bought and sold. A murderer could buy himself off, while

the poor man, who could not pay, lost his case. We do not bribe juries, but (legal) justice is an expensive luxury still, and counsel's fees put it out of the reach of poor men. One of the worst features of such a state of society as Amos saw is that men are afraid to speak out in condemnation of it, and the ill weeds grow apace for want of a scythe. Amos puts a certain sad emphasis on 'prudent,' as if he was feeling how little he could be called so, and yet there is a touch of scorn in him too. The man who is over-careful of his skin or his reputation will hold his tongue; even good men may become so accustomed to the glaring corruptions of society in the midst of which they have always lived, that they do not feel any call to rebuke or wage war against them; but the brave man, the man who takes his ideals from Christ, and judges society by its conformity with Christ's standard, will not keep silence, and the more he feels that 'It is an evil time' the more will he feel that he cannot but speak out, whatever comes of his protest. What masquerades as prudence is very often sinful cowardice, and such silence is treason against Christ. The third part repeats the exhortation to 'seek,' with a notable difference. It is now 'good' that is to be sought, and 'evil' that is to be turned from. These correspond respectively to 'Jehovah,' and 'Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba,' in former verses. That is to say, morality is the garb of religion, and religion is the only true source of morality. If we are not seeking the things that are lovely and of good report, our professions of seeking God are false; and we shall never earnestly and successfully seek good and hate evil unless we have begun by seeking and finding God, and holding Him in our heart of hearts. Modern social reformers, who fancy that they can sweeten society without religion, might do worse than go to school to Amos. Notable, too, is the lowered tone of confidence in the beneficial result of obeying the Prophet's call. In the earlier exhortation the promise had been absolute. 'Seek ye Me, and ye shall live'; now it has cooled to 'it may be.' Is Amos faltering? No; but while it is always true that blessed life is found by the seeker after God, because He finds the very source of life, it is not always true that the consequences of past turnings from Him are diverted by repentance. 'It may be' that these have to be endured, but even they become tokens of Jehovah's graciousness, and the purified 'remnant of Joseph' will possess the true life more abundantly because they have been exercised thereby.

Chapter 23

THE CARCASS AND THE EAGLES

'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came! 2. Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border? 3. Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; 4. That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; 5. That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; 6. That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.7. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.8. The Lord God hath sworn by Himself, saith the Lord the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.' -- AMOS vi.1-8. Amos prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. Jeroboam's reign was a time of great prosperity for Israel. Moab, Gilead, and part of Syria were reconquered, and the usual effects of conquest, increased luxury and vainglory, followed. Amos was not an Israelite born, for he came from Tekoa, away down south, in the wild country west of the Dead Sea, where he had been a simple herdsman till the divine call sent him into the midst of the corrupt civilisation of the Northern Kingdom. The first words of his prophecy give its whole spirit: 'The Lord will roar from Zion.' The word rendered 'roar' is the term specially used for the terrible cry with which a lion leaps on its surprised prey (Amos iii.4, 8). It is from Zion, the seat of God's Temple, that the 'roar' proceeds, and Amos's prophecy is but the echo of it in Israel. The prophecy of judgment in this passage is directed against the sins of the upper classes in Samaria. They are described in verse 1 as the 'notable men ... to whom the house of Israel come,' which, in modern language, is just 'conspicuous citizens,' who set the fashion, and are looked to as authorities and leaders, whether in political or commercial or social life. The word by which they are designated is used in Numbers i.17: 'Which are expressed by name.' The word 'carried back the thoughts of the degenerate aristocracy of Israel to the faith and zeal of their forefathers' (Pusey, Minor Prophets, on this verse). Israel, Amos calls 'The first of the nations.' It is singular that such a title should be given to the nation against whose corruption his one business is to testify, but probably there is keen irony in the word. It takes Israel at its own estimate, and then goes on to show how rotten, and therefore short-lived, was the prosperity which had swollen national pride to such a pitch. The chiefs of the foremost nation in the world should surely be something better than the heartless debauchees whom the Prophet proceeds to paint. Anglo-Saxons on both sides of the Atlantic, who are by no means deficient in this same complacent estimate of their own superiority to all other peoples, may take note. The same thought is prominent in the description of these notables as 'at ease.' They are living in a fool's paradise, shutting their eyes to the thunder-clouds that begin to rise slowly above the horizon, and keeping each other in countenance in laughing at Amos and his gloomy forecasts. They 'trusted in the mountain of Samaria,' which, they thought, made the city impregnable to assault. No doubt they thought that the Prophet's talk about doing right and trusting

in Jehovah was very fanatical and unpractical, just as many in England and America think that their nations are exalted, not by righteousness, but by armies, navies, and dollars or sovereigns. Verse 2 is very obscure to us from our ignorance of the facts underlying its allusions. In fact, it has been explained in exactly opposite ways, being taken by some to enumerate three instances of prosperous communities, which yet are not more prosperous than Israel, and by others to enumerate three instances of God's judgments falling on places which, though strong, had been conquered. In the former explanation, God's favour to Israel is made the ground of an implied appeal to their gratitude; in the latter, His judgments on other nations are made the ground of an appeal to their fear, lest like destruction should fall on them. But the main points of the passage are the photograph of the crimes which are bringing the judgment of God, and the solemn divine oath to inflict the judgment. The crimes rebuked are not the false worship of the calves, though in other parts of his prophecy Amos lashes that with terrible invectives, nor foul breaches of morality, though these were not wanting in Israel, but the vices peculiar to selfish, luxurious upper classes in all times and countries, who forget the obligations of wealth, and think only of its possibilities of self-indulgence. French noblesse before the Revolution, and English peers and commercial magnates, and American millionaires, would yield examples of the same sin. The hardy shepherd from Tekoa had learned 'plain living and high thinking' before he was a prophet, and would look with wondering and disgusted eyes at the wicked waste which he saw in Samaria. He begins with scourging the reckless security already referred to. These notables in Israel were 'at ease' because they 'put far away the evil day,' by refusing to believe that it was at hand, and paying no heed to prophets' warnings, as their fellows do still and always, and as we all are tempted to do. They who see and declare the certain end of national or personal sins are usually jeered at as pessimists, fanatics, alarmists, bad patriots, or personal ill-wishers, and the men whom they try to warn fancy that they hinder the coming of a day of retribution by disbelieving in its coming. Incredulity is no lightning-conductor to keep off the flash, and, listened to or not, the low growls of the thunder are coming nearer. With one hand these sinners tried to push away the evil day, while with the other they drew near to themselves that which made its coming certain -- 'the seat of violence,' or, rather, 'the sitting,' or 'session.' Violence, or wrongdoing, is enthroned by them, and where men enthrone iniquity, God's day of vengeance is not far off. Then follows a graphic picture of the senseless, corrupting luxury of the Samaritan magnates, on which the Tekoan shepherd pours his scorn, but which is simplicity itself, and almost asceticism, before what he would see if he came to London or New York. To him it seemed effeminate to loll on a divan at meals, and possibly it was a custom imported from abroad. It is noted that 'the older custom in Israel was to sit while eating.' The woodwork of the divans, inlaid with ivory, had caught his eye in some of his peeps into the great houses, and he inveighs against them very much as one of the Pilgrim Fathers might do if he could see the furniture in the drawing-rooms of some of his descendants. There is no harm in pretty things, but the aesthetic craze does sometimes indicate and increase selfish heartlessness as to the poverty and misery, which have not only no ivory on their divans, but no divans at all. Thus stretched in unmanly indolence on their cushions, they feast on delicacies. 'Lambs out of the flock' and 'calves out of the stall' seem to mean animals too young to be used as food. These gourmands, like their successors, prided themselves on having dainties out of season, because they were more costly then. And their feasts had the adornment of music, which the shepherd, who knew only the pastoral pipe that gathered his sheep, refers to with contempt. He uses a very rare word of uncertain meaning, which is probably best rendered in

some such way as the Revised Version does: 'They sing idle songs.' To him their elaborate performances seemed like empty babble. Worse than that, they 'devise musical instruments like David.' But how unlike him in the use they make of art! What a descent from the praises of God to the 'idle songs' fit for the hot dining-halls and the guests there! Amos was indignant at the profanation of art, and thought it best used in the service of God. What would he have said if he had been 'fastened into a front-row box' and treated to a modern opera? The revellers 'drink wine in bowls' by which larger vessels than generally employed are intended. They drank to excess, or as we might say, by bucketfuls. So the dainty feast, with its artistic refinement and music, ends at last in a brutal carouse, and the heads anointed with the most costly unguents drop in drunken slumber. A similar picture of Samaritan manners is drawn by Isaiah (chap. xxviii.), and obviously drunkenness was one of the besetting sins of the capital. But the darkest hue in the dark picture has yet to be added: 'They are not grieved for the affliction (literally, the 'breach' or 'wound') of Joseph.' The tribe of Ephraim, Joseph's son, being the principal tribe of the Northern Kingdom, Joseph is often employed as a synonym for Israel. All these pieces of luxury, corrupting and effeminate as they are, might be permitted, but heartless indifference to the miseries groaning at the door of the banqueting-hall goes with them. 'The classes' are indifferent to the condition of 'the masses.' Put Amos into modern English, and he is denouncing the heartlessness of wealth, refinement, art, and culture, which has no ear for the complaining of the poor, and no eyes to see either the sorrows and sins around it, or the lowering cloud that is ready to burst in tempest. The inevitable issue is certain, because of the very nature of God. It is outlined with keen irony. Amos sees in imagination the long procession of sad captives, and marching in the front ranks, the self-indulgent Sybarites, whose pre-eminence is now only the melancholy prerogative of going first in the fettered train. What has become of their revelry? It is gone, like the imaginary banquets of dreams, and instead of luxurious lolling on silken couches, there is the weary tramp of the captive exiles. Such result must be, since God is what He is. He has sworn 'by Himself'; His being and character are the pledge that it will be so as Amos has declared. How can such a God as He is do otherwise than hate the pride of such a selfish, heartless, God-forgetting aristocracy? How can He do otherwise than deliver up the city? God has not changed, and though His mills grind slowly, they do grind still; and it is as true for England and America, as it was for Samaria, that a wealthy and leisurely upper class, which cares only for material luxury glossed over by art, which has condescended to be its servant, is bringing near the evil day which it hugs itself into believing will never come.

Chapter 24

RIPE FOR GATHERING

'Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit.2. And He said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon My people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more.3. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.4. Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail.5. Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? 6. That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? 7. The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.8. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt.9. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: 10. And I w ill turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.11. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: 12. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.13. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.14. They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy God, O Dan, liveth: and, The manner of Beer-sheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again.' -- AMOS viii.1-14. There are three visions in the former chapter, each beginning as verse 1. This one is therefore intended to be taken as the continuation of these, and it is in substance a repetition of the third, only with more detail and emphasis. An insolent attempt, by the priest of Beth-el, to silence the Prophet, and the fiery answer which he got for his pains, come between. The stream of Amos's prophecy flows on, uninterrupted by the boulder which had tried to dam it up. Some courage was needed to treat Amaziah and his blasphemous bluster as a mere parenthesis. We have first to note the vision and its interpretation. It is such as a countryman, 'a dresser of sycamore trees' would naturally have. Experience supplies forms and material for the imagination, and moulds into which God-given revelations run. The point of the vision is rather obscured by the rendering 'summer fruit.' 'Ripe fruit' would be better, since the emblem represents the Northern Kingdom as ripe for the dreadful ingathering of judgment. The word for this (qayits) and that for 'the end' (qets) are alike in sound, but the play of words cannot be reproduced, except by some clumsy device, such as 'the end ripens' or 'the time of ripeness comes.' The figure is frequent in other prophecies of judgment, as, for instance, in Revelation xiv.14-20. Observe the repetition, from the preceding vision, of 'I will not pass by them any more.' The first two visions had threatened judgments, which had been averted by the Prophet's intercession; but the third, and now the fourth, declare that the time for prolonged impunity is passed. Just as the mellow ripeness of the fruit fixes the time of gathering it, so there comes a stage in national and individual

corruption, when there is nothing to be done but to smite. That period is not reached because God changes, but because men get deeper in sin. Because 'the harvest is ripe,' the long-delayed command, 'Put in thy sickle' is given to the angel of judgment, and the clusters of those black grapes, whose juice in the wine-press of the wrath of God is blood, are cut down and cast in. It is a solemn lesson, applying to each soul as well as to communities. By neglect of God's voice, and persistence in our own evil ways, we can make ourselves such that we are ripe for judgment, and can compel long-suffering to strike. Which are we ripening for -- the harvest when the wheat shall be gathered into Christ's barns, or that when the tares shall be bound in bundles for burning? The tragedy of that fruit-gathering is described with extraordinary grimness and force in the abrupt language of verse 3. The merry songs sung in the palace (this rendering seems more appropriate here than 'temple') will be broken off, and the singers' voices will quaver into shrill shrieks, so suddenly will the judgment be. Then comes a picture as abrupt in its condensed terribleness as anything in Tacitus -- 'Many the corpses; everywhere they fling them; hush!' We see the ghastly masses of dead ('corpse' is in the singular, as if a collective noun), so numerous that no burial-places could hold them; and no ceremonial attended them, but they were rudely flung anywhere by anybody (no nominative is given), with no accustomed voice of mourning, but in gloomy silence. It is like Defoe's picture of the dead-cart in the plague of London. Such is ever the end of departing from God -- songs palsied into silence or turned into wailing when the judgment bursts; death stalking supreme, and silence brooding over all. The crimes that ripened men for this terrible harvest are next set forth, in part, in verses 4 to 6. These verses partly coincide verbally with the previous indictment in Amos ii.6, etc., which, however, is more comprehensive. Here only one form of sin is dealt with. And what was the sin that deserved the bad eminence of being thus selected as the chief sign that Israel was ripe and rotten? Precisely the one which gets most indulgence in the Christian Church; namely, eagerness to be rich, and sharp, unkindly dealing. These men, who were only fit to be swept out of the land, were most punctual in their religious duties. They would not on any account do business either on a festival or on Sabbath, but they were very impatient till -- shall we say? Monday morning came -- that they might get to their beloved work again. Their lineal descendants are no strangers on the exchanges, or in the churches of London or New York. They were not only outwardly scrupulous and inwardly weary of religious observances, but when they did get to 'business,' they gave short measure and took a long price, and knew how to turn the scales always in their own favour. It was the expedient of rude beginners in the sacred art of getting the best of a bargain, to put a false bottom in the ephah, and to stick a piece of lead below the shekel weight, which the purchaser had to make go up in the scale with his silver. There are much neater ways of doing the same thing now; and no doubt some very estimable gentlemen in high repute as Christians, who give respectability to any church or denomination, could have taught these early practitioners a lesson or two. They were as cruel as they were greedy. They bought their brethren as slaves, and if a poor man had run into their debt for even a pair of shoes, they would sell him up in a very literal sense. Avarice, unbridled by the fear of God, leads by a short cut to harshness and disregard of the claims of others. There are more ways of buying the needy for a pair of shoes than these people practised. The last touch in the picture is meanness, which turned everything into money. Even what fell through the sieve when wheat was winnowed, which ought to have been given to anybody, was carefully scraped up, and, dirty as it was, sold. Is not 'nothing for nothing' an approved maxim to-day? Are not people held up as shining lights of commerce, who have the faculty of turning everything into

saleable articles? Some serious reflections ought to be driven home to us who live in great commercial communities, and are in manifold ways tempted to 'learn their ways, and so get a snare unto our souls,' by this gibbeting of tempers and customs, very common among ourselves, as the very head and front of the sin of Israel, which determined its ripeness for destruction. The catalogue of sins is left incomplete (compare with chapter ii.), as if holy indignation turned for relief to the thought of the certain judgment. That certainly is strongly affirmed by the representation of the oath of Jehovah. 'He can swear by no other,' therefore He 'swears by Himself'; and the 'excellency of Jacob' cannot with propriety mean anything else than Him who is, or ought to be, the sole ground of confidence and occasion of 'boasting' to the nation (Hos. v.5). He gives His own being as the guarantee that judgment shall fall. As surely as God is God, injustice and avarice will ruin a nation. We talk now about necessary consequences and natural laws rendering penalties inevitable. The Bible suggests a deeper foundation for their certain incidence -- even the very nature of God Himself. As long as He is what He is, covetousness and its child, harshness to the needy, will be sin against Him, and be avenged sooner or later. God has a long and a wide memory, and the sins which He 'remembers' are those which He has not forgiven, and will punish. Amos heaps image on image to deepen the impression of terror and confusion. Everything is turned to its opposite. The solid land reels, rises, and falls, like the Nile in flood (see Revised Version). The sun sets at midday, and noon is darkness. Feasts change to mourning, songs to lamentations. Rich garments are put aside for sackcloth, and flowing locks drop off and leave bald heads. These are evidently all figures vividly piled together to express the same thought. The crash that destroyed their national prosperity and existence would shake the most solid things and darken the brightest. It would come suddenly, as if the sun plunged from the zenith to the west. It would make joy a stranger, and bring grief as bitter as when a father or a mother mourns the death of an only son. Besides all this, something darker beyond is dimly hinted in that awful, vague, final threat, 'The end thereof as a bitter day.' Now all these threats were fulfilled in the fall of the kingdom of Israel; but that 'day of the Lord' was in principle a miniature foreshadowing of the great final judgment. Some of the very features of the description here are repeated with reference to it in the New Testament. We cannot treat such prophecies as this as if they were exhausted by their historical fulfilment. They disclose the eternal course of divine judgment, which is to culminate in a future day of judgment. The oath of God is not yet completely fulfilled. Assuredly as He lives and is God, so surely will modern sinners have to stand their trial; and, as of old, the chase after riches will bring down crashing ruin. We need that vision of judgment as much as Samaria did when Amos saw the basket of ripe fruit, craving, as it were, to be plucked. So do obstinate sinners invite destruction.The last section specifies one feature of judgment, the deprivation of the despised word of the Lord (vs.11-14). Like Saul, whose piteous wail in the witch's hovel was, 'God ... answereth me no more,' they who paid no heed to the word of the Lord shall one day seek far and wearily for a prophet, and seek in vain. The word rendered 'wander,' which is used in the other description of people seeking for water in a literal drought (iv.8), means 'reel,' and gives the picture of men faint and dizzy with thirst, yet staggering on in vain quest for a spring. They seek everywhere, from the Dead Sea on the east to the Mediterranean on the west, and then up to the north, and so round again to the starting-point. Is it because Judah was south that that quarter is not visited? Perhaps, if they had gone where the Temple was, they would have found the stream from under its threshold, which a later prophet saw going forth to heal the marshes and dry places. Why was the search vain? Has not God promised to be found of those that seek, however far they

have gone away? The last verse tells why. They still were idolaters, swearing by the 'sin of Samaria,' which is the calf of Beth-el, and by the other at Dan, and going on idolatrous pilgrimages to Beer-sheba, far away in the south, across the whole kingdom of Judah (Amos v.5). It was vain to seek for the word of the Lord with such doings and worship.The truth implied is universal in its application. God's message neglected is withdrawn. Conscience stops if continually unheeded. The Gospel may still sound in a man's ears, but have long ceased to reach farther. There comes a time when men shall wish wasted opportunities back, and find that they can no more return than last summer's heat. There may be a wish for the prophet in time of distress, which means no real desire for God's word, but only for relief from calamity. There may be a sort of seeking for the word, which seeks in the wrong places and in the wrong ways, and without abandoning sins. Such quest is vain. But if, driven by need and sorrow, a poor soul, feeling the thirst after the living God, cries from ever so distant a land of bondage, the cry will be answered. But let us not forget that our Lord has told us to take heed how we hear, on the very ground that 'to him that hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away.'* * * * *

Chapter 25

GUILTY SILENCE AND ITS REWARD

Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great, city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.3. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.4. But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.5. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.6. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.7. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.8. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? 9. And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.10. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.11. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.12. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.13. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.14. Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased Thee.15. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from her raging.16. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.17. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.' -- JONAH i.1-17.Jonah was apparently an older contemporary of Hosea and Amos. The Assyrian power was looming threateningly on the northern horizon, and a flash or two had already broken from that cloud. No doubt terror had wrought hate and intenser narrowness. To correct these by teaching, by an instance drawn from Assyria itself, God's care for the Gentiles and their susceptibility to His voice, was the purpose of Jonah's mission. He is a prophet of Israel, because the lesson of his history was for them, though his message was for Nineveh. He first taught by example the truth which Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue of Nazareth, and Peter learned on the housetop at Joppa, and Paul took as his guiding star. A truth so unwelcome and remote from popular belief needed emphasis when first proclaimed; and this singular story, as it were, underlines it for the generation which heard it first. Its place would rather have been among the narratives than the prophets, except for this aspect of it. So regarded, Jonah becomes a kind of representative of Israel; and his history sets forth large lessons as to its function among the nations, its

unwillingness to discharge it, the consequences of disobedience, and the means of return to a better mind.Note then, first, the Prophet's unwelcome charge. There seems no sufficient reason for doubting the historical reality of Jonah's mission to Nineveh; for we know that intercourse was not infrequent, and the silence of other records is, in their fragmentary condition, nothing wonderful. But the fact that a prophet of Israel was sent to a heathen city, and that not to denounce destruction except as a means of winning to repentance, declared emphatically God's care for the world, and rebuked the exclusiveness which claimed Him for Israel alone. The same spirit haunts the Christian Church, and we have all need to ponder the opposite truth, till our sympathies are widened to the width of God's universal love, and we discern that we are bound to care for all men, since He does so.Jonah sullenly resolved not to obey God's voice. What a glimpse into the prophetic office that gives us! The divine Spirit could be resisted, and the Prophet was no mere machine, but a living man who had to consent with his devoted will to bear the burden of the Lord. One refused, and his refusal teaches us how superb and self-sacrificing was the faithfulness of the rest. So we have each to do in regard to God's message intrusted to us. We must bow our wills, and sink our prejudices, and sacrifice our tastes, and say, 'Here am I; send me.' Jonah represents the national feelings which he shared. Why did he refuse to go to Nineveh? Not because he was afraid of his life, or thought the task hopeless. He refused because he feared success. God's goodness was being stretched rather too far, if it was going to take in Nineveh. Jonah did not want it to escape. If he had been sent to destroy it, he would probably have gone gladly. He grudged that heathen should share Israel's privileges, and probably thought that gain to Nineveh would be loss to Israel. It was exactly the spirit of the prodigal's elder brother. There was also working in him the concern for his own reputation, which would be damaged if the threats he uttered turned out to be thunder without lightning, by reason of the repentance of Nineveh.Israel was set among the nations, not as a dark lantern, but as the great lampstand in the Temple court proclaimed, to ray out light to all the world. Jonah's mission was but a concrete instance of Israel's charge. The nation was as reluctant to fulfil the reason of its existence as the Prophet was. Both begrudged sharing privileges with heathen dogs, both thought God's care wasted, and neither had such feelings towards the rest of the world as to be willing to be messengers of forgiveness to them. All sorts of religious exclusiveness, contemptuous estimates of other nations, and that bastard patriotism which would keep national blessings for our own country alone, are condemned by this story. In it dawns the first faint light of that sun which shone at its full when Jesus healed the Canaanite's daughter, or when He said, 'Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.'Note, next, the fatal consequences of refusal to obey the God-given charge. We need not suppose that Jonah thought that he could actually get away from God's presence. Possibly he believed in a special presence of God in the land of Israel, or, more probably, the phrase means to escape from service. At any rate, he determined to do his flight thoroughly. Tarshish was, to a Hebrew, at the other end of the world from Nineveh. The Jews were no sailors, and the choice of the sea as means of escape indicates the obstinacy of determination in Jonah.The storm is described with a profusion of unusual words, all apparently technical terms, picked up on board, just as Luke, in the only other account of a storm in Scripture, has done. What a difference between the two voyages! In the one, the unfaithful prophet is the cause of disaster, and the only sluggard in the ship. In the other, the Apostle, who has hazarded his life to proclaim his Lord, is the source of hope, courage, vigour, and safety. Such are the consequences of silence and of brave speech for God. No wonder that the fugitive Prophet slunk down into some dark corner, and sat bitterly brooding there,

self-accused and condemned, till weariness and the relief of the tension of his journey lulled him to sleep. It was a stupid and heavy sleep. Alas for those whose only refuge from conscience is oblivion!Over against this picture of the insensible Prophet, all unaware of the storm (which may suggest the parallel insensibility of Israel to the impending divine judgments), is set the behaviour of the heathen sailors, or 'salts,' as the story calls them. Their conduct is part of the lesson of the book; for, heathen as they are, they have yet a sense of dependence, and they pray; they are full of courage, battling with the storm, jettisoning the cargo, and doing everything possible to save the ship. Their treatment of Jonah is generous and chivalrous. Even when they hear his crime, and know that the storm is howling like a wild beast for him, they are unwilling to throw him overboard without one more effort; and when at last they do it, their prayer is for forgiveness, inasmuch as they are but carrying out the will of Jehovah. They are so much touched by the whole incident that they offer sacrifices to the God of the Hebrews, and are, in some sense, and possibly but for a time, worshippers of Him.All this holds the mirror up to Israel, by showing how much of human kindness and generosity, and how much of susceptibility for the truth which Israel had to declare, lay in rude hearts beyond its pale. This crew of heathen of various nationalities and religions were yet men who could be kind to a renegade Prophet, peril their lives to save his, and worship Jehovah. 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,' is the same lesson in another form. We may find abundant opportunities for learning it; for the characters of godless men, and of some among the heathen, may well shame many a Christian.Jonah's conduct in the storm is no less noble than his former conduct had been base. The burst of the tempest blew away all the fog from his mind, and he saw the stars again. His confession of faith; his calm conviction that he was the cause of the storm; his quiet, unhesitating command to throw him into the wild chaos foaming about the ship; his willing acceptance of death as the wages of his sin, all tell how true a saint he was in the depth of his soul. Sorrow and chastisement turn up the subsoil. If a man has any good in him, it generally comes to the top when he is afflicted and looks death in the face. If there is nothing but gravel beneath, it too will be brought up by the plough. There may be much selfish unfaithfulness overlying a real devoted heart. Jonah represented Israel here too, both in that the consequence of the national unfaithfulness and greedy, exclusive grasp of their privileges would lead to their being cast into the roaring waves of the sea of nations, amid the tumult of the peoples, and in that, for them as for him, the calamity would bring about a better mind, the confession of their faith, and acknowledgment of their sin. The history of Israel was typified in this history, and the lessons it teaches are lessons for all churches, and for all God's children for all time. If we shirk our duty of witnessing for Him, or any other of His plain commands, unfaithfulness will be our ruin. The storm is sure to break where His Jonahs try to hide, and their only hope lies in bowing to the chastisement and consenting to be punished, and avowing whose they are and whom they serve. If we own Him while the storm whistles round us, the worst of it is past, and though we have to struggle amid its waves, He will take care of us, and anything is possible rather than that we should be lost in them.The miracle of rescue is the last point. Jonah's repentance saved his life. Tossed overboard impenitent he would have been drowned. So Israel was taught that the break-up of their national life would not be their destruction if they turned to the Lord in their calamity. The wider lesson of the means of making chastisement into blessing, and securing a way of escape -- namely, by owning the justice of the stroke, and returning to duty -- is meant for us all. He who sends the storm watches its effect on us, and will not let His repentant servants be utterly overwhelmed. That is a better use to make of the story than to discuss whether any kind of known

Mediterranean fish could swallow a man. If we believe in miracles, the question need not trouble us. And miracle there must be, not only in the coincidence of the fish and the Prophet being in the same bit of sea at the same moment, but in his living for so long in his strange 'ark of safety.'The ever-present providence of God, the possible safety of the nation, even when in captivity, the preservation of every servant of God who turns to the Lord in his chastisement, the exhibition of penitence as the way of deliverance, are the purposes for which the miracle was wrought and told. Flippant sarcasms are cheap. A devout insight yields a worthy meaning. Jesus Christ employed this incident as a symbol of His Death and Resurrection. That use of it seems hard to reconcile with any view but that the story is true. But it does not seem necessary to suppose that our Lord regarded it as an intended type, or to seek to find in Jonah's history further typical prophecy of Him. The salient point of comparison is simply the three days' entombment; and it is rather an illustrative analogy than an intentional prophecy. The subsequent action of the Prophet in Nineveh, and the effect of it, were true types of the preaching of the Gospel by the risen Lord, through His servants, to the Gentiles, and of their hearing the Word. But it requires considerable violence in manipulation to force the bestowing of Jonah, for safety and escape from death, in the fish's maw, into a proper prophecy of the transcendent fact of the Resurrection.

Chapter 26

'LYING VANITIES'

'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.' -- JONAH 11.8. Jonah's refusal to obey the divine command to go to Nineveh and cry against it is best taken, not as prosaic history, but as a poetical representation of Israel's failure to obey the divine call of witnessing for God. In like manner, his being cast into the sea and swallowed by the great fish, is a poetic reproduction, for homiletical purposes, of Israel's sufferings at the hands of the heathen whom it had failed to warn. The song which is put into Jonah's mouth when in the fish's belly, of which our text is a fragment, represents the result on the part of the nation of these hard experiences. 'Lying vanities' mean idols, and 'their own mercy' means God. The text is a brief, pregnant utterance of the great truth which had been forced home to Israel by sufferings and exile, that to turn from Jehovah to false gods was to turn from the sure source of tender care to lies and emptiness. That is but one case of the wider truth that an ungodly life is the acme of stupidity, a tragic mistake, as well as a great sin. In confirmation and enforcement of our text we may consider: -- I. The illusory vanity of the objects pursued. The Old Testament tone of reference to idols is one of bitter contempt. Its rigid monotheism was intensified and embittered by the universal prevalence of idolatry; and there is a certain hardness in its tone in reference to the gods of the nations round about, which has little room for pity, and finds expression in such names as those of our text -- 'vanities,' 'lies,' 'nothingness,' and the like. To the Jew, encompassed on all sides by idol-worshippers, the alternative was vehement indignation or entire surrender. The Mohammedan in British India exhibits much the same attitude to Vishnu and Siva as the Jew did to Baal and Ashtoreth. It is easy to be tolerant of dead gods, but it becomes treason to Jehovah to parley with them when they are alive. But the point which we desire to insist upon here is somewhat wider than the vanity of idols. It is the emptiness of all objects of human pursuit apart from God. These last three words need to be made very prominent; for in itself 'every creature of God is good,' and the emptiness does not inhere in themselves, but first appears when they are set in His place. He, and only He, can, and does, satisfy the whole nature -- is authority for the will, peace for the conscience, love for the heart, light for the understanding, rest for all seeking. He, and He alone, can fill the past with the light in which is no regret, the present with a satisfaction rounded and complete, the future with a hope certain as experience, to which we shall ever approximate, and which we can never exhaust and outgrow. Any, or all, the other objects of human endeavour may be won, and yet we may be miserable. The inadequacy of all these ought to be pressed home upon us more than it is, not only by their limitations whilst they last, but by the transiency of them all. 'The fashion of this world passeth away,' as the Apostle John puts it, in a forcible expression which likens all this frame of things to a panorama being unwound from one roller and on to another. The painted screen is but paint at the best, and is in perpetual motion, which is not arrested by the vain clutches of hands that would fain stop the irresistible and tragic gliding past. These vanities are 'lying vanities.' There is only one aim of life which, being pursued and attained, fulfils the promises by which it drew man after it. It is a bald commonplace, reiterated not only by preachers but by moralists of every kind, and confirmed by universal experience, that a hope fulfilled is a hope disappointed. There is only one thing more tragic than a life which has failed in its aims, and it is a life which has perfectly

succeeded in them, and has found that what promised to be bread turns to ashes. The word of promise may be kept to the ear, but is always broken to the hope. Many a millionaire loses the power to enjoy his millions by the very process by which he gains them. The old Jewish thinker was wise not only in taking as the summing up of all worldly pursuits the sad sentence, 'All is vanity,' but in putting it into the lips of a king who had won all he sought. The sorceress draws us within her charmed circle by lying words and illusory charms, and when she has so secured the captives, her mask is thrown off and her native hideousness displayed. II. The hard service which lying vanities require. The phrase in our text is a quotation, slightly altered, from Psalm xxxi.6: 'I hate them that regard lying vanities; but I trust in the Lord.' The alteration in the form of the verb as it occurs in Jonah expresses the intensity of regard, and gives the picture of watching with anxious solicitude, as the eyes of a servant turned to his master, or those of a dog to its owner. The world is a very hard master, and requires from its servants the concentration of thought, heart, and effort. We need only recall the thousand sermons devoted to the enforcement of 'the gospel of getting on,' which prosperous worldlings are continually preaching. A chorus of voices on every side of us is dinning into the ears of every young man and woman the necessity for success in life's struggle of taking for a motto, 'This one thing I do.' How many a man is there, who in the race after wealth or fame, has flung away aspirations, visions of noble, truthful love to life, and a hundred other precious things? Browning tells a hideous story of a mother flinging, one after another, her infants to the wolves as she urged her sledge over the snowy plain. No less hideous, and still more maiming, are the surrenders that men make when once their hearts have been filled with the foolish ambitions of worldly success. Let us fix it in our minds, that nothing that time and sense can give is worth the price that it exacts. 'It is only heaven that can be had for the asking;

It is only God that is given away.' All sin is slavery. Its yoke presses painfully on the neck, and its burden is heavy indeed, and the rest which it promises never comes. III. The self-inflicted loss.Our text suggests that there are two ways by which we may learn the folly of a godless life -- One, the consideration of what it turns to, the other, the thought of what it departs from.'They forsake their own Mercy,' that is God. The phrase is here almost equivalent to 'His name'; and it carries the blessed thought that He has entered into relations with every soul, so that each man of us -- even if he have turned to 'lying vanities' -- can still call Him, 'my own Mercy.' He is ours; more our own than is anything without us. He is ours, because we are made for Him, and He is all for us. He is ours by His love, and by His gift of Himself in the Son of His love. He is ours; if we take Him for ours by an inward communication of Himself to us in the innermost depths of our being. He becomes 'the Master-Light of all our seeing.' In the mysterious inwardness of mutual possession, the soul which has given itself to God and possesses Him, has not only communion, but may even venture to claim as its own the deeper and more mysterious union with God. Those multiform mercies, 'which endure for ever,' and speed on their manifold errands into every remotest region of His universe, gather themselves together, as the diffused lights of some nebulae concentrate themselves into a sun. That sun, like the star that led the wise men from the East, and finally stood over one poor house in an obscure village, will shine lambent above, and will pass into, the humblest heart that opens for it. They who can say, as we all can if we will, 'My God,' can never want.And if we turn to the alternative in our text, and consider who they are to whom we turn when we turn from God, there should be nothing more needed to drive home the wholesome conviction of the folly of the wisest, who deliberately prefers shadow to substance, lying vanities to the one true and only reality. I beseech you to take that which is your own, and which no man can take

from you. Weigh in the scales of conscience, and in the light of the deepest necessities of your nature, the whole pile of those emptinesses that have been telling you lies ever since you listened to them; and place in the other scale the mercy of God, and the Christ who brings it to you, and decide which is the weightier, and which it becomes you to take for your pattern for ever.

Chapter 27

THREEFOLD REPENTANCE

'And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, 2. Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.3. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.4. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall he overthrown.5. So the people of Ninoveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.6. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.7. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water: 8. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.9. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not? 10. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not.' -- JONAH iii.1-10. This passage falls into three parts: Jonah's renewed commission and new obedience (vs.1-4), the repentance of Nineveh (vs.5-9), and the acceptance thereof by God (ver.10). We might almost call these three the repentance of Jonah, of Nineveh, and of God. The evident intention of the narrative is to parallel the Ninevites turning from their sins, and God's turning from His anger and purpose of destruction; and if the word 'repentance' is not applied to Jonah, his conduct sufficiently shows the thing. I. Note the renewed charge to the penitent Prophet, and his new eagerness to fulfil it. His deliverance and second commission are put as if all but simultaneous, and his obedience was swift and glad. Jonah did not venture to take for granted that the charge which he had shirked was still continued to him. If God commands to take the trumpet, and we refuse, we dare not assume that we shall still be honoured with the delivery of the message. The punishment of dumb lips is often dumbness. Opportunities of service, slothfully or faintheartedly neglected, are often withdrawn. We can fancy how Jonah, brought back to the better mind which breathes in his psalm, longed to be honoured by the trust of preaching once more, and how rapturously his spirit would address itself to the task. Duties once unwelcome become sweet when we have passed through the experience of the misery that comes from neglecting them. It is God's mercy that gives us the opportunity of effacing past disobedience by new alacrity. The second charge is possibly distinguishable from the first as being less precise. It may be that the exact nature of 'the preaching that I bid thee' was not told Jonah till he had to open his mouth in Nineveh; but, more probably, the second charge was identical with the first. The word rendered 'preach' is instructive. It means 'to cry' and suggests the manner befitting those who bear God's message. They should sound it out loudly, plainly, urgently, with earnestness and marks of emotion in their voice. Languid whispers will not wake sleepers. Unless the messenger is manifestly in earnest, the message will fall flat. Not with bated breath, as if ashamed of it; nor with hesitation, as if not quite sure of it; nor with coldness, as if it were of little urgency, -- is God's Word to be pealed in men's ears. The preacher is a crier. The substance of his

message, too, is set forth. 'The preaching which I bid thee' -- not his own imaginations, nor any fine things of his own spinning. Suppose Jonah had entertained the Ninevites with dissertations on the evidences of his prophetic authority, or submitted for their consideration a few thoughts tending to show the agreement of his message with their current opinions in religion, or an argument for the existence of a retributive Governor of the world, he would not have shaken the city. The less the Prophet shows himself, the stronger his influence. The more simply he repeats the stern, plain, short message, the more likely it is to impress. God's Word, faithfully set forth, will prove itself. The preacher or teacher of this day has substantially the same charge as Jonah had; and the more he suppresses himself, and becomes but a voice through which God speaks, the better for himself, his hearers, and his work. Nineveh, that great aggregate of cities, was full, as Eastern cities are, of open spaces, and might well be a three days' journey in circumference. What a task for that solitary stranger to thunder out his loud cry among all these crowds! But he had learned to do what he was bid; and without wasting a moment, he 'began to enter into the city a day's journey,' and, no doubt, did not wait till the end of the day to proclaim his message. Let us learn that there is an element of threatening in God's most merciful message, and that the appeal to terror and to the desire for self-preservation is part of the way to preach the Gospel. Plain warnings of coming evil may be spoken tenderly, and reveal love as truly as the most soothing words. The warning comes in time. 'Forty days' of grace are granted. The gospel warns us in time enough for escape. It warns us because God loves; and they are as untrue messengers of His love as of His justice who slur over the declaration of His wrath. II. Note the repentance of Nineveh (vs.5-9). The impression made by Jonah's terrible cry is perfectly credible and natural in the excitable population of an Eastern city, in which even now any appeal to terror, especially if associated with religious and prophetic claims, easily sets the whole in a frenzy. Think of the grim figure of this foreign man, with his piercing voice and half-intelligible speech, dropped from the clouds as it were, and stalking through Nineveh, pealing out his confident message, like that gaunt fanatic who walked Jerusalem in its last agony, crying, 'Woe! woe unto the bloody city!' or that other, who, with flaming fire on his head and madness in his eyes, affrighted London in the plague. No wonder that alarm was kindled, and, being kindled, spread like wildfire. Apparently the movement was first among the people, who began to fast before the news penetrated to the seclusion of the palace. But the contagion reached the king, and the popular excitement was endorsed and fanned by a royal decree. The specified tokens of repentance are those of ordinary mourning, such as were common all over the East, with only the strange addition, which smacks of heathen ideas, that the animals were made sharers in them. There is great significance in that 'believed God' (ver.5). The foundation of all true repentance is crediting God's word of threatening, and therefore realising the danger, as well as the disobedience, of our sin. We shall be wise if we pass by the human instrument, and hear God speaking through the Prophet. Never mind about Jonah, believe God. We learn from the Ninevites what is true repentance They brought no sacrifices or offerings, but sorrow, self-abasement, and amendment. The characteristic sin of a great military power would be 'violence,' and that is the specific evil from which they vow to turn. The loftiest lesson which prophets found Israel so slow to learn, 'A broken and a contrite heart Thou wilt not despise,' was learned by these heathens. We need it no less. Nineveh repented on a peradventure that their repentance might avail. How pathetic that 'Who can tell?' (ver.9) is! We know what they hoped. Their doubt might give fervour to their cries, but our certainty should give deeper earnestness and confidence to ours. The deepest meaning of the whole narrative is set

forth in our Lord's use of it, when He holds up the men of Nineveh as a condemnatory instance to the hardened consciences of His hearers. Probably the very purpose of the book was to show Israel that the despised and yet dreaded heathen were more susceptible to the voice of God than they were: 'I will provoke you to jealousy by them which are no people.' The story was a smiting blow to the proud exclusiveness and self-complacent contempt of prophetic warnings, which marked the entire history of God's people. As Ezekiel was told: 'Thou are not sent ... to many peoples of a strange speech and of an hard language.... Surely, if I sent thee to them, they would hearken unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee.' It is ever true that long familiarity with the solemn thoughts of God's judgment and punishment of sin abates their impression on us. Our Puritan forefathers used to talk about 'gospel-hardened sinners,' and there are many such among us. The man who lives by Niagara does not hear its roar as a stranger does. The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with other generations than that which was 'this generation' in Christ's time; and that which is 'this generation' to-day will, in many of its members, be condemned by them. But the wave of feeling soon retired, and there is no reason to believe that more than a transient impression was made. It does not seem certain that the Ninevites knew what 'God' they hoped to appease. Probably their pantheon was undisturbed, and their repentance lasted no longer than their fear. Transient repentance leaves the heart harder than before, as half-melted ice freezes again more dense. Let us beware of frost on the back of a thaw. 'Repentance which is repented of' is worse than none. III. We note the repentance of God (ver.10). Mark the recurrence of the word 'turn,' employed in verses 8, 9, and 10 in reference to men and to God. Mark the bold use of the word 'repent,' applied to God, which, though it be not applied to the Ninevites in the previous verses, is implied in every line of them. The same expression is found in Exodus xxxii.14, which may be taken as the classical passage warranting its use. The great truth involved is one that is too often lost sight of in dealing with prophecy; namely, that all God's promises and threatenings are conditional. Jeremiah learned that lesson in the house of the potter, and we need to keep it well in mind. God threatens, precisely in order that He may not have to perform His threatenings. Jonah was sent to Nineveh to cry, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,' in order that it might not be overthrown. What would have been the use of proclaiming the decree, if it had been irreversible? There is an implied 'if' in all God's words. 'Except ye repent' underlies the most absolute threatenings of evil. 'If we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end,' is presupposed in the brightest and broadest promises of good.The word 'repent' is denied and affirmed to have application to God. He is not 'a son of man, that He should repent,' inasmuch as His immutability and steadfast purpose know no variableness. But just because they cannot change, and He must ever be against them that do evil, and ever bless them that turn to Him with trust, therefore He changes His dealings with us according to our relation to Him, and because He cannot repent, or be other than He was and is, 'repents of the evil that He had said that He would do' unto sinners when they repent of the evil that they have done against Him, inasmuch as He leaves His threatening unfulfilled, and 'does it not.'So we might almost say that the purpose of this book of Jonah is to teach the possibility and efficacy of repentance, and to show how the penitent man, heathen or Jew, ever finds in God changed dealings corresponding to his changed heart. The widest charity, the humbling lesson for people brought up in the blaze of revelation, that dwellers in the twilight or in the darkness are dear to God and may be more susceptible of divine impressions than ourselves, the rebuke of all pluming ourselves on our privileges, the boundlessness of God's mercy, are among the other lessons of this strange book;

but none of them is more precious than its truly evangelic teaching of the blessedness of true penitence, whether exemplified in the renegade Prophet returning to his high mission, or the fierce Ninevites humbled and repentant, and finding mercy from the God of the whole earth.* * * * *

Chapter 28

IS THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD STRAITENED?

'O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?' -- MICAH ii.7.The greater part of so-called Christendom is to-day[1] celebrating the gift of a Divine Spirit to the Church; but it may well be asked whether the religious condition of so-called Christendom is not a sad satire upon Pentecost. There seems a woful contrast, very perplexing to faith, between the bright promise at the beginning and the history of the development in the future. How few of those who share in to-day's services have any personal experience of such a gift! How many seem to think that that old story is only the record of a past event, a transient miracle which has no kind of relation to the experience of the Christians of this day! There were a handful of believers in one of the towns of Asia Minor, to whom an Apostle came, and was so startled at their condition that he put to them in wonder the question that might well be put to multitudes of so-called Christians amongst us: 'Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?' And their answer is only too true a transcript of the experience of large masses of people who call themselves Christians: 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.'[1] WhitsundayI desire, then, dear brethren, to avail myself of this day's associations in order to press upon your consciences and upon my own some considerations naturally suggested by them, and which find voice in those two indignant questions of the old Prophet: -- 'Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?' 'Are these' -- the phenomena of existing popular Christianity -- 'are these His doings?' And if we are brought sharp up against the consciousness of a dreadful contrast, it may do us good to ask what is the explanation of so cloudy a day following a morning so bright.I. First, then, I have to ask you to think with me of the promise of the Pentecost.What did it declare and hold forth for the faith of the Church? I need not dwell at any length upon this point. The facts are familiar to you, and the inferences drawn from them are commonplace and known to us all. But let me just enumerate them as briefly as may be.'Suddenly there came a sound, as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.'What lay in that? First, the promise of a Divine Spirit by symbols which express some, at all events, of the characteristics and wonderfulness of His work. The 'rushing of a mighty wind' spoke of a power which varies in its manifestations from the gentlest breath that scarce moves the leaves on the summer trees to the wildest blast that casts down all which stands in its way.The natural symbolism of the wind, to popular apprehension the least material of all material forces, and of which the connection with the immaterial part of a man's personality has been expressed in all languages, points to a divine, to an immaterial, to a mighty, to a life-giving power which is free to blow whither it listeth, and of which men can mark the effects, though they are all ignorant of the force itself.The other symbol of the fiery tongues which parted and sat upon each of them speaks in like manner of the divine influence, not as destructive, but full of quick, rejoicing energy and life, the power to transform and to purify. Whithersoever the fire comes, it changes all things into its own substance. Whithersoever the fire comes, there the ruddy spires shoot upwards towards the heavens. Whithersoever the fire comes, there all bonds and fetters are melted and consumed. And so this fire transforms, purifies, ennobles, quickens, sets free; and where the fiery Spirit is,

there are energy, swift life, rejoicing activity, transforming and transmuting power which changes the recipient of the flame into flame himself.Then, still further, in the fact of Pentecost there is the promise of a Divine Spirit which is to influence all the moral side of humanity. This is the great and glorious distinction between the Christian doctrine of inspiration and all others which have, in heathen lands, partially reached similar conceptions -- that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has laid emphasis upon the Holy Spirit, and has declared that holiness of heart is the touchstone and test of all claims of divine inspiration. Gifts are much, graces are more. An inspiration which makes wise is to be coveted, an inspiration which makes holy is transcendently better. There we find the safeguard against all the fanaticisms which have sometimes invaded the Christian Church, namely, in the thought that the Spirit which dwells in men, and makes them free from the obligations of outward law and cold morality, is a Spirit that works a deeper holiness than law dreamed, and a more spontaneous and glad conformity to all things that are fair and good, than any legislation and outward commandment could ever enforce. The Spirit that came at Pentecost is not merely a Spirit of rushing might and of swift-flaming energy, but it is a Spirit of holiness, whose most blessed and intimate work is the production in us of all homely virtues and sweet, unpretending goodnesses which can adorn and gladden humanity. Still further, the Pentecost carried in it the promise and prophecy of a Spirit granted to all the Church. 'They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.' This is the true democracy of Christianity, that its very basis is laid in the thought that every member of the body is equally close to the Head, and equally recipient of the life. There is none now who has a Spirit which others do not possess. The ancient aspiration of the Jewish law-giver: 'Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them,' is fulfilled in the experience of Pentecost; and the handmaiden and the children, as well as the old men and the servants, receive of that universal gift. Therefore sacerdotal claims, special functions, privileged classes, are alien to the spirit of Christianity, and blasphemies against the inspiring God. If 'one is your Master, all ye are brethren,' and if we have all been made to drink into one Spirit, then no longer hath any man dominion over our faith nor power to intervene and to intercede with God for us.And still further, the promise of this early history was that of a Spirit which should fill the whole nature of the men to whom He was granted; filling -- in the measure, of course, of their receptivity -- them as the great sea does all the creeks and indentations along the shore. The deeper the creek, the deeper the water in it; the further inland it runs, the further will the refreshing tide penetrate the bosom of the continent. And so each man, according to his character, stature, circumstances, and all the varying conditions which determine his power of receptivity, will receive a varying measure of that gift. Yet it is meant that all shall be full. The little vessel, the tiny cup, as well as the great cistern and the enormous vat, each contains according to its capacity. And if all are filled, then this quick Spirit must have the power to influence all the provinces of human nature, must touch the moral, must touch the spiritual. The temporary manifestations and extraordinary signs of His power may well drop away as the flower drops when the fruit has set. The operations of the Divine Spirit are to be felt thrilling through all the nature, and every part of the man's being is to be recipient of the power. Just as when you take a candle and plunge it into a jar of oxygen it blazes up, so my poor human nature immersed in that Divine Spirit, baptized in the Holy Ghost, shall flame in all its parts into unsuspected and hitherto inexperienced brightness. Such are the elements of the promise of Pentecost.II. And now, in the next place, look at the apparent failure of the promise.'Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?' Look at Christendom. Look at all the churches. Look at yourselves. Will any one say that the religious condition of any body of

professed believers at this moment corresponds to Pentecost? Is not the gap so wide that to fill it up seems almost impossible? Is not the stained and imperfect fulfilment a miserable satire upon the promise? 'If the Lord be with us,' said one of the heroes of ancient Israel, 'wherefore is all this come upon us?' I am sure that we may say the same. If the Lord be with us, what is the meaning of the state of things which we see around us, and must recognise in ourselves? Do any existing churches present the final perfect form of Christianity as embodied in a society? Would not the best thing that could happen, and the thing that will have to happen some day, be the disintegration of the existing organisations in order to build up a more perfect habitation of God through the Spirit? I do not wish to exaggerate. God knows there is no need for exaggerating. The plain, unvarnished story, without any pessimistic picking out of the black bits and forgetting ail the light ones, is bad enough.Take three points on which I do not dwell and apply them to yourselves, dear brethren, and estimate by them the condition of things around us. First, say whether the ordinary tenor of our own religious life looks as if we had that Divine Spirit in us which transforms everything into its own beauty, and makes men, through all the regions of their nature, holy and pure. Then ask yourselves the question whether the standard of devotion and consecration in any church witnesses of the presence of a Divine Spirit. A little handful of people, the best of them very partially touched with the life of God, and very imperfectly consecrated to His service, surrounded by a great mass about whom we can scarcely, in the judgment of charity, say even so much, that is the description of most of our congregations. 'Are these His doings?' Surely somebody else's than His.Take another question. Do the relations of modern Christians and their churches to one another attest the presence of a unifying Spirit? 'We have all been made to drink into one Spirit,' said Paul. Alas, alas! does it seem as if we had? Look round professing Christendom, look at the rivalries and the jealousies between two chapels in adjoining streets. Look at the gulfs between Christian men who differ only on some comparative trifle of organisation and polity, and say if such things correspond to the Pentecostal promise of one Spirit which is to make all the members into one body? 'Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?' Take another branch of evidence. Look at the comparative impotence of the Church in its conflict with the growing worldliness of the world. I do not forget how much is being done all about us to-day, and how still Christ's Gospel is winning triumphs, but I do not suppose that any man can look thoughtfully and dispassionately on the condition, say, for instance, of Manchester, or of any of our great towns, and mark how the populace knows nothing and cares nothing about us and our Christianity, and never comes into our places of worship, and has no share in our hopes any more than if they lived in Central Africa, and that after eighteen hundred years of nominal Christianity, without feeling that some malign influence has arrested the leaping growth of the early Church, and that somehow or other that lava stream, if I might so call it, which poured hot from the heart of God in the old days has had its flow checked, and over its burning bed there has spread a black and wrinkled crust, whatsoever lingering heat there may still be at the centre. 'If God be with us, why has all this come upon us?'III. And now, lastly, let us think for a moment of the solution of the contradiction.The indignant questions of my text may be taken, with a little possibly permissible violence, as expressing and dismissing some untrue explanations. One explanation that sometimes is urged is, the Spirit of the Lord is straitened. That explanation takes two forms. Sometimes you hear people saying, 'Christianity is effete. We have to go now to fresh fountains of inspiration, and turn away from these broken cisterns that can hold no water.' I am not going to argue that question. I do not think for my part that Christianity will be effete until the world has got up to it and beyond it in its

practice, and it will be a good while before that happens. Christianity will not be worn out until men have copied and reduced to practice the example of Jesus Christ, and they have not quite got that length yet. No shadow of a fear that the gospel has lost its power, or that God's Spirit has become weak, should be permitted to creep over our hearts. The promise is, 'I will send another Comforter, and He shall abide with you for ever.' It is a permanent gift that was given to the Church on that day. We have to distinguish in the story between the symbols, the gift, and the consequences of the gift. The first and the last are transient, the second is permanent. The symbols were transient. The people who came running together saw no tongues of fire. The consequences were transient. The tongues and the miraculous utterances were but for a time. The results vary according to the circumstances; but the central thing, the gift itself, is an irrevocable gift, and once bestowed is ever with the Church to all generations.Another form of the explanation is the theory that God in His sovereignty is pleased to withhold His Spirit for reasons which we cannot trace. But it is not true that the gift once given varies in the degree in which it is continued. There is always the same flow from God. There are ebbs and flows in the spiritual power of the Church. Yes! and the tide runs out of your harbours. Is there any less water in the sea because it does? So the gift may ebb away from a man, from a community, from an epoch, not because God's manifestation and bestowment fluctuate, but because our receptivity changes. So we dismiss, and are bound to dismiss, if we are Christians, the unbelieving explanation, 'The Spirit of the Lord is straitened,' and not to sit with our hands folded, as if an inscrutable sovereignty, with which we have nothing to do, sometimes sent more and sometimes less of His spiritual gifts upon a waiting Church. It is not so. 'With Him is no variableness.' The gifts of God are without repentance; and the Spirit that was given once, according to the Master's own word already quoted, is given that He may abide with us for ever.Therefore we have to come back to this, which is the point to which I seek to bring you and myself, in lowly penitence and contrite acknowledgment -- that it is all our own fault and the result of evils in ourselves that may be remedied, that we have so little of that divine gift; and that if the churches of this country and of this day seem to be cursed and blasted in so much of their fruitless operations and formal worship, it is the fault of the churches, and not of the Lord of the churches. The stream that poured forth from the throne of God has not lost itself in the sands, nor is it shrunken in its volume. The fire that was kindled on Pentecost has not died down into grey ashes. The rushing of the mighty wind that woke on that morning has not calmed and stilled itself into the stagnancy and suffocating breathlessness of midday heat. The same fulness of the Spirit which filled the believers on that day is available for us all. If, like that waiting Church of old, we abide in prayer and supplication, the gift will be given to us too, and we may repeat and reproduce, if not the miracles which we do not need, yet the necessary inspiration of the highest and the noblest days and saints in the history of the Church. 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?' 'Ask and ye shall receive,' and be filled 'with the Holy Ghost and with power.'

Chapter 29

CHRIST THE BREAKER

'The Breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them.' -- MICAH ii.13. Micah was contemporary with Isaiah. The two prophets stand, to a large extent, on the same level of prophetic knowledge. Characteristic of both of them is the increasing clearness of the figure of the personal Messiah, and the increasing fulness of detail with which His functions are described. Characteristic of both of them is the presentation which we find in this text of that Messiah's work as being the gathering together of the scattered captive people and the leading them back in triumph into the blessed land. Such is the image which underlies my text. Of course I have nothing to do now with questions as to any narrower and nearer historical fulfilment, because I believe that all these Messianic prophecies which were susceptible of, and many of which obtained, a historical and approximate fulfilment in the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, have a higher and broader and more real accomplishment in that great deliverance wrought by Jesus Christ, of which all these earlier and partial and outward manifestations were themselves prophecies and shadows. So I make no apology for taking the words before us as having their only real accomplishment in the office and working of Jesus Christ. He is 'the Breaker which is come up before us.' He it is that has broken out the path on which we may travel, and in whom, in a manner which the Prophet dreamed not of, 'the Lord is at the head' of us, and our King goes before us. So that my object is simply to take that great name, the Breaker, and to see the manifold ways in which in Scripture it is applied to the various work of Jesus Christ in our redemption. I. I follow entirely the lead of corresponding passages in other portions of Scripture, and to begin with, I ask you to think of that great work of our Divine Redeemer by which He has broken for the captives the prison-house of their bondage. The image that is here before us is either that of some foreign land in which the scattered exiles were bound in iron captivity, or more probably some dark and gloomy prison, with high walls, massive gates, and barred windows, wherein they were held; and to them sitting hopeless in the shadow of death, and bound in affliction and iron, there comes one mysterious figure whom the Prophet could not describe more particularly, and at His coming the gates flew apart, and the chains dropped from their hands; and the captives had heart put into them, and gathering themselves together into a triumphant band, they went out with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; freemen, and on the march to the home of their fathers. 'The Breaker is gone up before them; they have broken, and passed through the gate, and are gone out by it.' And is not that our condition? Many of us know not the bondage in which we are held. We are held in it all the more really and sadly because we conceit ourselves to be free. Those poor, light-hearted people in the dreadful days of the French Revolution, used to keep up some ghastly mockery of society and cheerfulness in their prisons; and festooned the bars with flowers, and made believe to be carrying on their life freely as they used to do; but for all that, day after day the tumbrils came to the gates, and morning after morning the jailer stood at the door of the dungeons with the fatal list in his hand, and one after another of the triflers was dragged away to death. And so men and women are living a life which they fancy is free, and all the while they are in bondage, held in a prison-house. You, my brother! are chained by guilt; you

are chained by sin, you are chained by the habit of evil with a strength of which you never know till you try to shake it off. And there comes to each of us a mighty Deliverer, who breaks the gates of brass, and who cuts the bars of iron in sunder. Christ comes to us. By His death He has borne away the guilt; by His living Spirit He will bear away the dominion of sin from our hearts; and if the Son will make us free we shall be free indeed. Oh! ponder that deep truth, I pray you, which the Lord Christ has spoken in words that carry conviction in their very simplicity to every conscience: 'He that committeth sin is the slave of sin.' And as you feel sometimes -- and you all feel sometimes -- the catch of the fetter on your wrists when you would fain stretch out your hands to good, listen as to a true gospel to this old word which, in its picturesque imagery, carries a truth that should be life. To us all 'the Breaker is gone up before us,' the prison gates are open. Follow His steps, and take the freedom which He gives; and be sure that you 'stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with any yoke of bondage.' Men and women! Some of you are the slaves of your own lusts. Some of you are the slaves of the world's maxims. Some of you are held in bondage by some habit that you abominate, but cannot get away from. Here is freedom for you. The dark walls of the prison are round us all. 'The Scripture hath shut up all in sin, that He might have mercy upon all.' Blessed be His name! As the angel came to the sleeping Apostle, and to his light touch the iron gates swung obedient on their hinges, and Roman soldiers who ought to have watched their prey were lulled to sleep, and fetters that held the limbs dropped as if melted; so, silently, in His meek and merciful strength, the Christ comes to us all, and the iron gate which leadeth out into freedom opens of its own accord at His touch, and the fetters fall from our limbs, and we go forth free men. 'The Breaker is gone up before us.' II. Again, take another application of this same figure found in Scripture, which sets forth Jesus Christ as being the Opener of the path to God. 'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life, no man cometh to the Father but by Me,' said He. And again, 'By a new and living way which He hath opened for us through the veil' (that is to say, His flesh), we can have free access 'with confidence by the faith of Him.' That is to say, if we rightly understand our natural condition, it is not only one of bondage to evil, but it is one of separation from God. Parts of the divine character are always beautiful and sweet to every human heart when it thinks about them. Parts of the divine character stand frowning before a man who knows himself for what he is; and conscience tells us that between God and us there is a mountain of impediment piled up by our own evil. To us Christ comes, the Path-finder and the Path; the Pioneer who breaks the way for us through all the hindrances, and leads us up to the presence of God. For we do not know God as He is except by Jesus Christ. We see fragments, and often distorted fragments, of the divine nature and character apart from Jesus, but the real divine nature as it is, and as it is in its relation to me, a sinner, is only made known to me in the face of Jesus Christ. When we see Him we see God; Christ's tears are God's pity, Christ's gentleness is God's meekness, Christ's tender, drawing love is not only a revelation of a most pure and sweet Brother's heart, but a manifestation through that Brother's heart of the deepest depths of the divine nature. Christ is the heart of God. Apart from Him, we come to the God of our own consciences and we tremble; we come to the God of our own fancies and we presume; we come to the God dimly guessed at and pieced together from out of the hints and indications of His works, and He is little more than a dead name to us. Apart from Christ we come to a peradventure which we call a God; a shadow through which you can see the stars shining. But we know the Father when we believe in Christ. And so all the clouds rising from our own hearts and consciences and fancies and misconceptions, which we have piled together

between God and ourselves, Christ clears away; and thus He opens the path to God.And He opens it in another way too, on which I cannot dwell. It is only the God manifest in Jesus Christ that draws men's hearts to Him. The attractive power of the divine nature is ail in Him who has said, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.' The God whom men know, or think they know, outside of the revelation of divinity in Jesus Christ, is a God before whom they sometimes tremble, who is far more often their terror than their love, who is their 'ghastliest doubt' still more frequently than He is their 'dearest faith.' But the God that is in Christ woos and wins men to Him, and from His great sweetness there streams out, as it were, a magnetic influence that draws hearts to Him. The God that is in Christ is the only God that humanity ever loved. Other gods they may have worshipped with cowering terror and with far-off lip reverence, but this God has a heart, and wins hearts because He has. So Christ opens the way to Him.And still further, in a yet higher fashion, that Saviour is the Path-breaker to the Divine Presence, in that He not only makes God known to us, and not only makes Him so known to us as to draw us to Him, but in that likewise He, by the fact of His Cross and passion, has borne and borne away the impediments of our own sin and transgression which rise for ever between us and Him, unless He shall sweep them out of the way. He has made 'the rough places plain and the crooked things straight'; levelled the mountains and raised the valleys, and cast up across all the wilderness of the world a highway along which 'the wayfaring man though a fool' may travel. Narrow understandings may know, and selfish hearts may love, and low-pitched confessions may reach the ear of the God who comes near to us in Christ, that we in Christ may come near to Him. The Breaker is gone up before us; 'having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest of all ... by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us ... let us draw near with true hearts'III. Then still further, another modification of this figure is found in the frequent representations of Scripture, by which our Lord is the Breaker, going up before us in the sense that He is the Captain of our life's march.We have, in the words of my text, the image of the gladly-gathered people flocking after the Leader. 'They have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it; and their King shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them.' The Prophet knew not that the Lord their King, of whom it is enigmatically said that He too, as well as 'the Breaker,' is to go before them, was in mysterious fashion to dwell in that Breaker; and that those two, whom He sees separately, are yet in a deep and mysterious sense one. The host of the captives, returning in triumphant march through the wilderness and to the promised land, is, in the Prophet's words, headed both by the Breaker and by the Lord. We know that the Breaker is the Lord, the Angel of the Covenant in whom is the name of Jehovah.And so we connect with all these words of my text such words as designate our Saviour as the Captain of our salvation; such words as His own in which He says, 'When He putteth forth His sheep He goeth before them' -- such words as His Apostle used when he said, 'Leaving us an ensample that we should follow in His steps.' And by all there is suggested this -- that Christ, who breaks the prison of our sins, and leads us forth on the path to God, marches at the head of our life's journey, and is our Example and Commander; and Himself present with us through all life's changes and its sorrows.Here is the great blessing and peculiarity of Christian morals that they are all brought down to that sweet obligation: 'Do as I did.' Here is the great blessing and strength for the Christian life in all its difficulties -- you can never go where you cannot see in the desert the footprints, haply spotted with blood, that your Master left there before you, and planting your trembling feet in the prints, as a child might imitate his father's strides, may learn to recognise that all duty comes to this: 'Follow Me'; and that all sorrow is calmed, ennobled,

made tolerable, and glorified, by the thought that He has borne it. The Roman matron of the legend struck the knife into her bosom, and handed it to her husband with the words, 'It is not painful!' Christ has gone before us in all the dreary solitude, and in all the agony and pains of life. He has hallowed them all, and has taken the bitterness and the pain out of each of them for them that love Him. If we feel that the Breaker is before us, and that we are marching behind Him, then whithersoever He leads us we may follow, and whatsoever He has passed through we may pass through. We carry In His life the all-sufficing pattern of duty. We have in His companionship the all-strengthening consolation. Let us leave the direction of our road in His hands, who never says 'Go!' but always 'Come!' This General marches in the midst of His battalions and sets His soldiers on no enterprises or forlorn hopes which He has not Himself dared and overcome.So Christ goes as our Companion before us, the true pillar of fire and cloud in which the present Deity abode, and He is with us in real companionship. Our joyful march through the wilderness is directed, patterned, protected, companioned by Him, and when He 'putteth forth His own sheep,' blessed be His name, 'He goeth before them.'IV. And now, lastly, there is a final application of this figure which sets forth our Lord as the Breaker for us of the bands of death, and the Forerunner 'entered for us into the heavens.'Christ's resurrection is the only solid proof of a future life. Christ's present resurrection life is the power by partaking in which, 'though we were dead, yet shall we live.'He has trodden that path, too, before us. He has entered into the great prison-house into which the generations of men have been hounded and hurried; and where they lie in their graves, as in their narrow cells. He has entered there; with one blow He has struck the gates from their hinges, and has passed out, and no soul can any longer be shut in as for ever into that ruined and opened prison. Like Samson, He has taken the gates which from of old barred its entrance, and borne them on His strong shoulders to the city on the hill, and now Death's darts are blunted, his fetters are broken, and his gaol has its doors wide open, and there is nothing for him to do now but to fall upon his sword and to kill himself, for his prisoners are free. 'Oh, death! I will be thy plague; oh, grave! I will be thy destruction.' 'The Breaker has gone up before us'; therefore it is not possible that we should be holden of the impotent chains that He has broken.The Forerunner is for us entered and passed through the heavens, and entered into the holiest of all. We are too closely knit to Him, if we love Him and trust Him, to make it possible that we shall be where He is not, or that He shall be where we are not. Where He has gone we shall go. In heaven, blessed be His name! He will still be the leader of our progress and the captain at the head of our march. For He crowns all His other work by this, that having broken the prison-house of our sins, and opened for us the way to God, and been the leader and the captain of our march through all the pilgrimage of life, and the opener of the gate of the grave for our joyful resurrection, and the opener of the gate of heaven for our triumphal entrance, He will still as the Lamb that is in the midst of the Throne, go before us, and lead us into green pastures and by the still waters, and this shall be the description of the growing blessedness and power of the saints' life above, 'These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'

Chapter 30

AS GOD, SO WORSHIPPER

'... All the peoples will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.' -- MICAH iv.5 (R.V.). This is a statement of a general truth which holds good of all sorts of religion. 'To walk' is equivalent to carrying on a course of practical activity. 'The name' of a god is his manifested character. So the expression 'Walk in the name' means, to live and act according to, and with reference to, and in reliance on, the character of the worshipper's god. In the Lord's prayer the petition 'Hallowed be Thy name' precedes the petition 'Thy will be done.' From reverent thoughts about the name must flow life in reverent conformity to the will. I. A man's god is what rules his practical life. Religion is dependence upon a Being recognised to be perfect and sovereign, whose will guides, and whose character moulds, the whole life. That general statement may be broken up into parts; and we may dwell upon the attitude of dependence, or of that of submission, or upon that of admiration and recognition of ideal perfection, or upon that of aspiration; but we come at last to the one thought -- that the goal of religion is likeness and the truest worship is imitation. Such a view of the essence of religion gives point to the question, What is our god? and makes it a very easily applied, and very searching test, of our lives. Whatever we profess, that which we feel ourselves dependent on, that which we invest, erroneously or rightly, with supreme attributes of excellence, that which we aspire after as our highest good, that which shapes and orders the current of our lives, is our god. We call ourselves Christians. I am afraid that if we tried ourselves by such a test, many of us would fail to pass it. It would thin the ranks of all churches as effectually as did Gideon's ordeal by water, which brought down a mob of ten thousand to a little steadfast band of three hundred. No matter to what church we belong, or how flaming our professions, our practical religion is determined by our answer to the question, What do we most desire? What do we most eagerly pursue? England has as much need as ever the house of Jacob had of the scathing words that poured like molten lead from the lips of Isaiah the son of Amoz, 'Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures. Their land is also full of idols: they worship the work of their own hands.' Money, knowledge, the good opinion of our fellows, success in a political career -- these, and the like, are our gods. There is a worse idolatry than that which bows down before stocks and stones. The aims that absorb us; our highest ideal of excellence; that which possessed, we think would secure our blessedness; that lacking which everything else is insipid and vain -- these are our gods: and the solemn prohibition may well be thundered in the ears of the unconscious idolaters not only in the English world, but also in the English churches. 'Thou shalt not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.' II. The worshipper will resemble his god in character. As we have already said, the goal of religion is likeness, and the truest worship is imitation. It is proved by the universal experience of humanity that the level of morality will never rise above the type enshrined in their gods; or if it does, in consequence of contact with a higher type in a higher religion, the old gods will be flung to the moles and the bats. 'They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.' That is a universal truth. The worshippers were in the Prophet's thought as dumb and dead as the idols. They who 'worship vanity' inevitably 'become vain.' A Venus or a Jupiter, a Baal or an Ashtoreth, sets the tone of morals. This truth is abundantly enforced by

observation of the characters of the men amongst us who are practical idolaters. They are narrowed and lowered to correspond with their gods. Low ideals can never lead to lofty lives. The worship of money makes the complexion yellow, like jaundice. A man who concentrates his life's effort upon some earthly good, the attainment of which seems to be, so long as it is unattained, his passport to bliss, thereby blunts many a finer aspiration, and makes himself blind to many a nobler vision. Men who are always hunting after some paltry and perishable earthly good, become like dogs who follow scent with their noses at the ground, and are unconscious of everything a yard above their heads. We who live amidst the rush of a great commercial community see many instances of lives stiffened, narrowed, impoverished, and hardened by the fierce effort to become rich. And wherever we look with adequate knowledge over the many idolatries of English life, we see similar processes at work on character. Everywhere around us 'the peoples are walking every one in the name of his god.' That character constitutes the worshipper's ideal; it is a pattern to which he aims to be assimilated; it is a good the possession of which he thinks will make him blessed; it is that for which he willingly sacrifices much which a clearer vision would teach him is far more precious than that for which he is content to barter it. The idolaters walking in the name of their god is a rebuke to the Christian men who with faltering steps and many an aberration are seeking to walk in the name of the Lord their God. If He is in any real and deep sense 'our God,' we shall see in Him the realised ideal of all excellence, the fountain of all our blessedness, the supreme good for our seeking hearts, the sovereign authority to sway our wills; the measure of our conscious possession of Him will be the measure of our glad imitation of Him, and our joyful spirits, enfranchised by the assurance of our loving possession of Him who is love, will hear Him ever whisper to us, 'Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' The desire to reproduce in the narrow bounds of our human spirits the infinite beauties of the Lord our God will give elevation to our lives, and dignity to our actions attainable from no other source. If we hallow His name, we shall do His will, and earth will become a foretaste of heaven. III. The worshipper will resemble his god in fate. We may observe that it is only of God's people that Micah in our text applies the words 'for ever and ever.' 'The peoples'' worship perishes. They walk for a time in the name of their god, but what comes of it at last is veiled in silence. It is Jehovah's worshippers who walk in His name for ever and ever, and of whom the great words are true, 'Because I live ye shall live also.' We may be sure of this that all the divine attributes are pledged for our immortality; we may be sure, too, that a soul which here follows in the footsteps of Jesus, which in its earthly life walked in the name of the Lord its God, will continue across the narrow bridge, and go onward 'for ever and ever' in direct progress in the same direction in which it began on earth. The imitation, which is the practical religion of every Christian, has for its only possible result the climax of likeness. The partial likeness is attained on earth by contemplation, by aspiration, and by effort; but it is perfected in the heavens by the perfect vision of His perfect face. 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' Not till it has reached its goal can the Christian life begun here be conceived as ended. It shall never be said of any one who tried by God's help to walk 'in the name of the Lord' that he was lost in the desert, and never reached his journey's end. The peoples who walked in the name of any false god will find their path ending as on the edge of a precipice, or in an unfathomable bog; loss, and woe, and shame will be their portion. But 'the name of the Lord is a strong tower,' into which whoever will may run and be safe, and to walk in the name of the Lord is to walk on a way 'that shall be called the Way of Holiness, whereon no ravenous beast shall go up, but the redeemed shall walk there,' and all that are on it 'shall come with singing to Zion, and

everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.'

Chapter 31

'A DEW FROM THE LORD'

'The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.' -- MICAH v.7. The simple natural science of the Hebrews saw a mystery in the production of the dew on a clear night, and their poetic imagination found in it a fit symbol for all silent and gentle influences from heaven that refreshed and quickened parched and dusty souls. Created by an inscrutable process in silence and darkness, the dewdrops lay innumerable on the dry plains and hung from every leaf and thorn, each little globule a perfect sphere that reflected the sun, and twinkled back the beams in its own little rainbow. Where they fell the scorched vegetation lifted its drooping head. That is what Israel is to be in the world, says Micah. He saw very deep into God's mind and into the function of the nation. It may be a question as to whether the text refers more especially to the place and office of Israel when planted in its own land, or when dispersed among the nations. For, as you see, he speaks of 'the remnant of Jacob' as if he was thinking of the survivors of some great calamity which had swept away the greater portion of the nation. Both things are true. When settled in its own land, Israel's office was to teach the nations God; when dispersed among the Gentiles, its office ought to have been the same. But be that as it may, the conception here set forth is as true to-day as ever it was. For the prophetic teachings, rooted though they may be in the transitory circumstances of a tiny nation, are 'not for an age, but for all time,' and we get a great deal nearer the heart of them when we grasp the permanent truths that underlie them, than when we learnedly exhume the dead history which was their occasion. Micah's message comes to all Christians, and very eminently to English Christians. The subject of Christian missions is before us to-day, and some thoughts in the line of this great text may not be inappropriate. We have here, then, I. The function of each Christian in his place. 'The remnant of Jacob shall be as a dew from the Lord in the midst of many nations.' What made Israel 'as a dew'? One thing only; its religion, its knowledge of God, and its consequent purer morality. It could teach Greece no philosophy, no art, no refinement, no sensitiveness to the beautiful. It could teach Rome no lessons of policy or government. It could bring no wisdom to Egypt, no power or wealth to Assyria. But God lit His candle and set it on a candlestick, that it 'might give light to all that were in the house.' The same thing is true about Christian people. We cannot teach the world science, we cannot teach it philosophy or art, but we can teach it God. Now the possibility brings with it the obligation. The personal experience of Jesus Christ in our hearts, as the dew that brings to us life and fertility, carries with it a commission as distinct and imperative as if it had been pealed into each single ear by a voice from heaven. That which made Israel the 'dew amidst many nations,' parched for want of it, makes Christian men and women fit to fill the analogous office, and calls upon them to discharge the same functions. For -- in regard to all our possessions, and therefore most eminently and imperatively in regard to the best -- that which we have, we have as stewards, and the Gospel, as the Apostle found, was not only given to him for his own individual enjoyment, elevation, ennobling, emancipation, salvation, but was 'committed to his charge,' and he was 'entrusted' with it, as he says, as a sacred deposit. Remember, too, that, strange as it may seem, the only way by which that knowledge of God which was bestowed upon Israel could become the

possession of the world was by its first of all being made the possession of a few. People talk about the unfairness, the harshness, of the providential arrangement by which the whole world was not made participant of the revelation which was granted to Israel. The fire is gathered on to a hearth. Does that mean that the corners of the room are left uncared for? No! the brazier is in the middle -- as Palestine was, even geographically in the centre of the then civilised world -- that from the centre the beneficent warmth might radiate and give heat as well as light to 'all them that are in the house.' So it is in regard to all the great possessions of the race. Art, literature, science, political wisdom, they are all intrusted to a few who are made their apostles; and the purpose is their universal diffusion from these human centres. It is in the line of the analogy of all the other gifts of God to humanity, that chosen men should be raised up in whom the life is lodged, that it may be diffused. So to us the message comes: 'The Lord hath need of thee.' Christ has died; the Cross is the world's redemption. Christ lives that He may apply the power and the benefits of His death and of His risen life to all humanity. But the missing link between the all sufficient redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and the actual redemption of the world, is 'the remnant of Jacob,' the Christian Church which is to be 'in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord.' Now, that diffusion from individual centres of the life that is in Jesus Christ is the chiefest reason -- or at all events, is one chief reason -- for the strange and inextricable intertwining in modern society, of saint and sinner, of Christian and non-Christian. The seed is sown among the thorns; the wheat springs up amongst the tares. Their roots are so matted together that no hand can separate them. In families, in professions, in business relations, in civil life, in national life, both grow together. God sows His seed thin that all the field may smile in harvest. The salt is broken up into many minute particles and rubbed into that which it is to preserve from corruption. The remnant of Jacob is in the midst of many peoples; and you and I are encompassed by those who need our Christ, and who do not know Him or love Him; and one great reason for the close intertwining is that, scattered, we may diffuse, and that at all points the world may be in contact with those who ought to be working to preserve it from putrefaction and decay. Now there are two ways by which this function may be discharged, and in which it is incumbent upon every Christian man to make his contribution, be it greater or smaller, to the discharge of it. The one is by direct efforts to impart to others the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ which we have, and which we profess to be the very root of our lives. We can all do that if we will, and we are here to do it. Every one of us has somebody or other close to us, bound to us, perhaps, by the tie of kindred and love, who will listen to us more readily than to anybody else. Christian men and women, have you utilised these channels which God Himself, by the arrangements of society, has dug for you, that through them you may pour upon some thirsty ground the water of life? We could also help, and help far more than any of us do, in associated efforts for the same purpose. The direct obligation to direct efforts to impart the Gospel cannot be shirked, though, alas! it is far too often ignored by us professing Christians.But there is another way by which 'the remnant of Jacob' is to be 'a dew from the Lord,' and that is by trying to bring to bear Christian thoughts and Christian principles upon all the relations of life in which we stand, and upon all the societies, be they greater or smaller -- the family, the city, or the nation -- of which we form parts. We have heard a great deal lately about what people that know very little about it, are pleased to call 'the Nonconformist conscience,' I take the compliment, which is not intended, but is conveyed by the word. But I venture to say that what is meant, is not the 'Nonconformist' conscience, it is the Christian conscience. We Nonconformists have no monopoly, thank God, of that. Nay, rather, in some

respects, our friends in the Anglican churches are teaching some of us a lesson as to the application of Christian principles to civic duty and to national life. I beseech you, although I do not mean to dwell upon that point at all at this time, to ask yourselves whether, as citizens, the vices, the godlessness, the miseries -- the removable miseries -- of our great town populations, lie upon your hearts. Have you ever lifted a finger to abate drunkenness? Have you ever done anything to help to make it possible that the masses of our town communities should live in places better than the pigsties in which many of them have to wallow? Have you any care for the dignity, the purity, the Christianity of our civic rulers; and do you, to the extent of your ability, try to ensure that Christ's teaching shall govern the life of our cities? And the same question may be put yet more emphatically with regard to wider subjects, namely, the national life and the national action, whether in regard to war or in regard to other pressing subjects for national consideration. I do not touch upon these; I only ask you to remember the grand ideal of my text, which applies to the narrowest circle -- the family; and to the wider circles -- the city and the nation, as well as to the world. Time was when a bastard piety shrank back from intermeddling with these affairs and gathered up its skirts about it in an ecstasy of unwholesome unworldliness. There is not much danger of that now, when Christian men are in the full swim of the currents of civic, professional, literary, national life. But I will tell you of what there is a danger -- Christian men and women moving in their families, going into town councils, going into Parliament, going to the polling booths, and leaving their Christianity behind them. 'The remnant of Jacob shall be as a dew from the Lord.'Now let me turn for a moment to a second point, and that isII. The function of English Christians in the world.I have suggested in an earlier part of this sermon that possibly the application of this text originally was to the scattered remnant. Be that as it may, wherever you go, you find the Jew and the Englishman. I need not dwell upon the ubiquity of our race. I need not point you to the fact that, in all probability, our language is destined to be the world's language some day. I need do nothing more than recall the fact that a man may go on board ship, in Liverpool or London, and go round the world; everywhere he sees the Union Jack, and everywhere he lands upon British soil. The ubiquity of the scattered Englishman needs no illustration.But I do wish to remind you that that ubiquity has its obligation. We hear a great deal to-day about Imperialism, about 'the Greater Britain,' about 'the expansion of England.' And on one side all that new atmosphere of feeling is good, for it speaks of a vivid consciousness which is all to the good in the pulsations of the national life. But there is another side to it that is not so good. What is the expansion sought for? Trade? Yes! necessarily; and no man who lives in Lancashire will speak lightly of that necessity. Vulgar greed, and earth-hunger? that is evil. Glory? that is cruel, blood-stained, empty. My text tells us why expansion should be sought, and what are the obligations it brings with it. 'The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord' There are two kinds of Imperialism: one which regards the Empire as a thing for the advantage of us here, in this little land, and another which regards it as a burden that God has laid on the shoulders of the men whom John Milton, two centuries ago, was not afraid to call 'His Englishmen.' Let me remind you of two contrasted pictures which will give far more forcibly than anything I can say, the two points of view from which our world-wide dominion may be regarded. Here is one of them: 'By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. And I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people; and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened a mouth, or peeped.'

That is the voice of the lust for Empire for selfish advantages. And here is the other one: 'The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; yea, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him, for He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in His sight.' That is the voice that has learned: 'He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant'; and that the dominion founded on unselfish surrender for others is the only dominion that will last. Brethren! that is the spirit in which alone England will keep its Empire over the world.I need not remind you that the gift which we have to carry to the heathen nations, the subject peoples who are under the aegis of our laws, is not merely our literature, our science, our Western civilisation, still less the products of our commerce, for all of which some of them are asking; but it is the gift that they do not ask for. The dew 'waiteth not for man, nor tarrieth for the sons of men.' We have to create the demand by bringing the supply. We have to carry Christ's Gospel as the greatest gift that we have in our hands.And now, I was going to have said a word, lastly, but I see it can only be a word, about -- III. The failure to fulfil the function.Israel failed. Pharisaism was the end of it -- a hugging itself in the possession of the gift which it did not appreciate, and a bitter contempt of the nations, and so destruction came, and the fire on the hearth was scattered and died out, and the vineyard was taken from them and 'given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.' Change the name, as the Latin poet says, and the story is told about us. England largely fails in this function; as witness in India godless civilians; as witness on every palm-shaded coral beach in the South Seas, profligate beach-combers, drunken sailors, unscrupulous traders; as witness the dying out of races by diseases imported with profligacy and gin from this land. 'A dew from the Lord!'; say rather a malaria from the devil! 'By you,' said the Prophet, 'is the name of God blasphemed among the Gentiles.' By Englishmen the missionary's efforts are, in a hundred cases, neutralised, or hampered if not neutralised.We have failed because, as Christian people, we have not been adequately in earnest. No man can say with truth that the churches of England are awake to the imperative obligation of this missionary enterprise. 'If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He spare not thee.' Israel's religion was not diffusive, therefore it corrupted; Israel's religion did not reach out a hand to the nations, therefore its heart was paralysed and stricken. They who bring the Gospel to others increase their own hold upon it. There is a joy of activity, there is a firmer faith, as new evidences of its power are presented before them. There is the blessing that comes down upon all faithful discharge of duty; 'If the house be not worthy, your peace shall return to you.' After all, our Empire rests on moral foundations, and if it is administered by us -- and we each have part of the responsibility for all that is done -- on the selfish ground of only seeking the advantage of 'the predominant partner,' then our hold will be loosened. There is no such cement of empire as a common religion. If we desire to make these subject peoples loyal fellow-subjects, we must make them true fellow-worshippers. The missionary holds India for England far more strongly than the soldier does. If we apply Christian principles to our administration of our Empire, then instead of its being knit together by iron bands, it will be laced together by the intertwining tendrils of the hearts of those who are possessors of 'like precious faith.' Brethren, there is another saying in the Old Testament, about the dew. 'I will be as the dew unto Israel,' says God through the Prophet. We must have Him as the dew for our own souls first. Then only shall we be able to discharge the office laid upon us, to be in the midst of many peoples as 'dew from the Lord.' If our fleece is wet and we leave the ground dry, our fleece will soon be dry, though the ground may be bedewed.

Chapter 32

GOD'S REQUIREMENTS AND GOD'S GIFT

'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' -- MICAH vi.8. This is the Prophet's answer to a question which he puts into the mouth of his hearers. They had the superstitious estimate of the worth of sacrifice, which conceives that the external offering is pleasing to God, and can satisfy for sin. Micah, like his great contemporary Isaiah, and the most of the prophets, wages war against that misconception of sacrifice, but does not thereby protest against its use. To suppose that he does so is to misunderstand his whole argument. Another misuse of the words of my text is by no means uncommon to-day. One has heard people say, 'We are plain men; we do not understand your theological subtleties; we do not quite see what you mean by "Repentance toward God, and faith in Jesus Christ." "To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with my God," that is my religion, and I leave all the rest to you.' That is our religion too, but notice that word 'require.' It is a harsh word, and if it is the last word to be said about God's relation to men, then a great shadow has fallen upon life. But there is another word which Micah but dimly caught uttered amidst the thunders of Sinai, and which you and I have heard far more clearly. The Prophet read off rightly God's requirements, but he had not anything to say about God's gifts. So his word is a half-truth, and the more clearly it is seen, and the more earnestly a man tries to live up to the standard of the requirements laid down here, the more will he feel that there is something else needed, and the more will he see that the great central peculiarity and glory of Christianity is not that it reiterates or alters God's requirements, but that it brings into view God's gifts. 'To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God,' is possible only through repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And if you suppose that these words of my text disclose the whole truth about God's relation to men, and men's to God, you have failed to apprehend the flaming centre of the Light that shines from heaven. I. So, then, the first thing that I wish to suggest is God's requirements. Now, I do not need to say more than just a word or two about the summing-up in my text of the plain, elementary duties of morality and religion. It covers substantially the same ground, in a condensed form, as does the Decalogue, only that Moses began with the deepest thing and worked outwards, as it were; laying the foundation in a true relation to God, which is the most important, and from which will follow the true relation to men. Micah begins at the other end, and starting with the lesser, the more external, the purely human, works his way inwards to that which is the centre and the source of all. 'To do justly,' that is elementary morality in two words. Whatever a man has a right to claim from you, give him; that is the sum of duty. And yet not altogether so, for we all know the difference between a righteous man and a good man, and how, if there is only rigidly righteous action, there is something wanting to the very righteousness of the action and to the completeness of the character. 'To do' is not enough; we must get to the heart, and so 'love mercy.' Justice is not all. If each man gets his deserts, as Shakespeare says, 'who of us shall scape whipping?' There must be the mercy as well as the justice. In a very deep sense no man renders to his fellows all that his fellows have a right to expect of him, who does not render to them mercy. And so in a very deep sense, mercy is part of justice, and you have not given any poor creature all that that poor creature has a right to look for from you, unless you have given him all the gracious and gentle charities of

heart and hand. Justice and mercy do, in the deepest view, run into one. Then Micah goes deeper. 'And to walk humbly with thy God.' Some people would say that this summary of the divine requirements is defective, because there is nothing in it about a man's duty to himself, which is as much a duty as his duty to his fellows, or his duty to God. But there is a good deal of my duty to myself crowded into that one word, 'humbly.' For I suppose we might almost say that the basis of all our obligations to our own selves lies in this, that we shall take the right view -- that is, the lowly view -- of ourselves. But I pass that. 'To walk humbly with thy God.' 'Can two walk together unless they be agreed?' For walking with God there must be communion, based in love, and resulting in imitation. And that communion must be constant, and run through all the life, like a golden thread through some web. So, then, here is the minimum of the divine requirements, to give everybody what he has a right to, including the mercy to which he has a right, to have a lowly estimate of myself, and to live continually grasping the hand of God, and conscious of His overshadowing wing at all moments, and of conformity to His will at every step of the road. That is the minimum; and the people who so glibly say, 'That is my religion,' have little consciousness of how far-reaching and how deep-down-going the requirements of this text are. The requirements result from the very nature of God, and our relation to Him, and they are endorsed by our own consciences, for we all know that these, and nothing less than these are the duties that we owe to God. So much for God's requirements. II. Our failure. There is not one of us that has come up to the standard. Man after man may be conceived of as bringing in his hands the actions of his life, and laying them in the awful scales which God's hand holds. In the one are God's requirements, in the other my life; and in every case down goes the weight, and 'weighed in the balances we are altogether lighter than vanity.' We stand before the great Master in the school, and one by one we take up our copybooks; and there is not one of them that is not black with blots and erasures and swarming with errors. The great cliff stands in front of us with the victor's prize on its topmost ledge, and man after man tries to climb, and falls bruised and broken at the base. 'There is none righteous, no, not one.' Micah's requirements come to every man that will honestly take stock of his life and his character as the statement of an unreached and unreachable ideal to which he never has climbed nor ever can climb. Oh, brethren! if these words are all the words that are to be said about God and me, then I know not what lies before the enlightened conscience except shuddering despair, and a paralysing consciousness of inevitable failure. I beseech you, take these words, and go apart with them, and test your daily life by them. God requires me to do justly. Does there not rise before my memory many an act in which, in regard to persons and in regard to circumstances, I have fallen beneath that requirement? He requires me 'to love mercy.' He requires me 'to walk humbly,' and I have often been inflated and self-conceited and presumptuous. He requires me to walk with Himself, and I have shaken away His hand from me, and passed whole days without ever thinking of Him, and 'the God in whose hands' my 'breath is, and whose are all' my 'ways,' I have 'not glorified.' I cannot hammer this truth into your consciences. You have to do it for yourselves. But I beseech you, recognise the fact that you are implicated in the universal failure, and that God's requirement is God's condemnation of each of us. If, then, that is true, that all have come short of the requirement, then there should follow a universal sense of guilt, for there is the universal fact of guilt, whether there be the sense of it or not. There must follow, too, consequences resulting from the failure of each of us to comply with these divine requirements, consequences very alarming, very fatal; and there must follow a darkening of the thought of God. 'I knew thee that thou wert an austere man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and

gathering where thou didst not straw.' That is the God of all the people who take my text as the last word of their religion -- God 'requires of me. The blessed sun in the heavens becomes a lurid ball of fire when it is seen through the mist of such a conception of the divine character, and its relation to men. There is nothing that so drapes the sky in darkness, and hides out the great light of God, as the thought of His requirements as the last thought we cherish concerning Him.There follows, too, upon this conception, and the failure that results to fulfil the requirements, a hopelessness as to ever accomplishing that which is demanded of us. Who amongst us is there that, looking back upon his past in so far as it has been shaped by his own effort and his own unaided strength, can look forward to a future with any hope that it will mend the past? Brethren! experience teaches us that we have not fulfilled, and cannot fulfil, what remains our plain duty, notwithstanding our inability to discharge it -- viz., 'To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.' To think of God's requirements, and of my own failure, is the sure way to paralyse all activity; just as that man in the parable who said, 'Thou art an austere man,' went away and hid his talent in the earth. To think of God's requirements and my own failures, if heaven has nothing more to say to me than this stern 'Thou shalt,' is the short way to despair. And that is why most of us prefer to be immersed in the trivialities of daily life rather than to think of God, and of what He asks from us. For the only way by which some of us can keep our equanimity and our cheerfulness is by ignoring Him and forgetting what He demands, and never taking stock of our own lives.III. Lastly, my text leads us to think of God's gift.I said it is a half-truth, for it only tells us of what He desires us to be, and does not tell us of how we may be it. It is meant, like the law of which it is a condensation, to be the pedagogue, to lead the child to Jesus Christ, the true Master, and the true Gift of God.God 'requires.' Yes, and He requires, in order that we should say to Him, 'Lord, Thou hast a right to ask this, and it is my blessedness to give it, but I cannot. Do Thou give me what Thou dost require, and then I can.'The gift of God is Jesus Christ, and that gift meets all our failures. I have spoken of the sense of guilt that rises from the consciousness of failure to keep the requirements of the divine law; and the gift of God deals with that. It comes to us as we lie wounded, bruised, conscious of failure, alarmed for results, sensible of guilt, and dreading the penalties, and it says to us, 'Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.' 'God requires of thee what thou hast not done. Trust yourselves to Me, and all iniquity is passed from your souls.'I spoke of the hopelessness of future performance, which results from experience of past failures; and the gift of God deals with that. You cannot meet the requirements. Christ will put His Spirit into your spirits, if you will trust yourselves to Him, and then you will meet them, for the things which are impossible with men are possible with God. So, if led by Micah, we pass from God's requirements to His gifts, look at the change in the aspect which God bears to us. He is no longer standing strict to mark, and stern to judge and condemn: but bending down graciously to help. His last word to us is not 'Thou shalt do' but 'I will give.' His utterance in the Gospel is not 'do,' but it is 'take'; and the vision of God, which shines out upon us from the life and from the Cross of Jesus Christ, is not that of a great Taskmaster, but that of Him who helps all our weakness, and makes it strength. A God who 'requires' paralyses men, shuts men out from hope and joy and fellowship; a God who gives draws men to His heart, and makes them diligent in fulfilling all His blessed requirements.Think of the difference which the conception of God as giving makes to the spirit in which we work. No longer, like the Israelites in Egypt, do we try to make bricks without straw, and break our hearts over our failures, or desperately abandon the attempt, and live in neglect of God and His will; but joyfully, with the clear confidence that 'our labour is not in vain in the Lord,' we seek to keep the

commandments which we have learned to be the expressions of His love. One of the Fathers puts all in one lovely sentence: 'Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt.' Think, too, of the difference which this conception of the giving rather than of the requiring God brings into what we have to do. We have not to begin with effort, we have to begin with faith. The fountain must be filled from the spring before it can send up its crystal pillar flashing in the sunlight; and we must receive by our trust the power to will and to do. First fill the lamp with oil, and let the Master light it, and then let its blaze beam forth. First, we have to go to the giving God, with thanks 'unto Him for His unspeakable gift'; and then we have to say to Him, 'Thou hast given me Thy Son. What dost Thou desire that I shall give to Thee?' We have first to accept the gift, and then, moved by the mercy of God, to ask, 'Lord I what wilt Thou have me to do?'* * * * *

Chapter 33

THE IDEAL DEVOUT LIFE

'The Lord God is my Strength, and He will make my feet like hinds' feet, and He will make me to walk upon mine high places.' -- HABBAKKUK iii.19.So ends one of the most magnificent pieces of imaginative poetry in Scripture or anywhere else. The singer has been describing a great delivering manifestation of the Most High God, which, though he knew it was for the deliverance of God's people, shed awe and terror over his soul. Then he gathers himself together to vow that in this God, thus manifested as the God of his salvation, he 'will rejoice,' whatever penury or privation may attach to his outward life. Lastly, he rises, in these final words, to the apprehension of what this God, thus rejoiced in, will become to those who so put their trust and their gladness upon Himself.The expressions are of a highly metaphorical and imaginative character, but they admit of being brought down to very plain facts, and they tell us the results in heart and mind of true faith and communion with God.It is to be noticed that a parallel saying, almost verbatim the same as that of my text, occurs in the 18th psalm, and that there, too, it is the last and joyous result of a tremendous manifestation of the delivering energy of God.Without any attempt to do more than bring out the deep meaning of the words, I note that the three clauses of our text present three aspects of what our lives and ourselves may steadfastly be if we, too, will rejoice in the God of our salvation.I. First, such communion with God brings God to a man for his strength.The 18th psalm, which is closely parallel, as I have remarked, with this one, gives a somewhat different and inferior version of that thought when it says, 'It is the Lord that girdeth me with strength.' But Habakkuk, though perhaps he could not have put into dogmatic shape all that he meant, had come farther than that with this: 'The Lord is my strength.' He not only gives, as one might put a coin into the hand of a beggar, while standing separate from him all the while, but 'He is my strength.'And what does that mean? It is an anticipation of that most wonderful and highest of all the New Testament truths which the Apostle declared when he said: 'I can do all things in Christ which strengtheneth me within.' It is the anticipation in experience -- which always comes before dogmatic formulas that reduce experiences into articulate utterances, of what the Apostle recorded when he said that he had heard the voice that declared, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, and My strength is made perfect in weakness.'Ah, brother! do not let us deprive ourselves of the lofty consolations and the mysterious influx of power which may be ours, if we will open our eyes to see, and our hearts to receive, what is really the central blessing of the Gospel, the communication through the same faith as Habakkuk exercised when he said, 'I will rejoice in the God of my salvation,' of an actual divine strength to dwell in and manifest itself majestically and triumphantly through, our weakness. 'The Lord is my strength,' and if we will rejoice in the Lord we shall find that Habakkuk's experience was lower than ours, inasmuch as he knew less of God than we do; and we shall be able to surpass his saying with the other one of the Prophet: 'The Lord is my strength and song; He also is become my salvation.' That is the first blessing that this ancient believer, out of the twilight of early revelation, felt as certain to come through communion with God.II. The second is like unto it. Such rejoicing communion with God will give light-footedness in the path of life.'He makes my feet like hinds' feet.' The stag is, in all languages spoken by people that have ever seen it, the very type and emblem of elastic, springing ease, of light and bounding gracefulness, that clears every

obstacle, and sweeps swiftly over the moor. And when this singer, or his brother psalmist in the other psalm that we have referred to, says, 'Thou makest my feet like hinds' feet,' what he is thinking about is that light and easy, springing, elastic gait, that swiftness of advance. What a contrast that is to the way in which most of us get through our day's work! Plod, plod, plod, in a heavy-footed, spiritless grind, like that with which the ploughman toils down the sticky furrows of a field, with a pound of clay at each heel; or like that with which a man goes wearied home from his work at night. The monotony of trivial, constantly recurring doings, the fluctuations in the thermometer of our own spirits; the stiff bits of road that we have all to encounter sooner or later; and as days go on, our diminishing buoyancy of nature, and the love of walking a little slower than we used to do; we all know these things, and our gait is affected by them. But then my text brings a bright assurance, that swift and easy and springing as the course of a stag on a free hill-side may be the gait with which we run the race set before us.It is the same thought, under a somewhat different garb, which the Apostle has when he tells us that the Christian soldier ought to have his 'feet shod with the alacrity that comes from the gospel of peace.' We are to be always ready to run, and to run with light hearts when we do. That is a possible result of Christian communion, and ought, far more than it is, to be an achieved reality with each of us. Of course physical conditions vary. Of course our spirits go up and down. Of course the work that we have to do one day seems easier than the same work does another. All these fluctuations and variations, and causes of heavy-footedness -- and sometimes more sinful ones, causes of sluggishness -- will survive; but in spite of them all, and beneath them all, it is possible that we may have ourselves thus equipped for the road, and may rejoice in our work 'as a strong man to run a race,' and may cheerily welcome every duty, and cast ourselves into all our tasks. It is possible, because communion with God manifest in Christ does, as we have been seeing, actually breathe into men a vigour, and consequently a freshness and a buoyancy that do not belong to themselves, and do not come from nature or from surrounding things. Unless that is true, that Christianity gives to a man the divine gladness which makes him ready for work, I do not know what is the good of his Christianity to him. But not only is that so, but this same communion with God, which is the opening of the heart for the influx of the divine power, brings to bear upon all our work new motives which redeem it from being oppressive, tedious, monotonous, trivial, too great for our endurance, or too little for our effort. All work that is not done in fellowship with Jesus Christ tends to become either too heavy to be tackled successfully, or too trivial to demand our best energies, and in either case will be done perfunctorily, and as the days go on, mechanically and wearisomely, as a grind and a pled. 'Thou makest my feet like hinds' feet' -- if I get the new motive of love to God in Christ well into my heart so that it comes out and influences all my actions, there will be no more tasks too formidable to undertake, or too small to be worth an effort. There will be nothing unwelcome. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked things straight, and our feet will be shod with the preparedness of the gospel of peace.If we live in daily communion with God, another thought, too, will come in, which will, in like manner, make us ready 'to run with' cheerfulness 'the race that is set before us.' We shall connect everything that befalls us, and everything that we have to do, with the final issue, and life will become solemn, grave, and blessed, because it is the outer court and vestibule of the eternal life with God in Christ. They that hold communion with Him, and only they, will, as another prophet says, 'run and not be weary,' when there come the moments that require a special effort; and 'will walk and not faint' through the else tediously long hours of commonplace duty and dusty road.III. The last of the thoughts here is -- Communion with God brings

elevation.'He will make me to walk upon my high places.' One sees the herd on the skyline of the mountain ridge, and at home up there, far above dangers and attack; able to keep their footing on cliff and precipice, and tossing their antlers in the pure air. One wave of the hand, and they are miles away. 'He sets me upon my high places'; if we will keep ourselves in simple, loving fellowship with God in Christ; and day by day, even when 'the fig-tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit in the vine,' will still 'rejoice in the God of our salvation,' He will lift us up, and Isaiah's other clause in the verse which I have quoted will be fulfilled: 'They shall mount up with wings as eagles.' Communion with God does not only help us to plod and to travel, but it helps us to soar. If we keep ourselves in touch with Him, we shall be like a weight that is hung on to a balloon. The buoyancy of the one will lift the leadenness of the other. If we hold fast by Christ's hand that will lift us up to the high places, the heights of God, in so far as we may reach them in this world; and we shall be at home up there. They will be 'my high places,' that I never could have got at by my own scrambling, but to which Thou hast lifted me up, and which, by Thy grace, have become my natural abode. I am at home there, and walk at liberty in the loftiness, and fear no fall amongst the cliffs.Are you and I familiar with these upper ranges of thought and experience and life? Do we feel at home there more than down in the bottoms, amongst the swamps, and the miasma, and the mists? Where is your home, brother? The Mass begins with Sursum corda: 'Up with your hearts,' and that is the word for us. But the way to get up is to keep ourselves in touch with Jesus Christ, and then He will, even whilst our feet are travelling along this road of earth, set us at His own right hand in the heavenly places, and make them 'our high places.' It is safe up there. The air is pure; the poison mists are down lower; the hunters do not come there; their arrows or their rifles will not carry so far. It is only when the herd ventures a little down the hill that it is in danger from shots.But the elevation will not be such as to make us despise the low paths on which duty -- the sufficient and loftiest thing of all -- lies for us. Our souls may be like stars, and dwell apart, and yet may lay the humblest duties upon themselves, and whilst we live in the high places, we 'may travel on life's common way in cheerful godliness.' Communion with Him will make us light-footed, and lift us high, and yet it will keep us at desk, and mill, and study, and kitchen, and nursery, and shop, and we shall find that the high places are reachable in every life, and in every task. So we may go on until at last we shall hear the Voice that says, 'Come up higher,' and shall he lifted to the mountain of God, where the living waters are, and shall fear no snares or hunters any more for ever.* * * * *

Chapter 34

ZION'S JOY AND GOD'S

'Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem....17. He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing.' -- ZEPHANIAH iii.14, 17.What a wonderful rush of exuberant gladness there is in these words! The swift, short clauses, the triple invocation in the former verse, the triple promise in the latter, the heaped together synonyms, all help the impression. The very words seem to dance with joy. But more remarkable than this is the parallelism between the two verses. Zion is called to rejoice in God because God rejoices in her. She is to shout for joy and sing because God's joy too has a voice, and breaks out into singing. For every throb of joy in man's heart, there is a wave of gladness in God's. The notes of our praise are at once the echoes and the occasions of His. We are to be glad because He is glad: He is glad because we are so. We sing for joy, and He joys over us with singing because we do.I. God's joy over Zion.It is to be noticed that the former verse of our text is followed by the assurance: 'The Lord is in the midst of thee'; and that the latter verse is preceded by the same assurance. So, then, intimate fellowship and communion between God and Israel lies at the root both of God's joy in man and man's joy in God.We are solemnly warned by 'profound thinkers' of letting the shadow of our emotions fall upon God. No doubt there is a real danger there; but there is a worse danger, that of conceiving of a God who has no life and heart; and it is better to hold fast by this -- that in Him is that which corresponds to what in us is gladness. We are often told, too, that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is a stern and repellent God, and the religion of the Old Testament is gloomy and servile. But such a misconception is hard to maintain in the face of such words as these. Zephaniah, of whom we know little, and whose words are mainly forecasts of judgments and woes pronounced against Zion that was rebellious and polluted, ends his prophecy with these companion pictures, like a gleam of sunshine which often streams out at the close of a dark winter's day. To him the judgments which he prophesied were no contradiction of the love and gladness of God. The thought of a glad God might be a very awful thought; such an insight as this prophet had gives a blessed meaning to it. We may think of the joy that belongs to the divine nature as coming from the completeness of His being, which is raised far above all that makes of sorrow. But it is not in Himself alone that He is glad; but it is because He loves. The exercise of love is ever blessedness. His joy is in self-impartation; His delights are in the sons of men: 'As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.' His gladness is in His children when they let Him love them, and do not throw back His love on itself. As in man's physical frame it is pain to have secretions dammed up, so when God's love is forced back upon itself and prevented from flowing out in blessing, some shadow of suffering cannot but pass across that calm sky. He is glad when His face is mirrored in ours, and the rays from Him are reflected from us.But there is another wonderfully bold and beautiful thought in this representation of the gladness of God. Note the double form which it assumes: 'He will rest' -- literally, be silent -- 'in His love; He will joy over thee with singing.' As to the former, loving hearts on earth know that the deepest love knows no utterance, and can find none. A heart full of love rests as having attained its desire and accomplished its purpose. It keeps a perpetual Sabbath, and is content to be silent.But side by side with this picture of the repose of God's joy is set with

great poetic insight the precisely opposite image of a love which delights in expression, and rejoices over its object with singing. The combination of the two helps to express the depth and intensity of the one love, which like a song-bird rises with quivering delight and pours out as it rises an ever louder and more joyous note, and then drops, composed and still, to its nest upon the dewy ground.II. Zion's joy in God.To the Prophet, the fact that 'the Lord is in the midst of thee' was the guarantee for the confident assurance 'Thou shalt not fear any more'; and this assurance was to be the occasion of exuberant gladness, which ripples over in the very words of our first text. That great thought of 'God dwelling in the midst' is rightly a pain and a terror to rebellious wills and alienated hearts. It needs some preparation of mind and spirit to be glad because God is near; and they who find their satisfaction in earthly sources, and those who seek for it in these, see no word of good news, but rather a 'fearful looking for of judgment' in the thought that God is in their midst. The word rendered 'rejoices' in the first verse of our text is not the same as that so translated in the second. The latter means literally, to move in a circle; while the former literally means, to leap for joy. Thus the gladness of God is thought of as expressing itself in dignified, calm movements, whilst Zion's joy is likened in its expression to the more violent movements of the dance. True human joy is like God's, in that He delights in us and we in Him, and in that both He and we delight in the exercise of love. But we are never to forget that the differences are real as the resemblances, and that it is reserved for the higher form of our experiences in a future life to 'enter into the joy of the Lord.' It becomes us to see to it that our religion is a religion of joy. Our text is an authoritative command as well as a joyful exhortation, and we do not fairly represent the facts of Christian faith if we do not 'rejoice in the Lord always.' In all the sadness and troubles which necessarily accompany us, as they do all men, we ought by the effort of faith to set the Lord always before us that we be not moved. The secret of stable and perpetual joy still lies where Zephaniah found it -- in the assurance that the Lord is with us, and in the vision of His love resting upon us, and rejoicing over us with singing. If thus our love clasps His, and His joy finds its way into our hearts, it will remain with us that our 'joy may be full'; and being guarded by Him whilst still there is fear of stumbling, He will set us at last 'before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy.* * * * *

Chapter 35

VAIN TOIL

'Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.' -- HAGGAI i.6A large emigration had taken place from the land of captivity to Jerusalem. The great purpose which the returning exiles had in view was the rebuilding of the Temple, as the centre-point of the restored nation. With true heroism, and much noble and unselfish enthusiasm, they began the work, postponing to it all considerations of personal convenience. But the usual fate of all great national enthusiasms attended this. Political difficulties, hard practical realities, came in the way, and the task was suspended for a time. A handful remained true to the original ideas; the rest fell away. Personal comfort, love of ease, the claims of domestic life, the greed of gain, all the ignoble motives which, like gravitation and friction, check such movements after the first impulse is exhausted, came into play. Like every great cause, this one was launched amidst high hopes and honest zeal: but by degrees the hopes faded and became nothing better than 'godly imaginations.' The exiles took to building their own ceiled houses, and let the House of God lie waste. They began to think more of settling on the land than of building the Temple. No doubt they said all the things with which men are wont to hide their selfishness under the mask of duty: -- Men must live; we must take care of ourselves; it is mad enthusiasm to build a temple when we have not homes; we mean to build it some time, but we are practical men and must provide for our wants first.'This wisdom of theirs turned out folly, as it generally does. There came, as we learn from this prophet, a season of distress, in which the harvest, for which they had sacrificed their duties and their calling, failed: and in spite of their prudent diligence, or rather, just because of their misplaced and selfish attention to their worldly well-being, they were poor and hungry. 'The heaven over them was stayed from dew, and the earth from her fruit.' Haggai was sent by God to interpret the calamity, and to urge to the fulfilment of their earlier purposes.His words apply to a supernatural condition of things with which he is dealing, but they contain truths illustrated by it and true for ever. For us all, as truly as for those Jews, the first thing, the primary, all-embracing duty, is to serve God, to obey, love, and live with Him. The same selfish and worldly excuses have force with us: 'We have business to look after; men must live; we have no time to think about religion; I have built a new mill that occupies my thoughts; I have found a new plaything, and I must try it; I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So God and His claims, Christ and His love, are hustled into a corner to be attended to when opportunity serves, but to be neglected in the meantime. And the same result follows, not by miracle, but by natural necessity. Haggai puts these results in our text with bitter, indignant amplification. His words are all the working out of one idea-the unprofitableness, on the whole and in the long-run, of a godless life. He illustrates this in the clauses of our text in various forms, and my purpose now is simply to apply each of these to the realities of a godless life.I. It is a life of fruitless toil.The Prophet pictures the sowing, the abundant seed thrown broadcast, the long waiting, and then, finally, a wretched harvest -- a few prematurely yellow ears and short stalks. I remember a friend telling me that when he was a boy he went out reaping with his father in one of our years of great drought; and after a day's work threshed out all that he had cut, and carried it

home with him in his handkerchief. That is what Haggai saw realised in fact, because the sowing had been without God. It is what we may see in others and feel in ourselves. It is the very law and curse of godless toil with its unproductive harvest. The builders set out to build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven, and they never get higher than a story or two. There is nothing more tragic than the contrast between what a man actually accomplishes in his life and what he planned when he began it. Many and many of our lives are like the half-built houses in Pompeii, where the stones are lying that had been all squared and polished, and have never been lifted to their place in the unfinished walls. Much of the seed never comes up at all; and what we gather is always less than what we expected. The prize gleams before us; when we get it, is it as good as it looked when it hung tempting at the unreached goal? A fox-brush is scarcely sufficient payment for riding over half a county. Ah! but you say, there is the enthusiasm and stir of the pursuit. Well, yes; it is something if it is training you for something, and if you can say that faculties worth the cultivating are developed in that way: and whether that is so depends on what you think a man is made for, and on whether these are faculties which will last and find their scope as long as you last. Consider what you are, what you seek; and then say whether the most fruitful harvest from which God and His love are left out is not little. This fruitlessness of toil is inevitable unless it springs from a motive which in itself is sufficient, pursues a purpose which will surely be accomplished, and is done in hope of the world where 'our works do follow us.' If we are allied to Christ, then whether our work be great or small, apparently successful or frustrated, it will be all right. Though we do not see our fruit, we know that He will bless the springing thereof, and that no least deed done for Him but shall in the harvest-day be found waving a nodding head of multiplied results. 'God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him'; and 'he that goeth forth weeping shall doubtless return, bringing his sheaves with him.' 'Your labour is not in vain to the Lord.'II. A godless life is one of unsatisfied hunger and thirst.The poor results of the exiles' toil did not avail to stay gnawing hunger nor slake burning thirst, and the same result applies only too sadly to lives lived apart from God. There are a multitude of desires proper to the human soul besides those which belong to the bodily frame, and these have their proper objects. Is it true that the objects are sufficient to satisfy the desires? Does any one of the things for which we toil feed us full when we have it? Do we not always want just a little more? And is not that want accompanied with a real and sharp sense of hunger? Is it not true the appetite GROWS with what it feeds on? And even if a man schools himself to something like content, it comes not because the desire is satisfied, but because it is somehow bridled. Cerberus often breaks his chain, in spite of honied cakes that have been tossed into the wide mouths of his tripled heads. What do wealth and ambition do for their votaries? And even he who thirsts for nobler occupations and lives for higher aims is often obliged to admit, in weariness, that 'this also is vanity.'But even when the desire is satisfied, the man desiring is not. To feed their bodies men starve their souls. How many longings are crushed or neglected by him who pushes eagerly after any one longing! We have either to race from one course to another, splitting life into intolerable distractions, or we have to circumscribe and limit ourselves in order to devote all our power to securing one; and if we secure it, then a hundred others will bark like a kennel of hounds.And if you say, 'I know nothing about all this; I have my aims, and on the whole I secure a tolerable satisfaction for them,' do you not know a nameless unrest? If you do not, then you are so much the poorer and the lower, and you have murdered part of yourself. Some one single tyrannous desire sits solitary in your heart. He has slain all his brethren that he may rule, as sultans used to do in Constantinople. One big fish in the aquarium has eaten up all the others.God only satisfies the

soul. It is only the 'bread which came down from Heaven,' of which if we eat our souls shall live, and be filled as with marrow and fatness. That One is all-sufficient in His Oneness. Possessing Him, we know no satiety; possessing Him, we do not need to maim any part of our nature; possessing Him, we shall not covet divers multifarious objects. The loftiest powers of the soul find in Him their adequate, inexhaustible, eternal object. The lowest desires may, like the beasts of the forest, seek their meat from God. If we take Him for our own and live on Him by faith, our blessed experience will be, 'I am full: I have all and abound.'III. The godless life is one of futile defences.'Ye clothe you, but there is none warm.' The clothing was to guard against the nipping air that blew shrewdly on their hills, and it failed to keep them from the weather. We may be indulging in fancy in this application of our text, but still raiment is as needful as food, and its failure to answer its purpose points to a real sorrow and insufficiency of a life lived without God. In it there is no real defence against the manifold evils which storm upon all of us. When the bitter, biting weather comes, what have you to shelter you from the cold blast? Some rags of stoical resignation or proverbial commonplaces? 'What is done cannot be helped'; 'What cannot be cured must be endured'; 'It is a long lane that has no turning,' and the like. But what are these? You may have other occupations to interest you, but these will not heal, though they may divert your attention from, your gaping wounds. You have friends, and the like, but though you have all these and much beside, these will not avail. 'The covering is shorter than that a man can wrap himself in it.' Naked and shivering, exposed to the pelting and the pitiless storm, with rags soaked through, and chilled to the bone, what is there but death before the man in the wild weather on some trackless moor? And what is there for us if we have to bear the storms and cold of life without God? No doubt most of us struggle through somehow. Time heals much; work does a great deal; to live is so much, that no living being can be wholly miserable. Other cares and other occupations blossom and grow, and the brown mounds get covered with sweet springing grass. But how many lie down and die? How many for the rest of their lives go crushed and broken-spirited? How many carry about with them, deep in their hearts, a sleepless sorrow? How many have to bear passionate paroxysms of agony and bursts of angry grief, all of which might have been softened and soothed and made to gleam with the mellow light of hope as from a hidden sun, if only, instead of defiantly and weakly fronting the world alone, they had found in the man Christ the refuge from the storm and the covert from the tempest. How can a man face all the awful possibilities and the solemn certainties of life without God and not go mad? It is impossible to work without Him; it is impossible to rejoice without Him; but more impossible still, if that could be, is it to endure without Him. It is in union with Jesus Christ, and with Him alone, that we shall receive 'the pure linen, clean and white,' which is a surer defence than the warrior's mail, and 'being clothed we shall not be found naked.' IV. A godless life is one of fleeting riches.In Haggai's strong metaphor, the poor day-labourer earns his small wage and puts it into a ragged bag, or as we should say, a pocket with a hole in it; and when he comes to look for it, it is gone, and all his toil is for nothing. What a picture this is of the very experience that befalls all men who work for less wages than God's 'Well done.' Take an instance or two: here is a man who works hard for a long time, and puts his money into some bank, and one morning he gets a letter to tell him the bank's doors are closed, and his savings gone -- a bag with holes. Here is a man who climbs by slow degrees to the head of his profession and lives in popular admiration, and some day he sees a younger competitor shooting ahead of him, and all is lost -- a bag with holes. Here is a man who has, by some great discovery, established his fame or his fortune, and a new man, standing on his shoulders, makes a greater, and his fame dwarfs and his

trade runs into other channels -- a bag with holes. Here is a man who has conquered a world, and dies on the rock of St. Helena, with his pompous titles stripped off him, and instead of kingdoms a rood or two of garden, and instead of his legions, half a dozen soldiers, a doctor, and a jailer -- a bag with holes. Here is a man who, having amassed his riches and kept them without loss all his life, is dying. They cannot go with him. That would not matter; but unfortunately he has to live yonder, and he will have 'nothing of all his labour that he can carry away in his hands' -- a bag with holes.Such loss and final separation befall us all; but he who loves God loses none of his real treasure when he parts from earthly treasures. Fortune may turn her wheel as she pleases, his wealth cannot be taken from him. His riches are laid up in a sure storehouse, 'where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt.' We each live for ever. Should we not have for our object in life that which is eternal as ourselves? Why should we fix our hopes on that which is not abiding -- on things that can perish, on things that we must lose? Let us not run this awful risk. Do not impoverish or darken life here; do not condemn yourselves to unfruitful toil, to unsatisfied desires, to unguarded calamities, to unstable possessions; but come, as sinful men ought to come, to Jesus Christ for pardon and for life. Then, in due season, you will reap if you faint not; and the harvest will not be little, but 'some sixty-fold and some an hundred-fold'; then you will 'hunger no more, neither thirst any more,' but 'He that hath mercy on you will lead you to living fountains of water'; then you will not have to draw your poor rags round you for warmth, but shall be clothed with the robe of righteousness and the garment of praise; then you will never need to fear the loss of your riches, but bear with you whilst you live your treasures beyond the reach of change, and will find them multiplied a thousand-fold when you die and go to God, your portion and your joy for ever.

Chapter 36

BRAVE ENCOURAGEMENTS

'In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying, 2. Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, 3. Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? 4. Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts: 5. According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.6. For thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; 7. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts.8. The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts.9. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts.' -- HAGGAI ii.1-9. The second year of Darius, in which Haggai prophesied, was 520 B.C. Political intrigues had stopped the rebuilding of the Temple, and the enthusiasm of the first return had died away in the face of prolonged difficulties. The two brave leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, still survived, and kept alive their own zeal; but the mass of the people were more concerned about their comforts than about the restoration of the house of Jehovah. They had built for themselves 'ceiled houses,' and were engrossed with their farms. The Book of Ezra dwells on the external hindrances to the rebuilding. Haggai goes straight at the selfishness and worldliness of the people as the great hindrance. We know nothing about him beyond the fact that he was a prophet working in conjunction with Zechariah. He has been thought to have been one of the original company who came back with Zerubbabel, and it has been suggested, though without any certainty, that he may have been one of the old men who remembered the former house. But these conjectures are profitless, and all that we know is that God sent him to rouse the slackened earnestness of the people, and that his words exercised a powerful influence in setting forward the work of rebuilding. This passage is the second of his four short prophecies. We may call it a vision of the glory of the future house of Jehovah. The prophecy begins with fully admitting the depressing facts which were chilling the popular enthusiasm. Compared with the former Temple, this which they had begun to build could not but be 'as nothing.' So the murmurers said, and Haggai allows that they are quite right. Note the turn of his words: 'Who is left ... that saw this house in its former glory?' There had been many eighteen years ago; but the old eyes that had filled with tears then had been mostly closed by death in the interval, and now but few survived. Perhaps if the eyes had not been so dim with age, the rising house would not have looked so contemptible. The pessimism of the aged is not always clear-sighted, nor their comparisons of what was, and what is beginning to be, just. But it is always wise to be frank in admitting the full strength of the opinions that we oppose; and encouragements to work will never tell if they blink difficulties or seek to deny plain facts. Haggai was wise when he began with echoing the old men's disparagements, and in full view of them, pealed out his brave incitements to the work. The repetition of the one exhortation, 'Be strong, be

strong, be strong,' is very impressive. The very monotony has power. In the face of the difficulties which beset every good work the cardinal virtue is strength. 'To be weak is to be miserable,' and is the parent of failures. One hears in the exhortation an echo of that to Joshua, to whom and to his people the command 'Be strong and of good courage' was given with like repetition (Joshua i.). But there is nothing more futile than telling feeble men to be strong, and trembling ones to be very courageous. Unless the exhorter can give some means of strength and some reason for courage, his word is idle wind. So Haggai bases his exhortation upon its sufficient ground, 'For I am with you, saith Jehovah of hosts.' Strength is a duty, but only if we have a source of strength available. The one basis of it is the presence of God. His name reveals the immensity of His power, who commands all the armies of heaven, angels, or stars, and to whom the forces of the universe are as the ordered ranks of His disciplined army; and who is, moreover, the Captain of earthly hosts, ever giving victory to those who are His 'willing soldiers in the day of His power.' It is not vain to bid a man be strong, if you can assure him that God is with him. Unless you can, you may save your breath. Here is the temper for all Christian workers. Let them realise the duty of strength; let them have recourse to the Fountain of strength; let them mark the purpose of strength, which is 'work,' as Haggai puts it so emphatically. We have nothing to do with the magnitude of what we may be able to build. It may be very poor beside the great houses that greater ages or men have been able to rear. But whether it be a temple brave with gold and cedar, or a log, it is our business to put all our strength into the task, and to draw that strength from the assurance that God is with us. The difficulties connected with the translation of verse 5 need not concern us here. For my purpose, the general sense resulting from any translation is clear enough. The covenant made of old, when Israel came from an earlier captivity, is fresh as ever, and God's Spirit is with the people; therefore they need not fear. 'Fear ye not' is another of the well-meant exhortations which often produce the opposite effect from the intended one. One can fancy some of the people saying, 'It is all very well to talk about not being afraid; but look at our feebleness, our defencelessness, our enemies; we cannot but fear, if we open our eyes.' Quite true; and there is only one antidote to fear, and that is the assurance that God's covenant binds Him to take care of me. Unless one believes that, he must be strangely blind to the facts of life if he has not a cold dread coiled round his heart and ever ready to sting. The Prophet rises into grand predictions of the glory of the poor house which the weak hands were raising. Verses 6-9 set things invisible over against the visible. In general terms the Prophet announces a speedy convulsion, partly symbolical and partly real, in which 'all nations' shall be revolutionised, and as a consequence, shall become Jehovah's worshippers, bringing their treasures to the Temple, and so filling the house with glory. This shall be because Jehovah is the true Possessor of all their wealth. But the scope of verse 9 seems to transcend these promises, and to point to an undescribed 'glory,' still greater than that of the universal flocking of the nations with their gifts, and to reach a climax in the wide promise of peace given in the Temple, and thence, as is implied, flowing out 'like a river' through a tranquillised world. 'Yet once, it is a little while.' How long did the little while last? There were, possibly, some feeble incipient fulfilments of the prophecy in the immediate future; for, after the exile, there were convulsions in the political world which resulted in security to the Jews, and the religion of Israel began to draw some scattered proselytes. But the prophecy is not completely fulfilled even now, and it covers the entire development of the 'kingdom that cannot be moved' until the end of time. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews thus understands the prophecy (Hebrews xii.26, 27), and there are echoes of it in Revelation xxi., which describes the final form of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. So the

chronology of prophecy is not altogether that of history; and while the events stand clear, their perspective is foreshortened. All the ages are but 'a little while' in the calendar of heaven. In regard to the whole of the prophetic utterances, we have often to say with the disciples, 'What is this that he saith, a little while?' Eighteen centuries have rolled away since the seer heard, 'Behold, I come quickly,' and the vision still tarries. The old interpretation of 'the desire of all nations' as meaning Jesus Christ gave a literal fulfilment of the prophecy by His presence in the Temple; but that meaning of the phrase is untenable, both because the verb is in the plural, which would be impossible if a person were meant, and because the only interpretation which gives relevancy to verse 8 is that the expression means the silver and gold, there declared to be Jehovah's. That venerable explanation, then, cannot stand. There were offerings from heathen kings, such as those from Darius recorded in Ezra vi.6-10, and the gifts of Artaxerxes (Ezra vii.15), which may be regarded as incipient accomplishments; but such facts as these cannot exhaust the prophecy. It must be admitted that nothing happened during the history of that Temple to answer to the full meaning of this prophecy. But was it therefore a delusion that God spoke by Haggai? We must distinguish between form and substance. The Temple was the centre point of the kingdom of God on earth, the place of meeting between God and men, the place of sacrifice. The fulfilment of the prophecy is not to be found in any house made with hands, but in the true Temple which Jesus Christ has builded. He in His own humanity was all that the Temple shadowed and foretold. It is in Him, and in the spiritual Temple which He has reared, that Haggai's vision will find its full realisation, which is yet future. The powers that issue from Him shattered the Roman empire, have ever since been casting earth's kingdoms into new moulds, and have still destructive work to do. The 'once more' began when Jesus came, but the final 'shaking' lies in front still. Every smaller revolution in thought or sweeping away of institutions is a prelude to that great 'shaking' when everything will go except the kingdom that cannot be moved. Its result shall be that the treasures of the nations shall be poured at His feet who is 'worthy to receive riches,' even as other prophecies have foretold that 'men shall bring unto Thee the wealth of the nations' (Isaiah lx.11; Revelation xxi.24, 26).In that true Temple the glory of the Shechinah, which was wanting in the second, for ever abides, 'the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father'; and in it dwells for ever the dove of peace, ready to glide into every heart that enters to worship at the shrine. Jesus Christ is not the 'desire of all nations' which shall come to the Temple, but is the Temple to which the wealth of all nations shall be brought, in whom the true glory of a manifested God abides, and from whom the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and is His own peace too, shall enter reconciled souls, and calm turbulent passions, and reconcile contending peoples, and diffuse its calm through all the nations of the saved who there 'walk in the light of the Lord.'* * * * *

Chapter 37

DYING MEN AND THE UNDYING WORD

'Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? 6. But My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?'-Zechariah i.5, 6.Zechariah was the Prophet of the Restoration. Some sixteen years before this date a feeble band of exiles had returned from Babylon, with high hopes of rebuilding the ruined Temple. But their designs had been thwarted, and for long years the foundations stood unbuilded upon. The delay had shattered their hopes and flattened their enthusiasm; and when, with the advent of a new Persian king, a brighter day dawned, the little band was almost too dispirited to avail itself of it. At that crisis, two prophets 'blew soul-animating strains,' and as the narrative says elsewhere, 'the work prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah.'My text comes from the first of Zechariah's prophecies. In it he lays the foundation for all that he has subsequently to say. He points to the past, and summons up the august figures of the great pre-Exilic prophets, and reminds his contemporaries that the words which they spoke had been verified in the experience of past generations. He puts himself in line with these, his mighty predecessors, and declares that, though the hearers and the speakers of that prophetic word had glided away into the vast unknown, the word remained, lived still, and on his lips demanded the same obedience as it had vainly demanded from the generation that was past.It has sometimes been supposed that of the two questions in my text the first is the Prophet's -- 'Your fathers, where are they?' and that the second is the retort of the people -- 'The prophets, do they live for ever?' 'It is true that our fathers are gone, but what about the prophets that you are talking of? Are they any better off? Are they not dead, too?' But though the separation of the words into dialogue gives vivacity, it is wholly unnecessary. And it seems to me that Zechariah's appeal is all the more impressive if we suppose that he here gathers the mortal hearers and speakers of the immortal word into one class, and sets over against them the Eternal Word, which lives to-day as it did then, and has new lessons for a new generation. So it is from that point of view that I wish to look at these words now, and try to gather from them some of the solemn, and, as it seems to me, striking lessons which they inculcate. I follow with absolute simplicity the Prophet's thoughts.I. The mortal hearers and speakers of the abiding Word.'Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?' It is all but impossible to invest that well-known thought with any fresh force; but, perhaps, if we look at it from the special angle from which the Prophet here regards it, we may get some new impression of the old truth. That special angle is to bring into connection the Eternal Word and the transient vehicles and hearers of it.Did you ever stand in some roofless, ruined cathedral or abbey church, and try to gather round you the generations that had bowed and worshipped there? Did you ever step across the threshold of some ancient sanctuary, where the feet of vanished generations had worn down the sand-stone steps at the entrance? It is solemn to think of the fleeting series of men; it is still more striking to bring them into connection with that everlasting Word which once they heard, and accepted or rejected.But let me bring the thought a little closer. There is not a sitting in our churches that has not been sat in by dead people. As I stand here and look round I can re-people almost every pew with faces that we shall see no more. Many of you, the older habitues of this place, can do the same, and can look

and think, 'Ah! he used to sit there; she used to be in that corner.' And I can remember many mouldering lips that have stood in this place where I stand, of friends and brethren that are gone. 'Your fathers, where are they?' 'Graves under us, silent,' is the only answer. 'And the prophets, do they live for ever?' No memories are shorter-lived than the memories of the preachers of God's Word.Take another thought, that all these past hearers and speakers of the Word had that Word verified in their lives. 'Took it not hold of your fathers?' Some of them neglected it, and its burdens were upon them, little as they felt them sometimes. Some of them clave to it, and accepted it, and its blessed promises were all fulfilled to them. Not one of those who, for the brief period of their earthly lives, came in contact with that divine message but realised, more or less consciously, some blessedly and some in darkened lives and ruined careers, the solemn truth of its promises and of its threatenings. The Word may have been received, or it may have been neglected, by the past generations; but whether the members thereof put out a hand to accept, or withheld their grasp, whether they took hold of it or it took hold of them -- wherever they are now, their earthly relation to that word is a determining factor in their condition. The syllables died away into empty air, the messages were forgotten, but the men that ministered them are eternally influenced by the faithfulness of their ministrations, and the men that heard them are eternally affected by the reception or rejection of that word. So, when we summon around us the congregation of the dead, which is more numerous than the audience of the living to whom I now speak, the lesson that their silent presence teaches us is, 'Wherefore we should give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard.' II. Let us note the abiding Word, which these transient generations of hearers and speakers have had to do with.It is maddening to think of the sure decay and dissolution of all human strength, beauty, wisdom, unless that thought brings with it immediately, like a pair of coupled stars, of which the one is bright and the other dark, the corresponding thought of that which does not pass, and is unaffected by time and change. Just as reason requires some unalterable substratum, below all the fleeting phenomena of the changeful creation -- a God who is the Rock-basis of all, the staple to which all the links hang -- so we are driven back and back and back, by the very fact of the transiency of the transient, to grasp, for a refuge and a stay, the permanency of the permanent. 'In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne' -- the passing away of the mortal shadow of sovereignty revealed the undying and true King. It is blessed for us when the lesson which the fleeting of all that can flee away reads to us is that, beneath it all, there is the Unchanging. When the leaves drop from the boughs of the trees that veil the face of the cliff, then the steadfast rock is visible; and when the generations, like leaves, drop and rot, then the rock background should stand out the more clearly.Zechariah meant by the 'word of God' simply the prophetic utterances about the destiny and the punishment of his nation. We ought to mean by the 'word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever,' not merely the written embodiment of it in the Old or New Testament, but the Personal Word, the Incarnate Word, the everlasting Son of the Father, who came upon earth to be God's mouthpiece and utterance, and who is for us all the Word, the Eternal Word of the living God. It is His perpetual existence rather than the continuous duration of the written word, declaration of Himself though it is, that is mighty for our strength and consolation when we think of the transient generations.Christ lives. That is the deepest meaning of the ancient saying, 'All flesh is grass.... The Word of the Lord endureth for ever.' He lives; therefore we can front change and decay in all around calmly and triumphantly. It matters not though the prophets and their hearers pass away. Men depart; Christ abides. Luther was once surprised by some friends sitting at a table from which a meal had been

removed, and thoughtfully tracing with his fingers upon its surface with some drop of water or wine the one word 'Vivit'; He lives. He fell back upon that when all around was dark. Yes, men may go; what of that? Aaron may have to ascend to the summit of Hor, and put off his priestly garments and die there. Moses may have to climb Pisgah, and with one look at the land which he must never tread, die there alone by the kiss of God, as the Rabbis say. Is the host below leaderless? The Pillar of Cloud lies still over the Tabernacle, and burns steadfast and guiding in front of the files of Israel. 'Your fathers, where are they? The prophets, do they live for ever?' 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever.'Another consideration to be drawn from this contrast is, since we have this abiding Word, let us not dread changes, however startling and revolutionary. Jesus Christ does not change. But there is a human element in the Church's conceptions of Jesus Christ, and still more in its working out of the principles of the Gospel in institutions and forms, which partakes of the transiency of the men from whom it has come. In such a time as this, when everything is going into the melting-pot, and a great many timid people are trembling for the Ark of God, quite unnecessarily as it seems to me, it is of prime importance for the calmness and the wisdom and the courage of Christian people, that they should grasp firmly the distinction between the divine treasure which is committed to the churches, and the earthen vessels in which it has been enshrined. Jesus Christ, the man Jesus, the divine person, His incarnation, His sacrifice, His resurrection, His ascension, the gift of His Spirit to abide for ever with His Church -- these are the permanent 'things which cannot be shaken.' And creeds and churches and formulas and forms -- these are the human elements which are capable of variation, and which need variation from time to time. No more is the substance of that eternal Gospel affected by the changes, which are possible on its vesture, than is the stateliness of some cathedral touched, when the reformers go in and sweep out the rubbish and the trumpery which have masked the fair outlines of its architecture, and vulgarised the majesty of its stately sweep. Brethren! let us fix this in our hearts, that nothing which is of Christ can perish, and nothing which is of man can or should endure. The more firmly we grasp the distinction between the permanent and the transient in existing embodiments of Christian truth, the more calm shall we be amidst the surges of contending opinions. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' III. Lastly, the present generation and its relation to the abiding Word.Zechariah did not hesitate to put himself in line with the mighty forms of Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Hosea. He, too, was a prophet. We claim, of course, no such authority for present utterers of that eternal message, but we do claim for our message a higher authority than the authority of this ancient Prophet. He felt that the word of God that was put into his lips was a new word, addressed to a new generation, and with new lessons for new circumstances, fitting as close to the wants of the little band of exiles as the former messages, which it succeeded, had fitted to the wants of their generation. We have no such change in the message, for Jesus Christ speaks to us all, speaks to all times and to all circumstances, and to every generation. And so, just as Zechariah based upon the history of the past his appeal for obedience and acceptance, the considerations which I have been trying to dwell upon bring with them stringent obligations to us who stand, however unworthy, in the place of the generations that are gone, as the hearers and ministers of the Word of God. Let me put two or three very simple and homely exhortations. First, see to it, brother, that you accept that Word. By acceptance I do not mean a mere negative attitude, which is very often the result of lack of interest, the negative attitude of simply not rejecting; but I mean the opening not only of your minds but of your hearts to it. For if what I have been saying is true, and the Word of God has for its highest manifestation

Jesus Christ Himself, then you cannot accept a person by pure head-work. You must open your hearts and all your natures, and let Him come in with His love, with His pity, with His inspiration of strength and virtue and holiness, and you must yield yourselves wholly to Him. Think of the generations that are gone. Think of their brief moment when the great salvation was offered to them. Think of how, whether they received or rejected it, that Word took hold upon them. Think of how they regard it now, wherever they are in the dimness; and be you wise in time and be not as those of your fathers who rejected the Word.Hold it fast. In this time of unrest make sure of your grasp of the eternal, central core of Christianity, Jesus Christ Himself, the divine-human Saviour of the world. There are too many of us whose faith oozes out at their finger ends, simply because they have so many around them that question and doubt and deny. Do not let the floating icebergs bring down your temperature; and have a better reason for not believing, if you do not believe, than that so many and such influential and authoritative men have ceased to believe. When Jesus asks, 'Will ye also go away?' our answer should be, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'Accept Him, hold Him fast, trust to His guidance in present day questions. Zechariah felt that his message belonged to the generation to whom he spoke. It was a new message. We have no new message, but there are new truths to be evolved from the old message. The questionings and problems, social, economical, intellectual, moral -- shall I say political? -- of this day, will find their solution in that ancient word, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.' There is the key to all problems. 'In Him are hid all the treasures and wisdom of knowledge.'Zechariah pointed to the experiences of a past generation as the basis of his appeal. We can point back to eighteen centuries, and say that the experiences of these centuries confirm the truth that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world. The blessedness, the purity, the power, the peace, the hope which He has breathed into humanity, the subsidiary and accompanying material and intellectual prosperity and blessings that attend His message, its independence of human instruments, its adaptation to all varieties of class, character, condition, geographical position, its power of recuperating itself from corruptions and distortions, its undiminished adaptedness to the needs of this generation and of each of us -- enforce the stringency of the exhortation, and confirm the truth of the assertion: 'This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him!' 'The voice said, Cry. And I said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the Word of our God shall stand for ever.' Three hundred years after Isaiah a triumphant Apostle added, 'This is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.' Eighteen hundred years after Peter we can echo his confident declaration, and, with the history of these centuries to support our faith, can affirm that the Christ of the Gospel and the Gospel of the Christ are in deed and in truth the Living Word of the Living God.

Chapter 38

THE CITY WITHOUT WALLS

'Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls.... For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.' -- ZECHARIAH ii.4, 5. Zechariah was the Prophet of the returning exiles, and his great work was to hearten them for their difficult task, with their small resources and their many foes, and to insist that the prime condition to success, on the part of that portion of the nation that had returned, was holiness. So his visions, of which there is a whole series, are very largely concerned with the building of the Temple and of the city. In this one, he sees a man with a measuring-rod in his hand coming forth to take the dimensions of the still un-existing city of God. The words that I have read are the centre portion of that vision. You notice that there are three clauses, and that the first in order is the consequence of the other two. 'Jerusalem shall be builded as a city without walls ... for I will be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her.' And that exuberant promise was spoken about the Jerusalem over which Christ wept when he foresaw its inevitable destruction. When the Romans had cast a torch into the Temple, and the streets of the city were running with blood, what had become of Zechariah's dream of a wall of fire round about her? Then can the divine fire be quenched? Yes. And who quenched it? Not the Romans, but the people that lived within that flaming rampart. The apparent failure of the promise carries the lesson for churches and individuals to-day, that in spite of such glowing predictions, there may again sound the voice that the legend says was heard within the Temple, on the night before Jerusalem fell. 'Let us depart,' and there was a rustling of unseen wings, and on the morrow the legionaries were in the shrine. 'If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.' Now let us look, in the simplest possible way, at these three clauses, and the promises that are in them; keeping in mind that, like all the divine promises, they are conditional. The first is this: -- I. 'I will be a wall of fire round about her.' I need not dwell on the vividness and beauty of that metaphor. These encircling flames will consume all antagonism, and defy all approach. But let me remind you that the conditional promise was intended for Judaea and Jerusalem, and was fulfilled in literal fact. So long as the city obeyed and trusted God it was impregnable, though all the nations stood round about it, like dogs round a sheep. The fulfilment of the promise has passed over, with all the rest that characterised Israel's position, to the Christian Church, and to-day, in the midst of all the agitations of opinion, and all the vauntings of men about an effete Christianity, and dead churches, it is as true as ever it was that the living Church of God is eternal. If it had not been that there was a God as a wall of fire round about the Church, it would have been wiped off the face of the earth long ago. If nothing else had killed it the faults of its members would have done so. The continuance of the Church is a perpetual miracle, when you take into account the weakness, and the errors, and the follies, and the stupidities, and the narrownesses, and the sins, of the people who in any given day represent it. That it should stand at all, and that it should conquer, seems to me to be as plain a demonstration of the present working of God, as is the existence still, as a separate individuality amongst the peoples of the earth, of His ancient people, the Jews. Who was it who said, when somebody asked him for the best proof of the truth of Christianity, 'The Jews'? and so we may say, if you want a demonstration that God is working in the world, 'Look at the continuance of the

Christian Church.' In spite of all the vauntings of people that have already discounted its fall, and are talking as if it needed no more to be reckoned with, that calm confidence is the spirit in which we are to look around and forward. It does not become any Christian ever to have the smallest scintillation of a fear that the ship that bears Jesus Christ can fail to come to land, or can sink in the midst of the waters. There was once a timid would-be helper who put out his hand to hold up the Ark of God. He need not have been afraid. The oxen might stumble, and the cart roll about, but the Ark was safe and stable. A great deal may go, but the wall of fire will be around the Church. In regard to its existence, as in regard to the immortal being of each of its members, the great word remains for ever true: 'Because I live ye shall live also.' But do not let us forget that this great promise does not belong only to the Church as a whole, but that we have each to bring it down to our own individual lives, and to be quite sure of this, that in spite of all that sense says, in spite of all that quivering hearts and weeping eyes may seem to prove, there is a wall of fire round each of us, if we are keeping near Jesus Christ, through which it is as impossible that any real evil should pass and get at us, as it would be impossible that any living thing should pass through the flaming battlements that the Prophet saw round his ideal city. Only we have to interpret that promise by faith and not by sense, and we have to make it possible that it shall be fulfilled by keeping inside the wall, and trusting to it. As faith dwindles, the fiery wall burns dim, and evil can get across its embers, and can get at us. Keep within the battlements, and they will flame up bright and impassable, with a fire that on the outer side consumes, but to those within is a fire that cherishes and warms. II. The next point of the promise passes into a more intimate region. It is well to have a defence from that which is without us; but it is more needful to have, if a comparison can be made between the two, a glory 'in the midst' of us. The one is external defence; the other inward illumination, with all which light symbolises -- knowledge, joy, purity. There is even more than that meant by this great promise. For notice that emphatic little word the -- the glory, not a glory -- in the midst of her. Now you all know what 'the glory' was. It was that symbolic Light that spoke of the special presence of God, and went with the Children of Israel in their wanderings, and sat between the Cherubim. There was no 'Shechinah,' as it is technically called, in that second Temple. But yet the Prophet says, 'The glory' -- the actual presence of God -- 'shall be in the midst of her,' and the meaning of that great promise is taught us by the very last vision in the New Testament, in which the Seer of the Apocalypse says, 'The glory of the Lord did lighten it' (evidently quoting Zechariah), 'and the Lamb is the light thereof.' So the city is lit as by one central glow of radiance that flashes its beams into every corner, and therefore 'there shall be no night there.'Now this promise, too, bears on churches and on individuals. On the Church as a whole it bears in this way: the only means by which a Christian community can fulfil its function, and be the light of the world, is by having the presence of God, in no metaphor, the actual presence of the illuminating Spirit in its midst. If it has not that, it may have anything and everything else -- wealth, culture, learning, eloquence, influence in the world -- but all is of no use; it will be darkness. We are light only in proportion as we are 'light in the Lord.' As long as we, as communities, keep our hearts in touch with Him, so long do we shine. Break the contact, and the light fades and flickers out.The same thing is true, dear brethren, about individuals. For each of us the secret of joy, of purity, of knowledge, is that we be holding close communion with God. If we have Him in the depths of our hearts, then, and only then, shall we be 'light in the Lord.'And now look at the last point which follows, as I have said, as the result of the other two.III. 'Jerusalem shall be without walls.'It is to be like the defenceless villages scattered up and down over Israel. There is no need for bulwarks of

stone. The wall of fire is round about. The Prophet has a vision of a great city, of a type unknown in those old times, though familiar to us in our more peaceful days, where there was no hindrance to expansion by encircling ramparts, no crowding together of the people because they needed to hide behind the city walls; and where the growing community could spread out into the outer suburbs, and have fresh air and ample space. That is the vision of the manner of city that Jerusalem was to be. It did not come true, but the ideal was this. It has not yet come true sufficiently in regard to the churches of to-day, but it ought to be the goal to which they are tending. The more a Christian community is independent of external material supports and defences the better.I am not going to talk about the policy or impolicy of Established Churches, as they are called. But it seems to me that the principle that is enshrined in this vision is their condemnation. Never mind about stone and lime walls, trust in God and you will not need them, and you will be strong and 'established' just in the proportion in which you are cut loose from all dependence upon, and consequent subordination to, the civil power.But there is another thought that I might suggest, though I do not know that it is directly in the line of the Prophet's vision; and that is -- a Christian Church should neither depend on, nor be cribbed and cramped by, men-made defences of any kind. Luther tells us somewhere, in his parabolic way, of people that wept because there were no visible pillars to hold up the heavens, and were afraid that the sky would fall upon their heads. No, no, there is no fear of that happening, for an unseen hand holds them up. A church that hides behind the fortifications of its grandfathers' erection has no room for expansion; and if it has no room for expansion it will not long continue as large as it is. It must either grow greater, or grow, and deserve to grow, less.The same thing is true, dear brethren, about ourselves individually. Zechariah's prophecy was never meant to prevent what he himself helped to further, the building of the actual walls of the actual city. And our dependence upon God is not to be so construed as that we are to waive our own common-sense and our own effort. That is not faith; it is fanaticism.We have to build ourselves round, in this world, with other things than the 'wall of fire,' but in all our building we have to say, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchers watch in vain.' But yet neither Jerusalem nor the Church, nor the earthly state of that believer who lives most fully the life of faith, exhausts this promise. It waits for the day when the city shall descend, 'like a bride adorned for her husband, having no need of the sun nor of the moon, for the glory ... lightens it.' Having walls, indeed, but for splendour, not for defence; and having gates, which have only one of the functions of a gate -- to stand wide open, to the east and the west, and the north and the south, for the nations to enter in; and never needing to be barred against enemies by day, 'for there shall be no night there.'

Chapter 39

A VISION OF JUDGEMENT AND CLEANSING

'And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.2. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? 3. Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the Angel.4. And He answered and spake unto those that stood before Him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him He said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.5. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the Angel of the Lord stood by.6. And the Angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua, saying, 7. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, then thou shalt also judge My house, and shalt also keep My courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by, 8. Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth My servant The BRANCH.9. For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.10. In that day, saith the Lord of Hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree.' -- ZECHARIAH iii.1-10. Zechariah worked side by side with Haggai to quicken the religious life of the people, and thus to remove the gravest hindrances to the work of rebuilding the Temple. Inward indifference, not outward opposition, is the real reason for slow progress in God's work, and prophets who see visions and preach repentance are the true practical men. This vision followed Haggai's prophecy at the interval of a month. It falls into two parts -- a symbolical vision and a series of promises founded on it. I. The Symbolical Vision (vs.1-5). -- The scene of the vision is left undetermined, and the absence of any designation of locality gives the picture the sublimity of indefiniteness. Three figures, seen he knows not where, stand clear before the Prophet's inward eye. They were shown him by an unnamed person, who is evidently Jehovah Himself. The real and the ideal are marvellously mingled in the conception of Joshua the high priest -- the man whom the people saw every day going about Jerusalem -- standing at the bar of God, with Satan as his accuser. The trial is in process when the Prophet is permitted to see. We do not hear the pleadings on either side, but the sentence is solemnly recorded. The accusations are dismissed, their bringer rebuked, and in token of acquittal, the filthy garments which the accused had worn are changed for the full festal attire of the high priest. What, then, is the meaning of this grand symbolism? The first point to keep well in view is the representative character of the high priest. He appears as laden not with individual but national sins. In him Israel is, as it were, concentrated, and what befalls him is the image of what befalls the nation. His dirty dress is the familiar symbol of sin; and he wears it, just as he wore his sacerdotal dress, in his official capacity, as the embodied nation. He stands before the judgment seat, bearing not his own but the people's sins. Two great truths are thereby taught, which are as true to-day as ever. The first is that representation is essential to priesthood. It was so in shadowy and external fashion in Israel; it is so in deepest and most blessed reality in Christ's priesthood. He stands before God as our

representative -- 'And the Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.' If by faith we unite ourselves with Him, there ensues a wondrous transference of characteristics, so that our sin becomes His, and His righteousness becomes ours; and that in no mere artificial or forensic sense, but in inmost reality. Theologians talk of a communicatio idiomatum as between the human and the divine elements in Christ. There is an analogous passage of the attributes of either to the other, in the relation of the believer to his Saviour. The second thought in this symbolic appearance of Joshua before the angel of the Lord is that the sins of God's people are even now present before His perfect judgment, as reasons for withdrawing from them His favour. That is a solemn truth, which should never be forgotten. A Christian man's sins do accuse him at the bar of God. They are all visible there; and so far as their tendency goes, they are like wedges driven in to rend him from God. But the second figure in the vision is 'the Satan,' standing in the plaintiff's place at the Judge's right hand, to accuse Joshua. The Old Testament teaching as to the evil spirit who 'accuses' good men is not so developed as that of the New, which is quite natural, inasmuch as the shadow of bright light is deeper than that of faint rays. It is most full in the latest books, as here and in Job; but doctrinal inferences drawn from such highly imaginative symbolism as this are precarious. No one who accepts the authority of our Lord can well deny the existence and activity of a malignant spirit, who would fain make the most of men's sins, and use them as a means of separating their doers from God. That is the conception here. But the main stress of the vision lies, not on the accuser or his accusation, but on the Judge's sentence, which alone is recorded. 'The Angel of the Lord' is named in verse 1 as the Judge, while the sentence in verse 2 is spoken by 'the Lord.' It would lead us far away from our purpose to inquire whether that Angel of the Lord is an earlier manifestation of the eternal Son, who afterwards became flesh -- a kind of preluding or rehearsing of the Incarnation. But in any case, God so dwells in Him as that what the Angel says God says and the speaker varies as in our text. The accuser is rebuked, and God's rebuke is not a mere word, but brings with it punishment. The malicious accusations have failed, and their aim is to be gathered from the language which announces their miscarriage. Obviously Satan sought to procure the withdrawal of divine favour from Joshua, because of his sin; that is, to depose the nation from its place as the covenant people, because of its transgressions of the covenant. Satan here represents what might otherwise have been called, in theological language, 'the demands of justice.' The answer given him is deeply instructive as to the grounds of the divine forbearance. Note that Joshua's guilt as the representative of the people is not denied, but tacitly admitted and actually spoken of in verse 4. Why, then, does not the accuser have his way? For two reasons. God has chosen Jerusalem. His great purpose, the fruit of His undeserved mercy, is not to be turned aside by man's sins. The thought is the same as that of Jeremiah: 'If heaven above can be measured ... then I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done' (Jer. xxxi.37). Again, the fact that Joshua was 'a brand plucked from the burning' -- that is, that the people whom he represented had been brought unconsumed from the furnace of captivity -- is a reason with God for continuing to extend His favour, though they have sinned. God's past mercies are a motive with him. Creatural love is limited, and too often says, 'I have forgiven so often, that I am wearied, and can do it no more.' He has, therefore he will. We often come to the end of our long-suffering a good many times short of the four hundred and ninety a day which Christ prescribes. But God never does. True, Joshua and his people have sinned, and that since their restoration, and Satan had a good argument in pointing to these transgressions; but God does not say, 'I will put back the half-burned brand in the fire again, since the evil is not burned out of it,' but

forgives again, because He has forgiven before. The sentence is followed by the exchange of the filthy garments symbolical of sin, for the full array of the high priest. Ministering angels are dimly seen in the background, and are summoned to unclothe and clothe Joshua. The Prophet ventures to ask that the sacerdotal attire should be completed by the turban or mitre, probably that headdress which bore the significant writing 'Holiness to the Lord,' expressive of the destination of Israel and of its ceremonial cleanness. The meaning of this change of clothing is given in verse 4: 'I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee.' Thus the complete restoration of the pardoned and cleansed nation to its place as a nation of priests to Jehovah is symbolised. To us the gospel of forgiveness fills up the outline in the vision; and we know how, when sin testifies against us, we have an Advocate with the Father, and how the infinite love flows out to us notwithstanding all sin, and how the stained garment of our souls can be stripped off, and the 'fine linen clean and white,' the priestly dress on the day of atonement, be put on us, and we be made priests unto God. II. The remainder of the vision is the address of the Angel of the Lord to Joshua, developing the blessings now made sure to him and his people by this renewed consecration and cleansing. First (verse 7) is the promise of continuance in office and access to God's presence, which, however, are contingent on obedience. The forgiven man must keep God's charge, if he is to retain his standing. On that condition, he has 'a place of access among those that stand by'; that is, the privilege of approach to God, like the attendant angels. This promise may be taken as surpassing the prerogatives hitherto accorded to the high priest, who had only the right of entrance into the holiest place once a year, but now is promised the entree to the heavenly court, as if he were one of the bright spirits who stand there. They who have access with confidence within the veil because Christ is there, have more than the ancient promise of this vision.The main point of verse 8 is the promise of the Messiah, but the former part of the verse is remarkable. Joshua and his fellows are summoned to listen, 'for they are men which are a sign.' The meaning seems to be that he and his brethren who sat as his assessors in official functions, are collectively a sign or embodied prophecy of what is to come. Their restoration to their offices was a shadowy prophecy of a greater act of forgiving grace, which was to be effected by the coming of the Messiah.The name 'Branch' is used here as a proper name. Jeremiah (Jer. xxiii.5; xxxiii.15) had already employed it as a designation of Messiah, which he had apparently learned from Isaiah iv.2. The idea of the word is that of the similar names used by Isaiah, 'a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a Branch out of his roots' (Isaiah xi.1), and 'a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground' (Isaiah liii.2); namely, that of his origin from the fallen house of David, and the lowliness of his appearance.The Messiah is again meant by the 'stone' in verse 9. Probably there was some great stone taken from the ruins, to which the symbol attaches itself. The foundation of the second Temple had been laid years before the prophecy, but the stone may still have been visible. The Rabbis have much to say about a great stone which had been in the first Temple, and there used for the support of the ark, but in the second was set in the empty place where the ark should have been. Isaiah had prophesied of the 'tried corner-stone' laid in Zion, and Psalm cxviii.22 had sung of the stone rejected and made the head of the corner. We go in the track, then, of established usage, when we see in this stone the emblem of Messiah, and associate with it all thoughts of firmness, preciousness, support, foundation of the true Temple, basis of hope, ground of certitude, and whatever other substratum of fixity and immovableness men's hearts or lives need. In all possible aspects of the metaphor, Jesus is the Foundation.And what are the 'seven eyes on the stone'? That may simply be a vivid way of saying that the fulness of divine Providence would watch over

the Messiah, bringing Him when the time was ripe, and fitting Him for His work. But if we remember the subsequent explanation (iv.10) of the 'seven,' as 'the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth,' and connect this with Revelation v.6, we can scarcely rest content with that meaning, but find here the deeper thought that the fulness of the divine Spirit was given to Messiah, even as Isaiah (xi.2) prophesies of the sevenfold Spirit.'I will engrave the graving thereof' is somewhat obscure. It seems to mean that the seven eyes will be cut on the stone, like masons' marks. If the seven eyes are the full energies of the Holy Spirit, God's cutting of them on the stone is equivalent to His giving them to His Son; and the fulfilment of the promise was when He gave the Holy Spirit not 'by measure unto Him.'The blessed purpose of Messiah's coming and endowment with the Spirit is gloriously stated in the last clause of verse 9: 'I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.' Jesus Christ has 'once for all' made atonement, as the Epistle to the Hebrews so often says. The better Joshua by one offering has taken away sin. 'The breadth of Thy land, O Immanuel,' stretched far beyond the narrow bounds which Zechariah knew for Israel's territory. It includes the whole world. As has been beautifully said, 'That one day is the day of Golgotha.'The vision closes with a picture of the felicity of Messianic times, which recalls the description of the golden age of Solomon, when 'Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree' (1 Kings iv.25). In like manner the nation, cleansed, restored to its priestly privilege of free access to God by the Messiah who comes with the fulness of the Spirit, shall dwell in safety, and shall be knit together by friendship, and unenvyingly shall each share his good with all others, recognising in every man a neighbour, and gladly welcoming him to partake of all the blessings which the true Solomon has brought to his house and heart.

Chapter 40

THE RIGHT OF ENTRY

'I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.' -- ZECHARIAH iii.7. A WORD or two of explanation will probably be necessary in order to see the full meaning of this great promise. The Prophet has just been describing a vision of judgment which he saw, in which the high priest, as representative of the nation, stood before the Angel of the Lord as an unclean person. He is cleansed and clothed, his foul raiment stripped off him, and a fair priestly garment, with 'Holiness to the Lord' written on the front of it, put upon him. And then follow a series of promises, of which the climax is the one that I have read. 'I will give thee a place of access,' says the Revised Version, instead of 'places to walk'; 'I will give thee a place of access among those that stand by'; the attendant angels are dimly seen surrounding their Lord. And so the promise of my text, in highly figurative fashion, is that of free and unrestrained approach to God, of a life that is like that of the angels that stand before His Face. So, then, the words suggest to us, first, what a Christian life may be. There are two images blended together in the great words of my text; the one is that of a king's court, the other is that of a temple. With regard to the former it is a privilege given to the highest nobles of a kingdom -- or it was so in old days -- to have the right of entree, at all moments and in all circumstances, to the monarch. With regard to the latter, the prerogative of the high priest, who was the recipient of this promise, as to access to the Temple, was a very restricted one. Once a year, with the blood that prevented his annihilation by the brightness of the Presence into which he ventured, he passed within the veil, and stood before that mysterious Light that coruscated in the darkness of the Holy of Holies. But this High Priest is promised an access on all days and at all times; and that He may stand there, beside and like the seraphim, who with one pair of wings veiled their faces in token of the incapacity of the creature to behold the Creator; 'with twain veiled their feet' in token of the unworthiness of creatural activities to be set before Him, 'and with twain did fly' in token of their willingness to serve Him with all their energies. This Priest passes within the veil when He will. Or, to put away the two metaphors, and to come to the reality far greater than either of them, we can, whensoever we please, pass into the presence before which the splendours of an earthly monarch's court shrink into vulgarity, and attain to a real reception of the light that irradiates the true Holy Place, before which that which shone in the earthly shrine dwindles and darkens into a shadow. We may live with God, and in Him, and wrap a veil and 'privacy of glorious light' about us, whilst we pilgrim upon earth, and may have hidden lives which, notwithstanding all their surface occupation with the distractions and duties and enjoyments of the present, deep down in their centres are knit to God. Our lives may on the outside thus be largely amongst the things seen and temporal, and yet all the while may penetrate through these, and lay hold with their true roots on the eternal. If we have any religious life at all, the measure in which we possess it is the measure in which we may ever more dwell in the house of the Lord, and have our hearts in the secret place of the Most High, amid the stillnesses and the sanctities of His immediate dwelling. Our Master is the great Example of this, of whom it is said, not only in reference to His mysterious and unique union of nature with the Father in His divinity, but in reference to the humanity which He had in common with us all, yet without sin, that the Son of Man came down from heaven, and even in the act of coming, and when He had come, was yet

the Son of Man 'which is in heaven.' Thus we, too, may have 'a place of access among them that stand by,' and not need to envy the angels and the spirits of the just made perfect, the closeness of their communion, and the vividness of their vision, for the same, in its degree, may be ours. We, too, can turn all our desires into petitions, and of every wish make a prayer. We, too can refer all our needs to His infinite supply. We, too may consciously connect all our doings with His will and His glory; and for us it is possible that there shall be, as if borne on those electric wires that go striding across pathless deserts, and carry their messages through unpeopled solitudes, between Him and us a communication unbroken and continuous, which, by a greater wonder than even that of the telegraph, shall carry two messages, going opposite ways simultaneously, bearing to Him the swift aspirations and supplications of our spirits, and bringing to us the abundant answer of His grace. Such a conversation in heaven, and such association with the bands of the blessed is possible even for a life upon earth. Secondly, let us consider this promise as a pattern for us of what Christian life should be, and, alas! so seldom is. All privilege is duty, and everything that is possible for any Christian man to become, it is imperative on him to aim at. There is no greater sin than living beneath the possibilities of our lives, in any region, whether religious or other it matters not. Sin is not only going contrary to the known law of God, but also a falling beneath a divine ideal which is capable of realisation. And in regard to our Christian life, if God has flung open His temple-gates and said to us, 'Come in, My child, and dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide there under the shadow of the Almighty, finding protection and communion and companionship in My worship,' there can be nothing more insulting to Him, and nothing more fatally indicative of the alienation of our hearts from Him, than that we should refuse to obey the merciful invitation. What should we say of a subject who never presented himself in the court to which he had the right of free entree? His absence would be a mark of disloyalty, and would be taken as a warning-bell in preparation for his rebellion. What should we say of a son or a daughter, living in the same city with their parents, who never crossed the threshold of the father's house, but that they had lost the spirit of a child, and that if there was no desire to be near there could be no love? So, if we will ask ourselves, 'How often do I use this possibility of communion with God, which might irradiate all my daily life?' I think we shall need little else, in the nature of evidence, that our piety and our religious experience are terribly stunted and dwarfed, in comparison with what they ought to be. There is an old saying, 'He that can tell how often he has thought of God in a day has thought of Him too seldom.' I dare say many of us would have little difficulty in counting on the fingers of one hand, and perhaps not needing them all, the number of times in which, to-day, our thoughts have gone heavenwards. What we may be is what we ought to be, and not to use the prerogatives of our position is the worst of sins. Again, my text suggests to us what every Christian life will hereafter perfectly be. Some commentators take the words of my text to refer only to the communion of saints from the earth, with the glorified angels, in and after the Resurrection. That is a poor interpretation, for heaven is here to-day. But still there is a truth in the interpretation which we need not neglect. Only let us remember that nothing -- so far as Scripture teaches us -- begins yonder except the full reaping of the fruits of what has been sown here, and that if a man's feet have not learned the path into the Temple when he was here upon earth, death will not be the guide for him into the Father's presence. All that here has been imperfect, fragmentary, occasional, interrupted, and marred in our communion with God, shall one day be complete. And then, oh! then, who can tell what undreamed-of depths and sweetnesses of renewed communion and of intercourses begun, for the first time then, between 'those that stand by,' and have stood

there for ages, will then be realised?'Ye are come' -- even here on earth -- 'to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born,' but for us all there may be the quiet hope that hereafter we shall 'dwell in the house of the Lord for ever'; and 'in solemn troops and sweet societies' shall learn what fellowship, and brotherhood, and human love may be.Lastly, notice, not from my text but from its context, how any life may become thus privileged.The promise is preceded by a condition: 'If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, then ... I will give thee access among those that stand by.' That is to say, you cannot keep the consciousness of God's presence, nor have any blessedness of communion with Him, if you are living in disobedience of His commandments or in neglect of manifest duty. A thin film of vapour in our sky tonight will hide the moon. Though the vapour itself may be invisible, it will be efficacious as a veil. And any sin, great or small, fleecy and thin, will suffice to shut me out from God. If we are keeping His commandments, then, and only then, shall we have access with free hearts into His presence.But to lay down that condition seems the same thing as slamming the door in every man's face. But let us remember what went before my text, the experience of the priest to whom it was spoken in the vision. His filthy garments were stripped off him, and the pure white robes worn on the great Day of Atonement, the sacerdotal dress, were put upon him. It is the cleansed man that has access among 'those that stand by.' And if you ask how the cleansing is to be effected, take the great words of the Epistle to the Hebrews as an all-sufficient answer, coinciding with, but transcending, what this vision taught Zechariah: 'Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus, ... and having a High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.' Cleansed by Christ, and with Him for our Forerunner, we have boldness and 'access with confidence by the faith of Him,' who proclaims to the whole world, 'No man cometh to the Father but by Me.'

Chapter 41

THE SOURCE OF POWER

'And the Angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, 2. And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold, a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof: 3. And two olive-trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.4. So I answered and spake to the Angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my Lord? 5. Then the Angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my Lord.6. Then He answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.7. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.8. Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 9. The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you.10. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.' -- ZECHARIAH iv.1-10. THE preceding vision had reference to Joshua the priest, and showed him restored to his prerogative of entrance into the sanctuary. This one concerns his colleague Zerubbabel, the representative of civil power, as he of ecclesiastical, and promises that he shall succeed in rebuilding the Temple. The supposition is natural that the actual work of reconstruction was mainly in the hands of the secular ruler. Flesh is weak, and the Prophet had fallen into deep sleep, after the tension of the previous vision. That had been shown him by Jehovah, but in this vision we have the same angel interpreter who had spoken with Zechariah before. He does not bring the vision, but simply wakes the Prophet that he may see it, and directs his attention to it by the question, 'What seest thou?' The best way to teach is to make the learner put his conceptions into definite words. We see things more clearly, and they make a deeper impression, when we tell what we see. How many lazy looks we give at things temporal as well as at things eternal, after which we should be unable to answer the Angel's question! It is not every one who sees what he looks at. The passage has two parts -- the vision and its interpretation, with related promises. The vision may be briefly disposed of. Its original is the great lamp which stood in the tabernacle, and was replaced in the Solomonic Temple by ten smaller ones. These had been carried away at the Captivity, and we do not read of their restoration. But the main thing to note is the differences between this lamp and the one in the tabernacle. The description here confines itself to these: They are three -- the 'bowl' or reservoir above the lamp, the pipes from it to the seven lights, and the two olive-trees which stood on either side of the lamp and replenished from their branches the supply in the reservoir. The tabernacle lamp had no reservoir, and consequently no pipes, but was fed with oil by the priests. The meaning of the variations, then, is plain. They were intended to express the fuller and more immediately divine supply of oil. If the Revised Version's rendering of the somewhat doubtful numerals in verse 2 be accepted, each several light had seven pipes, thus expressing the perfection of its supplies. Now, there can be no doubt about the symbolism of the

tabernacle lamp. It represented the true office of Israel, as it rayed out its beams into the darkness of the desert. It meant the same thing as Christ's words, 'Ye are the light of the world,' and as the vision of the seven golden candlesticks, in Revelation i.12, 13, 20. The substitution of separate lamps for one with seven lights may teach the difference between the mere formal unity of the people of God in the Old Testament and the true oneness, conjoined with diversity, in the New Testament Church, which is one because Christ walks in the midst. Zechariah's lamp, then, called to the minds of the little band of restored exiles their high vocation, and the changed arrangements for the supply of that oil, which is the standing emblem for divine communications fitting for service, or, to keep to the metaphor, fitting to shine, signified the abundance of these. The explanation of the vision is introduced, as at Zechariah i.9, 19, by the Prophet's question of its meaning. His angelic teacher is astonished at his dullness, as indeed heavenly eyes must often be at ours, and asks if he does not know so familiar an object. The Prophet's 'No, my Lord,' brings full explanation. Ingenuously acknowledged ignorance never asks Heaven for enlightenment in vain. First, the true source of strength and success, as shown by the vision, is declared in plain terms. What fed the lamp? Oil, which symbolises the gift of a divine Spirit, if not in the full personal sense as in the New Testament, yet certainly as a God-breathed influence, preparing prophets, priests, kings, and even artificers, for their several forms of service. Whence came the oil? From the two olive-trees, which though, as verse 14 shows, they represented the two leaders, yet set forth the truth that their power for their work was from God; for the Bible knows nothing of 'nature' as a substitute for or antithesis to God, and the growth of the olive and its yield of oil is His doing. This, then, was the message for Zerubbabel and his people, that God would give such gifts as they needed, in order that the light which He Himself had kindled should not be quenched. If the lamp was fed with oil, it would burn, and there would be a Temple for it to stand in. If we try to imagine the feebleness of the handful of discouraged men, and the ring of enemies round them, we may feel the sweetness of the promise which bade them not despond because they had little of what the world calls might. We all need the lesson; for the blustering world is apt to make us forget the true source of all real strength for holy service or for noble living. The world's power at its mightiest is weak, and the Church's true power, at her feeblest, is omnipotent, if only she grasps the strength which is hers, and takes the Spirit which is given. The eternal antithesis of man's weakness at his haughtiest, and God's strength even in its feeblest possessors, is taught by that lamp flaming, whatever envious hands or howling storms might seek to quench it, because fed by oil from on high. Let us keep to God's strength, and not corrupt His oil with mixtures of foul-smelling stuff of our own compounding. Next, in the strength of that revelation of the source of might a defiant challenge is blown to the foe. The 'great mountain' is primarily the frowning difficulties which lifted themselves against Zerubbabel's enterprise, and more widely the whole mass of worldly opposition encountered by God's servants in every age. It seems to bar all advance; but an unseen Hand crushes it down, and flattens it out into a level, on which progress is easy. The Hebrew gives the suddenness and completeness of the transformation with great force; for the whole clause, 'Thou shalt become a plain,' is one word in the original. Such triumphant rising above difficulties is not presumption when it has been preceded by believing gaze on the source of strength. If we have taken to heart the former words of the Prophet, we shall not be in danger of rash overconfidence when we calmly front obstacles in the path of duty, assured that every mountain shall be made low. A brave scorn of the world, both in its sweetnesses and its terrors, befits God's men, and is apt to fulfil its own confidences; for most of these terrors are like

ghosts, who will not wait to be spoken to, but melt away if fairly faced. Nor should we forget the other side of this thought; namely, that it is the constant drift of Providence to abase the lofty in mind, and to raise the lowly. What is high is sure to get many knocks which pass over lower heads. To men of faith every mountain shall either become a plain or be cast into the sea.Then follows, on the double revelation of the source of strength and the futility of opposition, the assurance of the successful completion of the work. The stone which is to crown the structure shall be brought forth and set in its place amid jubilant prayers not offered in vain, that 'grace' -- that is, the protecting favour of God -- may rest on it.The same thought is reiterated and enlarged in the next 'word,' which is somewhat separated from the former, as if the flow of prophetic communication had paused for a moment, and then been resumed. In verse 9 we have the assurance, so seldom granted to God's workers, that Zerubbabel shall be permitted to complete the task which he had begun. It is the fate of most of us to inherit unfinished work from our predecessors, and to bequeath the like to our successors. And in one aspect, all human work is unfinished, as being but a fragment of the fulfilment of the mighty purpose which runs through all the ages. Yet some are more happy than others, in that they see an approximate completion of their work. But whether it be so or not, our task is to 'do the little we can do, and leave the rest with God,' sure that He will work all the fragments into a perfect whole, and content to do the smallest bit of service for Him. Few of us are strong enough to do separate building. We are like coral insects, whose reef is one, though its makers are millions.Zerubbabel finished his task, but its end was but a new beginning of an order of things of which he did not see the end. There are no beginnings or endings, properly speaking, in human affairs, but all is one unbroken flow. One man only has made a real new beginning, and that is Jesus Christ; and He only will really carry His work to its very last issues. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending. He is the Foundation of the true Temple, and He is also the Headstone of the corner, the foundation on which all rests, the apex to which all runs up. 'When He begins, He will also make an end.'The completion of the work is to be the token that the 'angel who spake with me' was God's messenger. We can know that before the fulfilment, but we cannot but know it after. Better to be sure that the message is from God while yet the certainty is the result of faith, than to be sure of it afterwards, when the issue has shattered and shamed our doubts.If we realise that God's Spirit is the guarantee for the success of work done for God, we shall escape the vulgar error of measuring the importance of things by their size, as, no doubt, many of these builders were doing. No one will help on the day of great things who despises that of small ones. They say that the seeds of the 'big trees' in California are the smallest of all the conifers. I do not vouch for the truth of the statement, but God's work always begins with little seeds, as the history of the Church and of every good cause shows. 'What do these feeble Jews?' sneered the spectators of their poor little walls, painfully piled up, over which a fox could jump. They did very little, but they were building the city of God, which has outlasted all the mockers.Men might look with contempt on the humble beginning, but other eyes than theirs looked at it with other emotions. The eyes which in the last vision were spoken of as directed on the foundation stone, gaze on the work with joy. These are the seven eyes of 'the Lord,' which are 'the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth' (Rev. v.6). The Spirit is here contemplated in the manifoldness of His operations rather than in the unity of His person. Thus the closing assurance, which involves the success of the work, since God's eyes rest on it with delight, comes round to the first declaration, 'Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit.' Note the strong contrast between 'despise' and 'rejoice.' What matter the scoffs of mockers, if God approves? What are

they but fools who look at that which moves His joy, and find in it only food for scorn? What will become of their laughter at last? If we try to get so near God as to see things with His eyes, we shall be saved from many a false estimate of what is great and what is small, and may have our own poor little doings invested with strange dignity, because He deigns to behold and bless them.

Chapter 42

THE FOUNDER AND FINISHER OF THE TEMPLE

'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it.' -- ZECHARIAH iv.9. I am afraid that Zerubbabel is very little more than a grotesque name to most Bible-readers, so I may be allowed a word of explanation as to him and as to the original force of my text. He was a prince of the blood royal of Israel, and the civil leader of the first detachment of returning exiles. With Joshua, the high priest, he came, at the head of a little company, to Palestine, and there pathetically attempted, with small resources, to build up some humble house that might represent the vanished glories of Solomon's Temple. Political enmity on the part of the surrounding tribes stopped the work for nearly twenty years. During all that time, the hole in the ground, where the foundations had been dug and a few courses of stones been laid, gaped desolate, a sad reminder to the feeble band of the failure of their hopes. But with the accession of a new Persian king, new energy sprang up, and new, favourable circumstances developed themselves. The Prophet Zechariah came to the front, although quite a young man, and became the mainspring of the renewed activity in building the Temple. The words of my text are, of course, in their plain, original meaning, the prophetic assurance that the man, grown an old man by this time, who had been honoured to take the first spadeful of soil out of the earth should be the man 'to bring forth the headstone with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it!' But whilst that is the original application, and whilst the words open to us a little door into long years of constrained suspension of work and discouraged hope, I think we shall not be wrong if we recognise in them something deeper than a reference to the Prince of David's line, concerning whom they were originally spoken. I take them to be, in the true sense of the term, a Messianic prophecy; and I take it that, just because Zerubbabel, a member of that royal house from which the Messiah was to come, was the builder of the Temple, he was a prophetic person. What was true about him primarily is thereby shown to have a bearing upon the greater Son of David who was to come thereafter, and who was to build the Temple of the Lord. In that aspect I desire to look at the words now: 'His hands have laid the foundation of the house, and His hands shall also finish it.' I. There is, then, here a large truth as to Christ, the true Temple-builder. It is the same blessed message which was given from His own lips long centuries after, when He spoke from heaven to John in Patmos, and said, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last.' The first letter of the Greek alphabet, and the last letter of the Greek alphabet, and all the letters that lie between, and all the words that you can make out of the letters -- they are all from Him, and He underlies everything. Now that is true about creation, in the broadest and in the most absolute sense. For what does the New Testament say, with the consenting voice of all its writers? 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Without Him was not anything made that was made.' His hands laid the foundations of this great house of the universe, with its 'many mansions.' And what says Paul? 'He is the Beginning, in Him all things consist' ... 'that in all things He might have the pre-eminence.' And what says He Himself from heaven? 'I am the First and the Last.' So, in regard to everything in the universe, Christ is its origin, and Christ is its goal and its end. He 'has laid the foundation, and His hands shall also finish it.' But, further, we turn to the application which is the more usual one, and say that He is the Beginner and Finisher of the work of redemption, which is His only from its

inception to its accomplishment, from the first breaking of the ground for the foundations of the Temple to the triumphant bringing forth of the last stone that crowns the corner and gleams on the topmost pinnacle of the completed structure. There is nothing about Jesus Christ, as it seems to me, more manifest, unless our eyes are blinded by prejudice, than that the Carpenter of Nazareth, who grew up amidst the ordinary conditions of infant manhood, was trained as other Jewish children, increased in wisdom, spoke a language that had been moulded by man, and inherited His nation's mental and spiritual equipment, yet stands forth on the pages of these four Gospels as a perfectly original man, to put it on the lowest ground, and as owing nothing to any predecessor, and not as merely one in a series, or naturally accounted for by reference to His epoch or conditions. He makes a new beginning; He presents a perfectly fresh thing in the history of human nature. Just as His coming was the introduction into the heart of humanity of a new type, the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, so the work that He does is all His own. He does it all Himself, for all that His servants do in carrying out the purposes dear to His heart is done by His working in and through them, and though we are fellow-labourers with Him, His hands alone lay every stone of the Temple. Not only does my text, in its highest application, point to Jesus Christ as the Author of redemption from its very beginning, but it also declares that all through the ages His hand is at work. 'Shall also finish it' -- then He is labouring at it now; and we have not to think of a Christ who once worked, and has left to us the task of developing the consequences of His completed activity, but of a Christ who is working on and on, steadily and persistently. The builders of some great edifice, whilst they are laying its lower courses, are down upon our level, and as the building rises the scaffolding rises, and sometimes the platform where they stand is screened off by some frail canvas stretched round it, so that we cannot see them as they ply their work with trowel and mortar. So Christ came down to earth to lay the courses of His Temple that had to rest upon earth, but now the scaffolding is raised and He is working at the top stories. Though out of our sight, He is at work as truly and energetically as He was when He was down here. You remember how strikingly one of the Evangelists puts that thought in the last words of his Gospel -- if, indeed, they are his words. 'He was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God, and they went everywhere, preaching the word.' Well, that looks as if there were a sad separation between the Commander and the soldiers that He had ordered to the front, as if He were sitting at ease on a hill overlooking the battlefield from a safe distance and sending His men to death. But the next words bring Him and them together -- 'The Lord also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.' And so, brethren, a work begun, continued, and ended by the same immortal Hand, is the work on which the redemption of the world depends. II. Notice, secondly, that we have here the assurance of the triumph of the Gospel. No doubt, in the long-forgotten days in which my text was spoken, there were plenty of over-prudent calculators in the little band of exiles who said, 'What is the use of our trying to build in face of all this opposition and with these poor resources of ours?' They would throw cold water enough on the works of Zerubbabel, and on Zechariah who inspired them. But there came the great word of promise to them, 'He shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings.' The text is the cure for all such calculations by us Christian people, and by others than Christian people. When we begin to count up resources, and to measure these against the work to be done, there is little wonder if good men and bad men sometimes concur in thinking that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has very little chance of conquering the world. And that is perfectly true, unless you take Him into the calculation, and then the probabilities look altogether different. We are but like a long row of ciphers, but put one significant

figure in front of the row of ciphers and it comes to be of value. And so, if you are calculating the probabilities of the success of Christianity in the world and forget to start with Christ, you have left out the principal factor in the problem. Churches lose their fervour, their members die and pass away. He renews and purifies the corrupted Church, and He liveth for ever. Therefore, because we may say, with calm confidence, 'His hands have laid the foundation of the house, and His hands are at work on all the courses of it as it rises,' we may be perfectly sure that the Temple which He founded, at which He still toils, shall be completed, and not stand a gaunt ruin, looking on which passers-by will mockingly say, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' When Brennus conquered Rome, and the gold for the city's ransom was being weighed, he clashed his sword into the scale to outweigh the gold. Christ's sword is in the scale, and it weighs more than the antagonism of the world and the active hostility of hell. 'His hands have laid the foundation; His hands shall also finish it.' III. Still further, here is encouragement for despondent and timid Christians. Jesus Christ is not going to leave you half way across the bog. That is not His manner of guiding us. He began; He will finish. Remember the words of Paul which catch up this same thought: 'Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perfect the same until the day of Jesus Christ.' Brethren! if the seed of the kingdom is in our hearts, though it be but as a grain of mustard seed, be sure of this, that He will watch over it and bless the springing thereof. So, although when we think of ourselves, our own slowness of progress, our own feeble resolutions, our own wayward hearts, our own vacillating wills, our many temptations, our many corruptions, our many follies, we may well say to ourselves, 'Will there ever be any greater completeness in this terribly imperfect Christian character of mine than there is to-day?' Let us be of good cheer, and not think only of ourselves, but much rather of Him who works on and in and for us. If we lift up our hearts to Him, and keep ourselves near Him, and let Him work, He will work. If we do not -- like the demons in the old monastic stories, who every night pulled down the bit of walling that the monks had in the daytime built for their new monastery -- by our own hands pull down what He, by His hand, has built up, the structure will rise, and we shall be 'builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.' Be of good cheer, only keep near the Master, and let Him do what He desires to do for us all. God is 'faithful who hath called us to the fellowship of His Son,' and He also will do it.IV. Lastly, here is a striking contrast to the fate which attends all human workers.There are very few of us who even partially seem to be happy enough to begin and finish any task, beyond the small ones of our daily life. Authors die, with books half finished, with sentences half finished sometimes, where the pen has been laid down. No man starts an entirely fresh line of action; he inherits much from his past. No man completes a great work that he undertakes; he leaves it half-finished, and coming generations, if it is one of the great historical works of the world, work out its consequences for good or for evil. The originator has to be contented with setting the thing going and handing on unfinished tasks to his successors. That is the condition under which we live. We have to be contented to do our little bit of work, that will fit in along with that of a great many others, like a chain of men who stand between a river and a burning house, and pass the buckets from end to end. How many hands does it take to make a pin? How many did it take to make the cloth of our dress? The shepherd out in Australia, the packer in Melbourne, the sailors on the ship that brought the wool home, the railwayman that took it to Bradford, the spinner, the weaver, the dyer, the finisher, the tailor -- they all had a hand in it, and the share of none of them was fit to stand upright by itself, as it were, without something on either side of it to hold it up.So it is in all our work in the world, and eminently in our Christian work.

We have to be contented with being parts of a mighty whole, to do our small piece of service, and not to mind though it cannot be singled out in the completed whole. What does that matter, as long as it is there? The waters of the brook are lost in the river, and it, in turn, in the sea. But each drop is there, though indistinguishable.Multiplication of joy comes from division of labour, 'One soweth and another reapeth,' and the result is that there are two to be glad over the harvest instead of one -- 'that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.' So it is a good thing that the hands that laid the foundations so seldom are the hands that finish the work; for thereby there are more admitted into the social gladness of the completed results. The navvy that lifted the first spadeful of earth in excavating for the railway line, and the driver of the locomotive over the completed track, are partners in the success and in the joy. The forgotten bishop who, I know not how many centuries ago, laid the foundations of Cologne Cathedral, and the workmen who, a few years since, took down the old crane that had stood for long years on the spire, and completed it to the slender apex, were partners in one work that reached through the ages.So let us do our little bit of work, and remember that whilst we do it, He for whom we are doing it is doing it in us, and let us rejoice to know that at the last we shall share in the 'joy of our Lord,' when He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. Though He builds all Himself, yet He will let us have the joy of feeling that we are labourers together with Him. 'Ye are God's building'; but the Builder permits us to share in His task and in His triumph.

Chapter 43

THE PRIEST OF THE WORLD AND KING OF MEN

'He shall build the Temple of the Lord ... and He shall be a Priest upon His throne.' -- ZECHARIAH vi.13. A handful of feeble exiles had come back from their Captivity. 'The holy and beautiful house' where their fathers praised Him was burned with fire. There was no king among them, but they still possessed a representative of the priesthood, the other great office of divine appointment. Their first care was to rear some poor copy of the Temple; and the usual difficulties that attend reconstruction of any sort, and dog every movement that rests upon religious enthusiasm, beset them -- strong enemies, and half-hearted friends, and personal jealousies weakening still more their weak forces. In this time of anarchy, of toil at a great task with inadequate resources, of despondency that was rapidly fulfilling its own forebodings, the Prophet, who was the spring of the whole movement, receives a word in season from the Lord. He is bidden to take from some of the returned exiles the tribute-money which they had brought, and having made of it golden and silver crowns -- the sign of kingship -- to set them on the high priest's head, thus uniting the sacerdotal and regal offices, which had always been jealously separated in Israel. This singular action is explained, by the words which he is commanded to speak, as being a symbolic prophecy of Him who is 'the Branch' -- the well-known name which older prophets had used for the Messiah -- indicating that in Him were the reality which the priesthood shadowed, and the rule which was partly delegated to Israel's king as well as the power which should rear the true temple of God among men. It is in accordance with the law of prophetic development from the beginning, that the external circumstances of the nation at the moment should supply the mould into which the promise is run. The earliest of all Messianic predictions embraced only the existence of evil, as represented by the serpent, and the conquest of it by one who was known but as a son of Eve. When the history reaches the patriarchal stage, wherein the family is the predominant conception, the prophecy proportionately advances to the assurance, 'In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' When the mission of Moses had made the people familiar with the idea of a man who was the medium of revelation, then a further stage was reached -- 'a Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your brethren, like unto me.' The kingdom of David prepared the way for the prediction of the royal dignity of the Messiah, as the peaceful reign of Solomon for the expectation of one who should bring peace by righteousness. The approach of national disaster and sorrow was reflected in Isaiah's vision of the suffering Messiah, and that prophet's announcements of exile had for their counterpoise the proclamation of Him who should bring liberty to the captive. So, here, the kingless band of exiles, painfully striving to rear again the tabernacle which had fallen down, are heartened for their task by the thought of the priest-king of the nation, the builder of an imperishable dwelling-place for God. To-day we need these truths not less than Zechariah's contemporaries did. And, thank God! we can believe that, for every modern perplexity, the blessed old words carry the same strength and consolation. If kings seem to have perished from among men, if authorities are dying out, and there are no names of power that can rally the world -- yet there is a Sovereign. If old institutions are crumbling, and must still further decay ere the site for a noble structure be cleared, yet He shall build the Temple. If priest be on some lips a name of superstitious folly, and on others a synonym for all that is despised as effete

in religion, yet this Priest abideth for ever, the guide and the hope for the history of humanity and for the individual spirit. Let us, then, put ourselves under the Prophet's guidance, and consider the eternal truths which he preaches to us too. I. The true hope of the world is a priest. The idea of priesthood is universal. It has been distorted and abused; it has been made the foundation of spiritual tyranny. The priest has not been the teacher nor the elevator of the people. All over the world he has been the ally of oppression and darkness, he has hindered and cramped social and intellectual progress. And yet, in spite of all this, there the office stands, and wherever men go, by some strange perversity they take with them this idea, and choose from among themselves those who, being endowed with some sort of ceremonial and symbolic purity, shall discharge for their brethren the double office of representing them before God, of representing God to them. That is what the world means, with absolute and entire unanimity, by a priest -- one who shall be sacrificer, intercessor, representative; bearer of man's worship, channel of God's blessing. How comes it, that, in spite of all the cruelties and lies that have gathered round the office, it lives, indestructible, among the families of men? Why, because it springs from, and corresponds to, real and universal wants in their nature. It is the result of the universal consciousness of sin. Men feel that there is a gulf betwixt them and God. They know themselves to be all foul. True, as their knowledge of God dims and darkens, their conscience hardens and their sense of sin lessens; but, as long as there is any notion of God at all, there will be a parallel and corresponding conviction of moral evil. And so, feeling that, and feeling it, as I believe, not because they are rude and barbarous, but because, though rude and barbarous, they still preserve some trace of their true relation to God, they lay hold upon some of their fellows, and say, 'Here! be thou for us this thing which we cannot be for ourselves -- stand thou there in front of us, and be at once the expression of our knowledge that we dare not come before our gods, and likewise, if it may be, the medium by which their gifts may come on us, unworthy.' That is a wide-spread and all but universally expressed instinct of human nature. Argue about it as you like, explain it away how you choose, charge the notions of priesthood and sacrifice with exaggeration, immorality, barbarism, if you will -- still the thing remains. And I believe for my part that, so far from that want being one which will be left behind, with other rude and savage desires, as men advance in civilisation -- it is as real and as permanent as the craving of the understanding for truth, and of the heart for love. When men lose it, it is because they are barbarised, not civilised, into forgetting it. On that rock all systems of religion and eminently all theories of Christianity, that leave out priest and sacrifice, will strike and split. The Gospel for the world must be one which will meet all the facts of man's condition. Chief among these facts is this necessity of the conscience, as expressed by the forms in which for thousands of years the worship of mankind has been embodied all but everywhere -- an altar, and a priest standing by its side. I need not pause to remind you how this Jewish people, who have at all events taught the world the purest Theism, and led men up to the most spiritual religion, had this same institution of a priesthood for the very centre of its worship. Nor need I dwell at length on the fact that the New Testament gives -- in its full adhesion to the same idea. We are told that all these sacerdotal allusions in it are only putting pure spiritual truth in the guise of the existing stage of religious development -- the husk, not the kernel. It seems to me much rather that the Old Testament ceremonial -- Temple, priesthood, sacrifice -- was established for this along with other purposes, to be a shadow of things to come. Christ's office is not metaphorically illustrated by reference to the Jewish ritual; but the Jewish ritual is the metaphor, and Christ's office the reality. He is the Priest. And what is the priest whom men crave? The first requisite is

oneness with those whom he represents. Men have ever felt that one of themselves must fill this office, and have taken from among their brethren their medium of communication with God. And we have a Priest who, 'in all things, is made like unto His brethren,' having taken part of their flesh and blood, and being 'in all points tempted like as we are.' The next requisite is that these men, who minister at earth's altars, should, by some lustration, or abstinence, or white robe, or other external sign, be separated from the profane crowd, and possess, at all events, a symbolic purity -- expression of the conviction that a priest must be cleaner and closer to God than his fellows. And we have a Priest who is holy, harmless, undefiled, radiant in perfect purity, lustrous with the light of constant union with God. And again, as in nature and character, so in function, Christ corresponds to the widely expressed wants of men, as shown in their priesthoods. They sought for one who should offer gifts and sacrifices on their behalf, and we have One who is 'a merciful and faithful High Priest to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.' They sought for a man who should pass into the awful presence, and plead for them while they stood without, and we lift hopeful eyes of love to the heavens, 'whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever.' They sought for a man who should be the medium of divine blessings bestowed upon the worshippers, and we know who hath gone within the veil, having ascended up on high, that He might give gifts unto men. The world needs a priest. Its many attempts to find such show how deep is the sense of need, and what he must be who shall satisfy them. We have the Priest that the world and ourselves require. I believe that modern Englishmen, with the latest results of civilisation colouring their minds and moulding their characters, stand upon the very same level, so far as this matter is concerned, as the veriest savage in African wilds, who has darkened even the fragment of truth which he possesses, till it has become a lie and the parent of lies. You and I, and all our brethren, alike need a brother who shall be holy and close to God, who shall offer sacrifices for us, and bring God to us. For you and me, and all our brethren alike, the good news is true, 'we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.' That message quenches the fire on every other altar, and strips the mitre from every other head. It, and it alone, meets fully and for ever that strange craving, which, though it has been productive of so many miseries and so many errors, though it has led to grinding tyranny and dark superstitions, though it has never anywhere found what it longs for, remains deep in the soul, indestructible and hungry, till it is vindicated and enlightened and satisfied by the coming of the true Priest,' made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.'II. Our text tells us, secondly, that 'the priest of the world is the king of men.' 'He shall be a Priest upon His throne.'In Israel these two offices were jealously kept apart, and when one monarch, in a fit of overweening self-importance, tried to unite in his own person the kingly and the priestly functions, 'the leprosy rose up in his forehead,' even as he stood with the censer in his hand, and 'Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death.' And the history of the world is full of instances, in which the struggles of the temporal and spiritual power have caused calamities only less intolerable than those which flowed from that alliance of priests and kings which has so often made monarchy a grinding tyranny, and religion a mere instrument of statecraft. History being witness, it would seem to be a very doubtful blessing for the world that one man should wield both forms of control without check or limitation, and be at once king and priest. If the words before us refer to any one but to Christ, the prophet had an altogether mistaken notion about what would be good for men, politically and ecclesiastically, and we may be thankful that his dream has never come true. But if they point to the Son of David who has died for us, and declare that because He is Priest, He is

therefore King -- oh! then they are full of blessed truth concerning the basis and the nature and the purpose of His dominion, which may well make us lift up our heads and rejoice that in the midst of tyranny and anarchy, of sovereignties whose ultimate resort is force, there is another kingdom -- the most absolute of despotisms and yet the most perfect democracy, whose law is love, whose subjects are every one the children of a King, the kingdom of that Priest-ruler on whose head is Aaron's mitre, and more than David's crown.He does rule. 'The kingdom of Christ' is no unreal fanciful phrase. Take the lowest ground. Who is it that, by the words He spoke, by the deeds He did, by the life He lived, has shaped the whole form of moral and religious thought and life in the civilised world? Is there One among the great of old, the dead yet sceptred sovereigns, who still rule our spirits from their urns, whose living power over thought and heart and deed among the dominant races of the earth is to be compared with His? And beyond that, we believe that, as the result of His mighty work on earth, the dominion of the whole creation is His, and He is King of kings, and Lord of lords, that His will is sovereign and His voice is absolute law, to which all the powers of nature, all the confusions of earth's politics, all the unruly wills of men, all the pale kingdoms of the dead, and all the glorious companies of the heavens, do bow in real though it be sometimes unconscious and sometimes reluctant obedience.The foundation of His rule is His sacrifice; or in other words -- no truer though a little more modern in their sound -- men will do anything for Him who does that for them. Men will yield their whole souls to the warmth and light that stream from the Cross, as the sunflower turns itself to the sun. He that can give an anodyne which is not an opiate, to my conscience -- He that can appeal to my heart and will, and say, 'I have given Myself for thee,' will never speak in vain to those who accept His gift, when He says, 'Now give thyself to Me.'Brethren! it is not the thinker who is the true king of men, as we sometimes hear it proudly said. We need One who will not only show but be the Truth; who will not only point, but open and be, the Way; who will not only communicate thought, but give, because He is, the Life. Not the rabbi's pulpit, nor the teacher's desk, still less the gilded chairs of earthly monarchs, least of all the tents of conquerors, are the throne of the true King. He rules from the Cross. The one dominion worth naming, that over men's inmost spirits, springs from the one sacrifice which alone calms and quickens men's inmost spirits. 'Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ,' for Thou art 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' His rule is wielded In gentleness. Priestly dominion has ever been fierce, suspicious, tyrannous. 'His words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords.' But the sway of this merciful and faithful High Priest is full of tenderness. His sceptre is not the warrior's mace, nor the jewelled rod of gold, but the reed -- emblem of the lowliness of His heart, and of authority guided by love. And all His rule is for the blessing of His subjects, and the end of it is that they may be made free by obedience, emancipated in and for service, crowned as kings by submission to the King of kings, consecrated as priests by their reliance on the only Priest over the house of God, whose loving will rests not until it has made all His people like Himself.Then, dear brethren! amid all the anarchic chaos of this day, when old institutions are crumbling or crashing into decay, when the whole civilised world seems slowly and painfully parting from its old moorings, and like some unwieldy raft, is creaking and straining at its chains as it feels the impulse of the swift current that is bearing it to an unknown sea, when venerable names cease to have power, when old truths are flouted as antiquated, and the new ones seem so long in making their appearance, when a perfect Babel of voices stuns us, and on every side are pretenders to the throne which they fancy vacant, let us joyfully welcome all change, and hopefully anticipate the future. Lifting our eyes from the world, let

us fix them on the likeness of a throne above the firmament that is above the cherubs, and rejoice since there we behold 'the likeness as the appearance of a man upon it.' 'Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee.'III. Our text still further reminds us that the Priest-King of men builds among men the Temple of God.The Prophet and his companions had become familiar in their captivity with the gigantic palaces and temples which Assyrian and Babylonian monarchs had a passion for rearing. They had learned to regard the king as equally magnified by his conquests and by his buildings. Zechariah foretells that the true King shall rear a temple more lasting than Solomon's, more magnificent than those which towered on their marble-faced platforms over the Chaldean plain.Christ is Himself the true Temple of God. Whatsoever that shadowed Christ is or gives. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead. 'The glory' which once dwelt between the cherubim, 'tabernacled among us' in His flesh. As the place of sacrifice, as the place where men meet God, as the seat of revelation of the divine will, the true tabernacle which the Lord hath pitched is the Manhood of our Lord.Christ builds the temple. By faith, the individual soul becomes the abode of God, and into our desecrated spirits there comes the King of Glory. 'Know ye not that ye are the temples of God?' By faith, the whole body of believing men 'are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.'Christ builds this temple because He is the Temple. By His incarnation and work, He makes our communion with God and God's dwelling in us possible. By His death and sacrifice He draws men to Himself, and blends them in a living unity. By the gift of His Spirit and His life, He hallows their wills, and makes them partakers of His own likeness; so that 'coming to Him, we also are built up a spiritual house.'Christ builds the temple, and uses us as His servants in the work. Our prophecy was given to encourage faint-hearted toilers, not to supply an excuse for indolence. Underlying all our poor labours, and blessing them all, is the power of Christ. We may well work diligently who work in the line of His purposes, after the pattern of His labours, in the strength of His power, under the watchfulness of His eye. The little band may be few and feeble; let them not be fearful, for He, the throned Priest, even He, and not they with their inadequate resources, shall build the temple.Christ builds on through all the ages, and the prophecy of our text is yet unfulfilled. Its fulfilment is the meaning and end of all history. For the present, there has to be much destructive as well as constructive work done. Many a wretched hovel, the abode of sorrow and want, many a den of infamy, many a palace of pride, many a temple of idols, will have to be pulled down yet, and men's eyes will be blinded by the dust, and their hearts will ache as they look at the ruins. Be it so. The finished structure will obliterate the remembrance of poor buildings that cumbered its site. This Emperor of ours may indeed say, that He found the city of brick and made it marble. Have patience if His work is slow; mourn not if it is destructive; doubt not, though the unfinished walls, and corridors that seem to lead nowhere, and all the confusion of unfinished toils puzzle you, when you try to make out the plan. See to it, my brother, that you lend a hand and help to rear the true temple, which is rising slowly through the ages, at which successive generations toil, and from whose unfinished glories they dying depart, but which shall be completed, because the true Builder 'ever liveth,' and is 'a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.' Above all, brethren! take heed that you are yourselves builded in that temple. Travellers sometimes find in lonely quarries long abandoned or once worked by a vanished race, great blocks squared and dressed, that seem to have been meant for palace or shrine. But there they lie, neglected and forgotten, and the building for which they were hewn has been reared without them. Beware lest God's grand temple should be built up without you, and you be left to desolation and decay. Trust your souls to

Christ, and He will set you in the spiritual house which the King greater than Solomon is building still. In one of the mosques of Damascus, which has been a Christian church, and before that was a heathen temple, the portal bears, deep cut in Greek characters, the inscription, 'Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.' The confident words seem contradicted by the twelve centuries of Mohammedanism on which they have looked down. But though their silent prophecy is unheeded and unheard by the worshippers below, it shall be proved true one day, and the crescent shall wane before the steady light of the Sun of Righteousness. The words are carven deep over the portals of the temple which Christ rears; and though men may not be able to read them, and may not believe them if they do, though for centuries traffickers have defiled its courts, and base-born usurpers have set up their petty thrones, yet the writing stands sure, a dumb witness against the transient lies, a patient prophet of the eternal truth. And when all false faiths, and their priests who have oppressed men and traduced God, have vanished; and when kings that have prostituted their great and godlike office to personal advancement and dynastic ambition are forgotten; and when every shrine reared for obscene and bloody rites, or for superficial and formal worship, has been cast to the ground, then from out of the confusion and desolation shall gleam the temple of God, which is the refuge of men, and on the one throne of the universe shall sit the Eternal Priest -- our Brother, Jesus the Christ.* * * * *

Chapter 44

A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

'A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a master, where is My fear? saith the Lord of Hosts unto you, O priests, that despise My Name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised Thy Name? 7. Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar. And ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee?' -- MALACHI i.6, 7.A charactistic of this latest of the prophets is the vivacious dialogue of which our text affords one example. God speaks and the people question His word, which in reply He reiterates still more strongly. The other instances of its occurrence may here be briefly noted, and we shall find that they cover all the aspects of the divine speech to men, whether He charges sin home upon them or pronounces threatenings of judgment, or invites by gracious promises the penitent to return. His charges of sin are repelled in our text and in the following verse by the indignant question, 'Wherein have we polluted Thee?' And similarly in the next chapter the divine accusation, 'Ye have wearied the Lord with your words,' is thrown back with the contemptuous retort, 'Wherein have we wearied Him?' And in like manner in the third chapter, 'Ye have robbed Me,' calls forth no confession but only the defiant answer,' Wherein have we robbed Thee?' And in a later verse, the accusation, 'Your words have been stout against Me,' is traversed by the question, 'What have we spoken so much against Thee?' Similarly the threatening of judgment that the Lord will 'cut off' the men that 'profane the holiness of the Lord' calls forth only the rebutting question, 'Wherefore?' (ii.14). And even the gracious invitation, 'Return unto Me, and I will return unto you,' evokes not penitence, but the stiff-necked reply, 'Wherein shall we return?' (iii.7). In this sermon we may deal with the first of these three cases, and consider, God's Indictment, and man's plea of 'Not guilty.'I. God's Indictment.The precise nature of the charge is to be carefully considered. The Name is the sum of the revealed character, and that Name has been despised. The charge is not that it has been blasphemed, but that it has been neglected, or under-estimated, or cared little about. The pollution of the table of the Lord is the overt act by which the attitude of mind and heart expressed in despising His Name is manifested; but the overt act is secondary and not primary -- a symptom of a deeper-lying disease. And herein our Prophet is true to the whole tenor of the Old Testament teaching, which draws its indictment against men primarily in regard to their attitude, and only as a manifestation of that, to their acts. The same deed may be, if estimated in relation to human law, a crime: if estimated in relation to godless ethics, a wrong; and if estimated in the only right way, namely, the attitude towards God which it reveals, a sin. 'The despising of His Name' may be taken as the very definition of sin. It is usual with men to-day to say that 'Sin is selfishness'; but that statement does not go deep enough unless it be recognised that self-regard only becomes sin when it rears its puny self in opposition to, or in disregard of, the plain will of God. The 'New Theology,' of course, minimises, even where it does not, as it to be consistent should, deny the possibility of sin: for, if God is all and all is God, there can be no opposition, there can be no divine will to be opposed, and no human will to oppose it. But the fact of sin certified by men's own consciences is the rock on which Pantheism must always strike and sink. A superficial view of human history and of human nature may try to explain away the fact of sin by shallow talk about 'heredity' and 'environment,' or about 'ignorance' and 'mistakes'; but after all such euphemistic attempts to

rechristen the ugly thing by beguiling names, the fact remains, and conscience bears sometimes unwilling witness to its existence, that men do set their own inclinations against God's commands, and that there is in them that which is 'not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' The root of all sin is the despising of His Name.And as sin has but one root, it has many branches, and as working backwards from deed to motive, we find one common element in all the various acts; so working outwards from motive to deed, we have to see one common character stamped upon a tragical variety of acts. The poison-water is exhibited in many variously coloured and tasted draughts, but however unlike each other they may be, it is always the same.The great effort of God's love is to press home this consciousness of despising His Name upon all hearts. The sorrows, losses, and disappointments which come to us all are not meant only to make us suffer, but through suffering to lead us to recognise how far we have wandered from our Father, and to bring us back to His heart and our home. The beginning of all good in us is the contrite acknowledgment of our evil. Christ's first preaching was the continuation of John's message, 'Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'; and His tenderest revelation of the divine love incarnated in Himself was meant to arouse the penitent confession, 'I am no more worthy to be called Thy son,' and the quickening resolve, 'I will arise and go to my Father.' There is no way to God but through the narrow gate of repentance. There is no true reception of the gift of Christ which does not begin with a vivid and heart-broken consciousness of my own sin. We can pass into, and abide in, the large room of joyous acceptance and fellowship, but we must reach it by a narrow path walled in by gloomy rocks and trodden with bleeding feet. The penitent knowledge of oar sin is the first step towards the triumphant knowledge of Christ's righteousness as ours. Only they who have called out in the agony of their souls, 'Lord, save us, we perish,' have truly learned the love of God, and truly possess the salvation that is in Christ. II. Man's plea of 'Not Guilty.'That such an answer should be given to such a charge is a strange, solemn fact, which tragically confirms the true indictment. The effect of all sin is to make us less conscious of its presence, as persons in an unventilated room are not aware of its closeness. It is with profound truth that the Apostle speaks of being hardened by the 'deceitfulness' of sin. It comes to us in a cloud and enfolds us in obscure mist. Like white ants, it never works in the open, but makes a tunnel or burrows under ground, and, hidden in some piece of furniture, eats away all its substance whilst it seems perfectly solid. The man's perception of the standard of duty is enfeebled. We lose our sense of the moral character of any habitual action, just as a man who has lived all his life in a slum sees little of its hideousness, and knows nothing of green fields and fresh air. Conscience is silenced by being neglected. It can be wrongly educated and perverted, so that it may regard sin as doing God's service; and the only judgment in which it can be absolutely trusted is the declaration that it is right to do right, while all its other decisions as to what is right may be biassed by self-interest; but the force with which it pronounces its only unalterable decision depends on the whole tenor of the life of the man. The sins which are most in accordance with our characters, and are therefore most deeply rooted in us, are those which we are least likely to recognise as sins. So, the more sinful we are, the less we know it; therefore there is need for a fixed standard outside of us. The light on the deck cannot guide us; there must be the lighthouse on the rock. This sad answer of the heart untouched by God's appeal prevents all further access of God's love to that heart. That love can only enter when the reply to its indictment is, 'I have despised Thy name.'Let us not forget the New Testament modification of the divine accusation. 'In Christ' is the Name of God fully and finally revealed to men. For us who live in the blaze of the ineffable brightness of the

revelation, our attitude towards Him who brings it is the test of our 'hallowing of the Name' which He brings. He Himself has varied Malachi's indictment when He said, 'He that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me.' Our sin is now to be measured by our under-estimate and neglect of Him, and chiefly of His Cross. That Cross prevents our consciousness of sin from becoming despair of pardon. Judas went out, and with bitter weeping, himself ended his traitorous life. If God's last word to us were, 'Ye have despised My Name,' and it sank into our souls, there would be no hope for any of us. But the message which begins with the universal indictment of sin passes into the message which holds forth forgiveness and freedom as universal as the sin, and 'God hath concluded all in unbelief that He may have mercy upon all.'

Chapter 45

BLEMISHED OFFERINGS

'Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts.' -- MALACHI i.8. A word of explanation may indicate my purpose in selecting this, I am afraid, unfamiliar text. The Prophet has been vehemently rebuking a characteristic mean practice of the priests, who were offering maimed and diseased animals in sacrifice. They were probably dishonest as well as mean, because the worshippers would bring sound beasts, and the priests, for their own profit, slipped in a worthless animal, and kept the valuable one for themselves. They had become so habituated to this piece of economical religion, that they saw no harm in it, and when they offered the lame and the sick and the blind for sacrifice they said to themselves, 'It is not evil.' And so Malachi, with the sudden sharp thrust of my text, tries to rouse their torpid consciences. He says to them: 'Take that diseased creature that you are not ashamed to lay on God's altar, and try what the governor' -- the official appointed by the Persian Kings to rule over the returned exiles -- 'will think about it. Will an offering of that sort be considered a compliment or an insult? Do you think it will smooth your way or help your suit with him? Surely God deserves as much reverence as the deputy of Artaxerxes. Surely what is not good enough for a Persian satrap is not good enough for the Lord of Hosts. Offer it to the governor, will he be pleased with it? Will he accept thy person?' Now, it seems to me that this cheap religion of the priests, and this scathing irony of the Prophet's counsel need little modification to fit us very closely. You will bear me witness, I think, that I do not often speak to you about money. But I am going to try to bring out something about the great subject of Christian administration of earthly possessions from this text, because I believe that the Christian consciousness of this generation does need a great deal of rousing and instructing about this matter. I. We note the startling and strange contrast which the text suggests. The diseased lamb was laid without scruple or hesitation on God's altar, and not one of these tricky priests durst have taken it to Court in order to secure favour there. Generalise that, and it comes to this -- the gifts that we lavish on men are the condemnation of the gifts that we bring to God; and further, we should be ashamed to offer to men what we are not in the least ashamed to bring to God. Let me illustrate in one or two points. Let us contrast in our own consciences, for instance, the sort of love that we give to one another with the sort of love that we bring to Him. How strong, how perennially active, how delighting in sacrifice and service, what a felt source of blessedness is the love that knits many husbands and wives, many parents and children, many lovers and friends together! And in dreadful contrast, how languid, how sporadic and interrupted, how reluctant when called upon for service and sacrifice, how little operative in our lives is the love we bring to God! We durst not lay upon the altar of family affection, of wedded love, of true friendship, a love of such a sort as we take to God and expect Him to he satisfied with. It would be an insult if offered to 'the governor,' but we think it good enough for the King of kings. Here a gushing flood, there a straitened trickle coming drop by drop; here a glowing flame that fills life with warmth and light, there a few dying embers. Measure and contrast the love that is lavished by men upon one another, and the love that is coldly brought to Him. And I think we must all bow our heads penitently. Contrast the trust that we put in one another, and the trust that we direct to Him. In the one case it is absolute. 'I am as sure as I am of my own existence that so-and-so will

always be as true as steel to me, and will never fail me, and whatever he, or she, does, or fails to do, no shadow of suspicion, or mist of doubt, will creep across the sunshine of our sky.' And in contrast to the firm grasp with which we clasp an infirm human hand, there is a tremulous touch, scarcely a grasp at all, which we lay upon the one Hand that is strong enough always to be outstretched for our defence and our blessing. Contrast your confidence in men, and your confidence in God. Are we not all committing the absurdity of absolutely trusting that which has no stability or stay, and refusing so to trust that which is the Rock of Ages? God's faithfulness is absolute, our faith in it is tremulous. Men's faithfulness is uncertain, our faith in it is entire. We might contrast the submission and obedience with which we follow those who have secured our confidence and evoked our love, as contrasted with the rebellion, the reluctance, the self-will, which come in to break and mar our submission to God. Men that will not take Jesus Christ for their Master, and refuse to follow Him when He speaks, will bind themselves to some human teacher, and enrol themselves as disciples in some school of thought or science or philosophy, with a submission so entire, that it puts to shame the submission which Christians render to the Incarnate Truth Himself. And so I might go on, all round the horizon of our human nature, and signalise the difference that exists between the blemished sacrifices which each part of our being dares to bring to God and expects Him to accept, and the sacrifices, unblemished and spotless, which we carry to one another. But let me say a word more directly about the subject of which Malachi is speaking. It seems to me that we may well take a very condemnatory contrast between what we offer to God in regard to our administration of earthly good, and what we offer on other altars. Contrast what you give, for directly beneficent and Christian purposes, with what you spend, without two thoughts, on your own comfort, indulgence, recreation, tastes -- sometimes doubtful tastes -- and the like. Contrast England's drink bill and England's missionary contribution. We spend L10,000,000 on some wretched war, and some of you think it is cheap at the price, and the whole contributions of English Christians to missionary purposes in a twelvemonth do not amount to a tenth of that sum. You offer that to the spread of Christ's kingdom. 'Offer it to your Government,' and try to compound for your share of the ten millions that you are going to spend in shells and gunpowder by the amount you give to Christian missions, and you will very soon have the tax-gatherer down on you. 'Will he be pleased with it?' This one Missionary Society with which we are nominally connected has an income of L70,000 a year. I suppose that is about a shilling per head from the members of our congregations. Of this congregation there are many that never give us a farthing, except, perhaps, the smallest coin in their pockets when the collecting-box comes round. I do not suppose that there is one of us that applies the underlying principle in our text, of giving God our best, to this work. I am not going to urge you. It is my business now simply to state, as boldly and strongly as I can, the fact; and I say with all sadness, with self-condemnation, as well as bringing an indictment against my brethren, but with the clearest conviction that I am not exaggerating in the smallest degree, that the contrast between what we lavish on other things and what we give for God's work in the world, is a shameful contrast, like that other which the Prophet gibbeted with his indignant eloquence. II. And now let me come to another point -- viz., that we have here suggested and implied the true law and principle on which all Christian giving of all sorts is to be regulated.And that is -- give the best. The diseased animal was no more fit for the altar of God than it was for the shambles of the viceroy. It was the entire and unblemished one that would be accepted in either case. But for us Christian people that general principle has to be expanded. Let me do it in two or three sentences.The foundation of all

is 'the unspeakable Gift.' Jesus Christ has given Himself, God has given His Son. And Jesus Christ and God, in giving, gave up that we might receive. Do you believe that? Do you believe it about yourself? If you do, then the next step becomes certain. That gift, truly received by any man, will infallibly lead to a kindred (though infinitely inferior) self-surrender. If once we come within the circle of the attraction of that great Sun, if I might so say, it will sweep us clean out of our orbit, and turn us into satellites reflecting His light. To have self for our centre is death and misery, to have Christ for our centre is life and blessedness. And the one power that decentralises a man, and sweeps him into an orbit around Jesus, is the faithful acceptance of His great gift. Just as some little State will give up its independence in order to be blessedly absorbed into a great Empire, on the frontiers of which it maintains a precarious existence, so a man is never so strong, never so blessed, never so truly himself, as when the might of Christ's sacrifice has melted down all his selfishness, and has made it flow out in rivers of self-surrender, self-absorption, self-annihilation, and so self-preservation. 'He that loseth his life shall find it.'Then the next step is that this self-surrender, consequent upon my faithful acceptance of the Lord's surrender for me, changes my whole conception as to what I call my possessions. If I, in the depths of my soul, have yielded myself to Jesus Christ, which I shall have done if I have truly accepted Him as yielding Himself for me, then the yielding of self draws after it, necessarily, and without a question, a new relation between me and all that I have and all that I can do. Capacities, faculties, means, opportunities, powers of brain and heart and mind, and everything else -- they all belong to Him. As in old times a nobleman came and put his hands between the King's hands, and kneeling before him surrendered his lands, and all his property, to the over-lord, and got them back again for his own, so we shall do, in the measure in which we have accepted Christ as our Saviour and our Guide. And so, because am His, I shall feel that I am His steward to administer what He gives me, not for myself, but for men and for God.Then there follows another thing, and that is, that Christian giving, not of money only, but of money in a very eminent degree, is only right and truly Christian when you give yourself with your gift. A great many of us put our sixpence, or our half-crown, or our sovereign, into the plate, and no part of ourselves goes with it, except a little twinge of unwillingness to part with it. That is how they fling bones to dogs. That is not how you have to give your money and your efforts to God and God's cause. Farmers nowadays sow their seed-corn out of a machine with a number of little conical receptacles at the back of it and a small hole in the bottom of each, and as the thing goes bumping along over the furrows, out they fall. That drill does as well as, and better than, the hand of the sower scattering the seed, but it does not do near as well in the Christian agriculture in sowing the seed of the Kingdom. Machine-work will not do there; we have to have the sower's hand, and the sower's heart with his hand, as he scatters the seed. Brethren! apply the lesson to yourselves, and let your sympathies and your prayers and your wishes to help go along with your gifts, if you intend them to be of any good.And there is another thing, and that is that, somehow or other, if not in the individual gifts, at all events in their aggregate, there must be present the fact of sacrifice. 'I will not offer unto the Lord burnt offerings of that which doth cost me nothing,' said the old king. And we do not give as we ought, unless our gifts involve some measure of sacrifice. From many a subscription list some of the biggest donations would disappear, like the top-writing in one of those old manuscripts where the Gospel has been half-erased and written over with some foolish legend, which vanishes when the detergent liquid is applied to the parchment, if that thought were brought to bear upon it. God asks how much is kept, not how much is given.Now, dear friends, these are all threadbare, elementary,

'A.B.C.' truths. Are they the alphabet of our stewardship and administration of our possessions?III. One last suggestion I would make on this text is that it brings before us the possible blessing and possible grave results of right or wrong Christian giving. 'Will he be pleased with it? Or will he accept thy person?' Will the governor think the hobbling creature, blind of an eye, and infected with some sickness, to be a beautiful addition to his flock? Will it help your suit with him? No!It is New Testament teaching that our faithfulness in the administration of earthly possessions of all sorts has a bearing on our spiritual life. Remember our Lord's triple illustration of this principle, when He speaks about faithfulness 'in that which is least,' leading on to the possession of that which is the greatest; when He speaks of faithfulness in regard to 'the unrighteous Mammon' leading on to being intrusted with the true riches; when He speaks of faithfulness in our administration of that which is another's -- alien to ourselves, and which may pass into the possession of a thousand more -- leading on to our firmer hold, and our deeper and fuller possession of the riches which, in the deepest sense of the word, are our own. One very important element in the development and advance of the religious life is our right use of these earthly things. I have seen many a case in which a man was far better when he was a poor man than he was when a rich one, in which slowly, stealthily, certainly, the love of wealth has closed round a man like an iron band round a sapling, and has hindered the growth of his Christian character, and robbed him of the best things. And, God be thanked! one has seen cases, too, in which, by their Christian use of outward possessions, men have weakened the dominion of self upon themselves, have learned the subordinate value of the wealth that can be counted and detached from its possessor, and have grown in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Dear friends, God has given all of us something in charge, the faithful use of which is a potent factor in the growth of our Christian characters.It is New Testament teaching that our faithful administration of earthly possessions has a bearing on the future. Remember what Jesus Christ said, 'That when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.' Remember what His Apostle says, 'Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.' Let no fear of imperilling the great truth of salvation by faith lead us to forget that the faith which saves manifests its vitality and genuineness, by its effects upon our lives, and that no small part of our lives is concerned with the right acquisition and right use of these perishable outward gifts. And let us take care that we do not, in our dread of damaging the free grace of God, forget that although we do not earn blessedness, here or hereafter, by gifts whilst we are living or legacies when we are dead, the administration of money has an important part to play in shaping Christian character, and the Christian character which we acquire here settles our hereafter.Brethren! we all need to revise our scale of giving, especially in regard to missionary operations. And if we will do that at the foot of the Cross, then we shall join the chorus, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive riches,' and we shall come to Him 'bringing our silver and our gold with us,' rejoicing that He gives us the possibility of sharing His blessedness, 'according to the word of the Lord Jesus which He spake, It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Chapter 46

A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

'The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this ... out of the tents of Jacob, ...14. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth.' -- MALACHI ii.12, 14 (R.V.). It is obvious from the whole context that divorce and foreign inter-marriage were becoming increasingly prevalent in Malachi's time. The conditions in these respects were nearly similar to that prevailing in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is these sins which the Prophet is here vehemently condemning, and for which he threatens to cut off the transgressors out of the tents of Jacob, and to regard no more their offerings and simulated worship. They might cover 'the altar of the Lord with tears,' but the sacrifice which they laid upon it was polluted by the sins of their daily domestic life, and therefore was not 'regarded by Him any more.' Malachi is true to the prophetic spirit when he denounces a religion which has the form of godliness without its power over the practical life. But his sharp accusations have their edge turned by the question, 'Wherefore?' which again calls out from the Prophet's lips a more sharply-pointed accusation, and a solemner warning that none should 'deal treacherously against the wife of his youth,' 'for I hate putting away, saith the Lord.' We may dismiss any further reference to the circumstances of the text, and regard it as but one instance of man's way of treating the voice of God when it warns of the consequences of the sin of man. Looked at from such a point of view the words of our text bring before us God's merciful threatenings and man's incredulous rejection of them. I. God's merciful threatenings. The fact of sin affects God's relation to and dealings with the sinner. It does not prevent the flowing forth of His love, which is not drawn out by anything in us, but wells up from the depths of His being, like the Jordan from its source at Dan, a broad stream gushing forth from the rock. But that love which is the outgoing of perfect moral purity must necessarily become perfect opposition to its own opposite in the sinfulness of man. The divine character is many-sided, and whilst 'to the pure' it 'shows itself pure,' it cannot but be that 'to the froward' it 'will show itself froward.' Man's sin has for its most certain and dreadful consequence that, if we may so say, it forces God to present the stern side of His nature which hates evil. But not merely does sin thus modify the fact of the divine relation to men, but it throws men into opposition in which they can see only the darkness which dwells in the light of God. To the eye looking through a red tinted medium all things are red, and even the crystal sea before the throne is 'a sea of glass mingled with fire.' No sin can stay our reception of a multitude of good gifts appealing to our hearts and revealing the patient love of our Father in heaven, but every sin draws after it as certainly as the shadow follows the substance, evil consequences which work themselves out on the large scale in nations and communities, and in the smaller spheres of individual life. And surely it is the voice of love and not of anger that comes to warn us of the death which is the wages of sin. It is not God who has ordained that 'the soul that sinneth it shall die,' but it is God who tells us so. The train is rushing full steam ahead to the broken bridge, and will crash down the gulph and be huddled, a hideous ruin, on the rocks; surely it is care for life that holds out the red flag of danger, and surely God is not to be blamed if in spite of the flag full speed is kept up and the crash comes. The miseries and sufferings which follow our sins are self-inflicted, and for the most part automatic. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that' -- and not some other crop -- 'will he

also reap.' The wages of sin are paid in ready money; and it is as just to lay them at God's door as it would be to charge Him with inflicting the disease which the dissolute man brings upon himself. It is no arbitrary appointment of God's that 'he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption'; nor is it His will acting as that of a jealous despot which makes it inevitably true that here and hereafter, 'Every transgression and disobedience shall receive its just recompense of reward,' and that to be parted from Him is death. If then we rightly understand the connection between sin and suffering, and the fact that the sorrows which are but the echoes of preceding sins have all a distinctly moral and restorative purpose, we are prepared rightly to estimate how tenderly the God who warns us against our sins by what men call threatenings loves us while He speaks. II. Man's rejection of God's merciful threatenings. It is the great mystery and tragedy of life that men oppose themselves to God's merciful warnings that all sin is a bitter, because it is an evil, thing. He has to lament, 'I have smitten your children, and they have received no correction.' The question 'Wherefore?' is asked in very various tones, but none of them has in it the accent of true conviction; and there is a whole world of difference between the lowly petition, 'Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me,' and the curt, self-complacent brushing aside of God's merciful threatenings in the text. The last thing which most of us think of as the cause of our misfortunes is ourselves; and we resent as almost an insult the word, which if we were wise, we should welcome as the crowning proof of the seeking love of our Father in heaven. We are more obstinate and foolish than Balaam, who persisted in his purpose when the angel with the drawn sword in his hand would have barred his way, not to the tree of life, but to death. The awful mystery that a human will can, and the yet sadder mystery that it does, set itself against the divine, is never more unintelligible, never so stupid, and never so tragic as when God says, 'Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?' and we say, 'Why need I die? I will not turn.' The 'Wherefore?' of our text is widely asked in the present day as an expression of utter bewilderment at the miseries of humanity, both in the wide area of this disordered world and in the narrower field of individual lives. There are whole schools of so-called political and social thinkers who have yet to learn that the one thing which the world and the individual need is not a change of conditions or environment, but redemption from sin. Man's sorrows are but a symptom of his disease, and he is no more to be healed by tinkering with these than a fever-stricken patient can be restored to health by treating the blotches on his skin which tell of the disease that courses through his veins. But sometimes the question is more than an expression of bewilderment; it conceals an arraignment of God's justice, or even a denial that there is a God at all. There are men among us who hesitate not to avow that the miseries of the world have rooted out of their minds a belief in Him; and who point to all the ills under which humanity staggers as conclusive against the ancient faith of a God of love. They, too, forget that that love is righteousness, and that if there be sin in the world and God above it, He must necessarily war against it and hate it. Our right response to God's merciful threatenings is to ask this question in the right spirit. We are not wise if we turn a deaf ear to His warnings, or go on in a headlong course which He by His providences declared to be dangerous and fatal. We use them as wise men should, only if our 'Wherefore?' is asked in order to learn our evil, and having learned it, to purge our bosoms of the perilous stuff by confession and to seek pardon and victory in Christ. Then we shall 'know the secret of the Lord' which is 'with them that fear Him'; and the mysteries that still hang over our own histories and the world's destiny will have shining down upon them the steadfast light of that love which seeks to make men blessed by making them good.

Chapter 47

THE LAST WORD OF PROPHECY

'Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.2. But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: 3. And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.4. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.5. And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift Witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not Me, saith the Lord of Hosts.6. For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.7. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? 8. Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings.9. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation.10. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.11. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of Hosts.12. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of Hosts.' -- MALACHI iii.1-12. Deep obscurity surrounds the person of this last of the prophets. It is questioned whether Malachi is a proper name at all. It is the Hebrew word rendered in verse 1 of our passage 'My messenger,' and this has led many authorities to contend that the prophecy is in fact anonymous, the name being only a designation of office. Whether this is so or not, the name, if it is a name, is all that we know about him. The tenor of his prophecy shows that he lived after the restoration of the Temple and its worship, and the sins which he castigates are substantially those with which Ezra and Nehemiah had to fight. One ancient Jewish authority asserts that he was Ezra; but the statement has no confirmation, and if it had been correct, we should not have expected that such an author would have been anonymous. This dim figure, then, is the last of the mighty line of prophets, and gives strong utterance to the 'hope of Israel'! One clear voice, coming from we scarcely know whose lips, proclaims for the last time, 'He comes! He comes!' and then all is silence for four hundred years. Modern critics, indeed, hold that the bulk of the Psalter is of later date; but that contention has much to do before it can be regarded as established. The first point worthy of notice in this passage, then, is the concentration, in this last prophetic utterance, of that element of forward-looking expectancy which marked all the earlier revelation. From the beginning, the selectest spirits in Israel had set their faces and pointed their fingers to a great future, which gathered distinctness as the ages rolled, and culminated in the King from David's line, of whom many psalms sung, and in the suffering Servant of the Lord, who

shines out from the pages of the second part of Isaiah's prophecy. This Messianic hope runs through all the Old Testament, like a broadening river. 'They that went before cried, Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh.' That hope gives unity to the Old Testament, whatever criticism may have to teach about the process of its production. The most important thing about the book is that one purpose informs it all; and the student who misses the truth that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' has a less accurate conception of the meaning and inter-relations of the Old Testament than the unlearned who has accepted that great truth. We should be willing to learn all that modern scholarship has to teach about the course of revelation. But we should take care that the new knowledge does not darken the old certainty that the prophets 'testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and of the glory that should follow,' Here, at the very end, stands Malachi, reiterating the assurance which had come down through the centuries. The prophets, as it were, had lit a beacon which flamed through the darkness. Hand after hand had flung new fuel on it when it burned low. It had lighted up many a stormy night of exile and distress. Now we can dimly see one more, the last of his order, casting his brand on the fire, which leaps up again; and then he too passes into the darkness, but the beacon burns on. The next point to note is the clear prophecy of a forerunner. 'My messenger' is to come, and to 'prepare the way before Me.' Isaiah had heard a voice calling, 'Prepare the way of the Lord,' and Malachi quotes his words, and ascribes the same office to the 'messenger.' In the last verses of his prophecy he calls this messenger 'Elijah the prophet.' Here, then, we have a remarkable instance of a historical detail set forth in prophecy. The coming of the Lord is to be immediately preceded by the appearance of a prophet, whose function is to effect a moral and religious reformation, which shall prepare a path for Him. This is no vague ideal, but definite announcement of a definite fact, to be realised in a historical personality. How came this half-anonymous Jew, four hundred years beforehand, to hit upon the fact that the next prophet in Israel would herald the immediate coming of the Lord? There ought to be but one answer possible. Another point to note is the peculiar relation between Jehovah and Him who comes. Emphatically and broadly it is declared that Jehovah Himself 'shall suddenly come to His temple'; and then the prophecy immediately passes on to speak of the coming of 'the Messenger of the covenant,' and dwells for a time exclusively on his work of purifying; and then again it glides, without conscious breach of continuity or mark of transition, into, 'And I will come near to you in judgment.' A mysterious relationship of oneness and yet distinctness is here shadowed, of which the solution is only found in the Christian truth that the Word, which was Grod, and was in the beginning with God, became flesh, and that in Him Jehovah in very deed tabernacled among men. The expression 'the Messenger (or Angel) of the covenant' is connected with the remarkable representations in other parts of the Old Testament, of 'the Angel of Jehovah,' in whom many commentators recognise a pre-incarnate manifestation of the eternal Word. That 'Angel' had redeemed Israel from Egypt, had led them through the desert, had been the 'Captain of the Lord's host.' The name of Jehovah was 'in Him.' He it is whose coming is here prophesied, and in His coming Jehovah comes to His temple. We next note the aspect of the coming which is prominent here. Not the kingly, nor the redemptive, but the judicial, is uppermost. With keen irony the Prophet contrasts the professed eagerness of the people for the appearance of Jehovah and their shrinking terror when He does come. He is 'the Lord whom ye seek'; the Messenger of the covenant is He 'whom ye delight in.' But all that superficial and partially insincere longing will turn into dread and unwillingness to abide His scrutiny. The images of the refiner's fire and the fullers' soap imply painful processes, of which the intention is to burn

out the dross and beat out the filth. It sounds like a prolongation of Malachi's voice when John the Baptist peals out his herald cry of one whose 'fan was in His hand,' and who should plunge men into a fiery baptism, and consume with fire that destroyed what would not submit to be cast into the fire that cleansed. Nor should we forget that our Lord has said, 'For judgment am I come into the world.' He came to 'purify'; but if men would not let Him do what He came for, He could not but be their bane instead of their blessing. The stone is laid. If we build on it, it is a sure foundation; if we stumble over it, we are broken. The double aspect and effect of the gospel, which was meant only to have the single operation of blessing, are clearly set forth in this prophecy, which first promises purging from sin, so that not only the 'sons of Levi' shall offer in righteousness, but that the 'offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant,' and then passes immediately to foretell that God will come in judgment and witness against evil-doers. Judgment is the shadow of salvation, and constantly attends on it. Neither Malachi nor the Baptist gives a complete view of Messiah's work, but still less do they give an erroneous one; for the central portion of both prophecies is His purifying energy which both liken to cleansing fire. That real and inward cleansing is the great work of Christ. It was wrought on as many of His contemporaries as believed on Him, and for such as did not He was a swift Witness against them. Nor are we to forget that the prophecy is not exhausted yet; for there remains another 'day of His coming' for judgment. The prophets did not see the perspective of the future, and often bring together events widely separated in time, just as, to a spectator on a mountain, distances between points far away towards the horizon are not measurable. We have to allow for foreshortening. This blending of events historically widely apart is to be kept in view in interpreting Malachi's prediction that the coming would result in Judah's and Israel's offerings being 'pleasant unto the Lord as in former years.' That prediction is not yet fulfilled, whether we regard the name of Israel and the relation expressed in it as having passed over to the Christian Church, or whether we look forward to that bringing in of all Israel which Paul says will be as 'life from the dead.' But by slow degrees it is being fulfilled, and by Christ men are being led to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God. The more directly Messianic part of this prophecy is closed in verse 6 by a great saying, which at once gives the reason for the coming and for its severe aspect of witness against sin. The unchangeableness of God, which is declared in His very name, guarantees the continued existence of Israel. As Paul says in regard to the same subject, 'The calling of God is without change of purpose' (on His part). But it is as impossible that God should leave them to their sins, which would destroy them, as that He should Himself consume them. Therefore He will surely come; and coming, will deliver from evil. But they who refuse to be so delivered will forfeit that title and the pledge of preservation which it implies. A new paragraph begins with verse 7, which is not closely connected with the promises preceding. It recurs to the prevailing tone of Malachi, the rebuke of negligence in attending to the legal obligations of worship. That negligence is declared to be a reason for God's withdrawal from them. But the 'return,' which is promised on condition of their renewed obedience, can scarcely be identified with the coming just foretold. That coming was to bring about offerings of righteousness which should be pleasant to the Lord. This section (vs.7-12) promises blessings as results of such offerings, and a 'return' of Jehovah to His people contingent upon their return to Him. If the two sections of this passage are taken as closely connected, this one must describe the consequences of the coming. But, more probably, this accusation of negligence and promise of blessing on a change of conduct are independent of the previous verses. We, however, may fairly take them as exhibiting the obligations of those who have received that great gift of purifying from

Jesus Christ, and are thereby consecrated as His priests.The key-word of the Christian life is 'sacrifice' -- surrender, and that to God. That is to be stamped on the inmost selves, and by the act of the will, on the body as well. 'Yield yourselves to God, and your members as instruments of righteousness to Him.' It is to be written on possessions. Malachi necessarily keeps within the limits of the sacrificial system, but his impetuous eloquence hits us no less. It is still possible to 'rob God.' We do so when we keep anything as our own, and use it at our own will, for our own purposes. Only when we recognise His ownership of ourselves, and consequently of all that we call 'ours,' do we give Him His due. All the slave's chattels belong to the owner to whom he belongs. Such thorough-going surrender is the secret of thorough possession. The true way to enjoy worldly goods is to give them to God.The lattices of heaven are opened, not to pour down, as of old, fiery destruction, but to make way for the gentle descent of God's blessing, which will more than fill every vessel set to receive it. This is the universal law, not always fulfilled in increase of outward goods, but in the better riches of communion and of larger possession in God Himself. He suffers no man to be His creditor, but more than returns our gifts, as legends tell of some peasant who brought his king a poor tribute of fruits of his fields, and went away from the presence-chamber with a jewel in his hand.

Chapter 48

THE UNCHANGING LORD

'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' MALACHI iii.6. The scriptural revelations of the divine Name are always the basis of intensely practical admonition. The Bible does not think it worth while to proclaim the Name of God without building on the proclamation promises or commandments. There is no 'mere theology' in Scripture; and it does not speak of 'attributes,' nor give dry abstractions of infinitude, eternity, omniscience, unchangeableness, but lays stress on the personality of God, which is so apt to escape us in these abstract conceptions, and thus teaches us to think of this personal God our Father, as infinite, eternal, knowing all things, and never changing. There is all the difference in our attitude towards the very same truth if we think of the unchangeableness of God, or if we think that our Father God is unchangeable. In our text the thought of Him as unchanging comes into view as the foundation of the continuance of the unfaithful sons of Jacob in their privileges and in their very lives. 'I am the Lord,' Jehovah, the Self-existent, the Eternal whose being is not under the limitations of succession and time. 'Because I am Jehovah, I change not'; and because Jehovah changes not, therefore our finite and mortal selves abide, and our infinite and sinful selves are still the objects of His steadfast love. Let us consider, first, the unchangeable God, and second, the unchanging God as the foundation of our changeful lives. I. The unchangeable God. In the great covenant-name Jehovah there is revealed an existence which reverses all that we know of finite and progressive being, or finite and mortal being, or finite and variable nature. With us there are mutations arising from physical nature. The material must needs be subject to laws of growth and decadence. Our spiritual nature is subject to changes arising from the advancement in knowledge. Our moral nature is subject to fluctuations; circumstances play upon us, and 'nothing continueth in one stay.' Change is the condition of life. It means growth and happiness; it belongs to the perfection of creatures. But the unchangeableness of God is the negation of all imperfection, it is the negation of all dependence on circumstances, it is the negation of all possibility of decay or exhaustion, it is the negation of all caprice. It is the assurance that His is an underived, self-dependent being, and that with Him is the fountain of light; it is the assurance that, raised above the limits of time and the succession of events, He is in the eternal present, where all things that were and are, and are to come, stand naked and open. It is the assurance that the calm might of His eternal will acts, not in spasms of successive volitions preceded by a period of indecision and equilibrium between contending motives, but is one continuous uniform energy, never beginning, never bending, never ending; that the purpose of His will is 'the eternal purpose which He hath purposed in Himself.' It is the assurance that the clear vision of His infinite knowledge, from the heat of which nothing is hid, has no stages of advancement, and no events lying nebulous in a dim horizon by reason of distance, or growing in clearness as they draw nearer, but which pierces the mists of futurity and the veils of the past and the infinities of the present, and 'from the beginning to the end knoweth all things.' It is the assurance that the mighty stream of love from the heart of God is not contingent on the variations of our character and the fluctuations of our poor hearts, but rises from His deep well, and flows on for ever, 'the river of God' which 'is full of water.' It is the assurance that round all the majesty and the mercy which He has revealed for our adoration and our trust there is the

consecration of permanence, that we might have a rock on which to build and never be confounded. Is there anywhere in the past an act of His power, a word of His lip, a revelation of His heart which has been a strength or a joy or a light to any man? It is valid for me, and is intended for my use. 'He fainteth not, nor is weary.' The bush burns and is not consumed. 'I will not alter the thing that has gone out of my lips.' 'By two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we have strong consolation.' II. The unchanging God as the foundation of our changeful lives. In the most literal sense our text is true. Because He lives we live also. He is the same for ever, therefore we are not consumed. The foundation of our being lies beyond and beneath all the mutable things from which we are tempted to believe that we draw our lives, and is in God. The true lesson to be drawn from the mutable phenomena of earth is -- heaven. The many links in the chain must have a staple. Reason requires that behind all the fleeting shall be the permanent. There must be a basis which does not partake of change. The lesson from all the mutable creation is the immutable God. Since God changes not, the life of our spirits is not at the mercy of changing events. We look back on a lifetime of changing scenes through which we have passed, and forward to a similar succession, and this mutability is sad to many of us, and in some aspects sad to all, so powerless we are to fix and arrest any of our blessings. Which we shall keep we know not; we only know that, as certainly as buds and blossoms of spring drop, and the fervid summer darkens to November fogs and December frosts, so certainly we shall have to part with much in our passage through life. But if we let God speak to us, the necessary changes that come to us will not be harmful but blessed, for the lesson that the mutability of the mutual is meant to impress upon us is, the permanency of the divine, and our dependence, not on them, but on Him. We may look upon all the world of time and chance and think that He who Himself is unchanging changeth all. The eye of the tempest is a point of rest. The point in the heavens towards which, according to some astronomers, the whole of the solar system is drifting, is a fixed point. If we depend on Him, then change is not all sad; it cannot take God away, but it may bring us nearer to Him. We cannot be desolate as long as we have Him. We know not what shall be on the morrow. Be it so; it will be God's to-morrow. When the leaves drop we can see the rock on which the trees grow; and when changes strip the world for us of some of its waving beauty and leafy shade, we may discern more clearly the firm foundation on which our hopes rest. All else changes. Be it so; that will not kill us, nor leave us utterly forlorn as long as we hear the voice which says, 'I am the Lord; I change not; therefore ye are not consumed.' God's purposes and promises change not, therefore our faith may rest on Him, notwithstanding our own sins and fluctuations. It is this aspect of the divine immutability which is the thought of our text. God does not turn from His love, nor cancel His promises, nor alter His purposes of mercy because of our sins. If God could have changed, the godless forgetfulness of, and departure from, Him of 'the Sons of Jacob' would have driven Him to abandon His purposes; but they still live -- living evidences of His long-suffering. And in that preservation of them God would have them see the basis of hope for the future. So this is the confidence with which we should cheer ourselves when we look upon the past, and when we anticipate the future. The sins that have been in our past have deserved that we should have been swept away, but we are here still. Why are we? Why do we yet live? Because we have to do with an unchanging love, with a faithfulness that never departs from its word, with a purpose of blessing that will not be turned aside. So let us look back with this thought and be thankful; let us look forward with it and be of good cheer. Trust yourself, weak and sinful as you are, to that unchanging love. The future will have in it faults and failures, sins and shortcomings, but rise from

yourself to God. Look beyond the light and shade of your own characters, or of earthly events to the central light, where there is no glimmering twilight, no night, 'no variableness nor shadow of turning.' Let us live in God, and be strong in hope. Forward, not backward, let us look and strive; so our souls, fixed and steadied by faith in Him, will become in a manner partakers of His unchangeableness; and we too in our degree will be able to say, 'The Lord is at my side; I shall not be moved.'

Chapter 49

A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

'Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts. But ye say, Wherein shall we return?' -- MALACHI iii.7 (R.V.). In previous sermons we have considered God's indictment of man's sin met by man's plea of 'not guilty,' and God's threatenings brushed aside by man's question. Here we have the climax of self-revealing and patient love in God's wooing voice to draw the wanderer back, met by man's refusing answer. These three divine utterances taken together cover the whole ground of His speech to us; and, alas! these three human utterances but too truly represent for the most part our answers to Him. I. God's invitation to His wandering child. The gracious invitation of our text presupposes a state of departure. The child who is tenderly recalled has first gone away. There has been a breach of love. Dependence has been unwelcome, and cast off with the vain hope of a larger freedom in the far-off land; and this is the true charge against us. It is not so much individual acts of sin but the going away in heart and spirit from our Father God which describes the inmost essence of our true condition, and is itself the source of all our acts of sin. Conscience confirms the description. We know that we have departed from Him in mind, having wasted our thoughts on many things and not having had Him in the multitude of them in us. We have departed from Him in heart, having squandered our love and dissipated our desires on many objects, and sought in the multiplicity of many pearls -- some of them only paste -- a substitute for the all-sufficient simplicity of the One of great price. We have departed from Him in will, having reared up puny inclinations and fleeting passions against His calm and eternal purpose, and so bringing about the shock of a collision as destructive to us as when a torpedo-boat crashes in the dark against a battleship, and, cut in two, sinks. The gracious invitation of our text follows, 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' Threatenings, and the execution of these in acts of judgment, are no indication of a change in the loving heart of God; and because it is the same, however we have sinned against it and departed from it, there is ever an invitation and a welcome. We may depart from Him, but He never departs from us. Nor does He wait for us to originate the movement of return, but He invites us back. By all His words in His threatenings and in His commandments, as in the acts of His providence, we can hear His call to return. The fathers of our flesh never cease to long for their prodigal child's return; and their patient persistence of hope is but brief and broken when contrasted with the infinite long-suffering of the Father of spirits. We have heard of a mother who for long empty years has nightly set a candle in her cottage window to guide her wandering boy back to her heart; and God has bade us think more loftily of the unchangeableness of His love than that of a woman who may forget, that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb. II. Man's answer to God's invitation. It is a refusal which is half-veiled and none the less real. There is no unwillingness to obey professed, but it is concealed under a mask of desiring a little more light as to how a return is to be accomplished. There are not many of us who are rooted enough in evil as to be able to blurt out a curt 'I will not' in answer to His call. Conscience often bars the way to such a plain and unmannerly reply; but there are many who try to cheat God, and who do to some extent cheat themselves, by professing ignorance of the way which would lead them to His heart. Some of us have learned only too well to raise questions about the method of

salvation instead of accepting it, and to dabble in theology instead of making sure work of return. Some of us would fain substitute a host of isolated actions, or apparent moral or religious observance, for the return of will and heart to God; and all who in their consciences answer God's call by saying, 'Wherein shall we return?' with such a meaning are playing tricks with themselves, and trying to hoodwink God. But the question of our text has often a nobler origin, and comes from the depths of a troubled heart. Not seldom does God's loving invitation rouse the dormant conscience to the sense of sin. The man, lying broken at the foot of the cliff down which he has fallen, and seeing the brightness of God far above, has his heart racked with the question: How am I, with lame limbs, to struggle back to the heights above? 'How shall man be just with God?' All the religions of the world, with their offerings and penances and weary toils, are vain attempts to make a way back to the God from whom men have wandered, and that question, 'Wherein shall we return?' is really the meaning of the world's vain seeking and profitless effort. God has answered man's question; for Christ is at once the way back to God, and the motive which draws us to walk in it. He draws us back by the magnetism of His love and sacrifice. We return to God when we cling to Jesus. He is the highest, the tenderest utterance of the divine voice; and when we yield to His invitation to Himself we return to God. He calls to each of us, 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.' What can we reply but, 'I come; let me never wander from Thee'?

Chapter 50

'STOUT WORDS,' AND THEIR CONFUTATION

'Your words have been stout against Me, saith the Lord: yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against Thee? 14. Ye have said, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts? 15. And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.16. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.17. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.18. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. IV.1. For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.2. But unto you that fear My Name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.3. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet, in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of Hosts.4. Remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.5. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: 6. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.' -- MALACHI iii.13-18; iv.1-6. This passage falls into three parts, -- the 'stout words' against God which the Prophet sets himself to confute (verses 13-15); the prophecy of the day which will show their falsehood (verse 16 to iv.3); and the closing exhortation and prediction (iv.4-6). I. The returning exiles had not had the prosperity which they had hoped. So many of them, even of those who had served God, began to let doubts darken their trust, and to listen to the whispers of their own hearts, reinforced by the mutterings of others, and to ask: 'What is the use of religion? Does it make any difference to a man's condition?' Here had they been keeping God's charge, and going in black garments 'before the Lord,' in token of penitence, and no good had come to them, while arrogant neglect of His commandments did not seem to hinder happiness, and 'they that work wickedness are built up.' Sinful lives appeared to have a firm foundation, and to rise high and palace-like, while righteous ones were like huts. Goodness seemed to spell ruin. What was wrong in these 'stout words'? It was wrong to attach such worth to external acts of devotion, as if these were deserving of reward. It was wrong to suspend the duty of worship on the prosperity resulting from it, and to seek 'profit' from 'keeping his charge.' Such religion was shallow and selfish, and had the evils of the later Pharisaism in germ in it. It was wrong to yield to the doubts which the apparently unequal distribution of worldly prosperity stirred in their hearts. But the doubts themselves were almost certain to press on Old Testament believers, as well as on Old Testament scoffers, especially under the circumstances of Malachi's time. The fuller light of Christianity has eased their pressure, but not removed it, and we have all had to face them, both when our own hearts have ached with sorrow and when pondering on the perplexities of this

confused world. We look around, and, like the psalmist, see 'the prosperity of the wicked,' and, like him, have to confess that our 'steps had wellnigh slipped' at the sight. The old, old question is ever starting up. 'Doth God know?' The mystery of suffering and the mystery of its distribution, the apparent utter want of connection between righteousness and well-being, are still formidable difficulties in the way of believing in a loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful God, and are stock arguments of the unbeliever and perplexities of humble faith. Never to have felt the force of the difficulty is not so much the sign of steadfast faith as of scant reflection. To yield to it, and still more, to let it drive us to cast religion aside, is not merely folly, but sin. So thinks Malachi. II. To the stout words of the doubters is opposed the conversation of the godly. 'Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another,' nourishing their faith by believing speech with like-minded. The more the truths by which we believe are contradicted, the more should we commune with fellow-believers. Attempts to rob us should make us hold our treasure the faster. Bold avowal of the faith is especially called for when many potent voices deny it. And, whoever does not hear, God hears. Faithful words may seem lost, but they and every faithful act are written in His remembrance and will be recompensed one day. If our names and acts are written there, we may well be content to accept scanty measures of earthly good, and not be 'envious of the foolish' in their prosperity. Malachi's answer to the doubters leaves all other considerations which might remove the difficulty unmentioned, and fixes on the one, the prophecy of a future which will show that it is not all the same whether a man is good or bad. It was said of an English statesman that he called a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old, and that is what the Prophet does. Christianity has taught us many other ways of meeting the doubters' difficulty, but the sheet anchor of faith in that storm is the unconquerable assurance that a day comes when the righteousness of providence will be vindicated, and the eternal difference between good and evil manifested in the fates of men. The Prophet is declaring what will be a fact one day, but he does not know when. Probably he never asked himself whether 'the day of the Lord' was near or far off, to dawn on earth or to lie beyond mortal life. But this he knew -- that God was righteous, and that sometime and somewhere character would settle destiny, and even outwardly it would be good to be good. He first declares this conviction in general terms, and then passes on to a magnificent and terrible picture of that great day. The promise, which lay at the foundation of Israel's national existence, included the recognition of it as 'a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people,' and Malachi looks forward to that day as the epoch when God will show by His acts how precious the righteous are in His sight. Not the whole Israel, but the righteous among them, are the heirs of the old promise. It is an anticipation of the teaching that 'they are not all Israel which are of Israel,' And it bids us look for the fulfilment of every promise of God's to that great day of the Lord which lies still before us all, when the gulf between the righteous and the wicked shall be solemnly visible, wide, and profound. There have been many 'days which I make' in the world's history, and in a measure each of them has re-established the apparently tottering truth that there is a God who judgeth in the earth, but the day of days is yet to come. No grander vision of judgment exists than Malachi's picture of 'the day,' lurid, on the one hand, with the fierce flame, before which the wicked are as stubble that crackles for a moment and then is grey ashes, or as a tree in a forest fire, which stands for a little while, a pillar of flame, and then falls with a crash, shaking the woods; and on the otherhand, radiant with the early beams of healing sunshine, in whose sweet morning light the cattle, let out from their pent-up stalls, gambol in glee. But let us not forget while we admire the noble poetry of its form that this is God's oracle, nor that we have each to settle for ourselves

whether that day shall be for us a furnace to destroy or a sun to cheer and enlighten. We can only note in a sentence the recurrence in verse 1 of the phrases 'the proud' and they 'that work wickedness,' from verse 15 of chapter iii. The end of those whom the world called happy, and who seemed stable and elevated, is to be as stubble before the fire. We must also point out that 'the sun of righteousness' means the sun which is righteousness, and is not a designation of the Messiah. Nor can we dwell on the picture of the righteous treading down the wicked, which seems to prolong the previous metaphor of the leaping young cattle. Then shall 'the upright have dominion over them in the morning.' III. The final exhortation and promise point backwards and forwards, summing up duty in obedience to the law, and fixing hope on a future reappearance of the leader of the prophets. Moses and Elijah are the two giant figures which dominate the history of Israel. Law and prophecy are the two forms in which God spoke to the fathers. The former is of perpetual obligation, the latter will flash up again in power on the threshold of the day. Jesus has interpreted this closing word for us. John came 'in the spirit and power of Elijah,' and the purpose of his coming was to 'turn the hearts of the fathers to the children' (Luke i.16, 17); that is, to bring back the devout dispositions of the patriarchs to the existing generations, and so to bring the 'hearts of the children to their fathers,' as united with them in devout obedience. If John's mission had succeeded, the 'curse' which smote Israel would have been stayed. God has done all that He can do to keep us from being consumed by the fire of that day. The Incarnation, Life, and Death of Jesus Christ made a day of the Lord which has the twofold character of that in Malachi's vision, for He is a 'saviour of life unto life' or 'of death unto death,' and must be one or other to us. But another day of the Lord is still to come, and for each of us it will come burning as a furnace or bright as sunrise. Then the universe shall 'discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.'

Chapter 51

THE LAST WORDS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

'Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.' -- MALACHI iv.6. 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.' -- REVELATION xxii.21. It is of course only an accident that these words close the Old and the New Testaments. In the Hebrew Bible Malachi's prophecies do not stand at the end; but he was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and after him there were 'four centuries of silence.' We seem to hear in his words the dying echoes of the rolling thunders of Sinai. They gather up the whole burden of the Law and of the prophets; of the former in their declaration of a coming retribution, of the latter in the hope that that retribution may be averted. Then, in regard to John's words, of course as they stand they are simply the parting benediction with which he takes leave of his readers; but it is fitting that the Book of which they are the close should seal up the canon, because it stands as the one prophetic book of the New Testament, and so reaches forward into the coming ages, even to the consummation of all things. And just as Christ in His Ascension was taken from them whilst His hands were lifted up in the act of blessing, so it is fitting that the revelation of which He is the centre and the theme should part from us as He did, shedding with its final words the dew of benediction on our upturned heads. I venture, then, to look at these significant closing words of the two Testaments as conveying the spirit of each, and suggesting some thoughts about the contrast and the harmony and the order that subsist between them. I. I ask you, first, to notice the apparent contrast and the real harmony and unity of these two texts. 'Lest I come and smite the land with a curse.' That last awful word does not convey, in the original, quite the idea of our English word 'curse.' It refers to a somewhat singular institution in the Mosaic Law according to which things devoted, in a certain sense, to God were deprived of life. And the reference historically is to the judgments that were inflicted upon the nations that occupied the land before the Israelitish invasion, those Canaanites and others who were put under 'the ban' and devoted to utter destruction. So, says my text, Israel, which has stepped into their places, may bring down upon its head the same devastation; and as they were swept off the face of the land that they had polluted with their iniquities, so an apostate and God-forgetting Judah may again experience the same utter destruction falling upon them. If instead of the word 'curse' we were to substitute the word 'destruction,' we should get the true idea of the passage. And the thought that I want to insist upon is this, that here we have distinctly gathered up the whole spirit of millenniums of divine revelation, all of which declare this one thing, that as certainly as there is a God, every transgression and disobedience receives, and must receive, its just recompense of reward. That is the spirit of law, for law has nothing to say, except, 'Do this, and thou shalt live; do not this, and thou shalt die.' And then turn to the other. 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.' What has become of the thunder? All melted into dewy rain of love and pity and compassion. Grace is love that stoops; grace is love that foregoes its claims, and forgives sins against itself. Grace is love that imparts, and this grace, thus stooping, thus pardoning, thus bestowing, is a universal gift. The Apostolic benediction is the declaration of the divine purpose, and the inmost heart and loftiest meaning of all the words which from the beginning God hath spoken is that His condescending, pardoning, self-bestowing mercy may fall upon all hearts, and gladden every soul. So there seems to emerge, and there is, a very real and a very significant contrast. 'I come and

smite the earth with a curse' sounds strangely unlike 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.' And, of course, in this generation there is a strong tendency to dwell upon that contrast and to exaggerate it, and to assert that the more recent has antiquated the more ancient, and that now the day when we have to think of and to dread the curse that smites the earth is past, 'because the true Light now shineth.' So I ask you to notice that beneath this apparent contrast there is a real harmony, and that these two utterances, though they seem to be so diverse, are quite consistent at bottom, and must both be taken into account if we would grasp the whole truth. For, as a matter of fact, nowhere are there more tender utterances and sweeter revelations of a divine mercy than in that ancient law with its attendant prophets. And as a matter of fact, nowhere, through all the thunderings and lightnings of Sinai, are there such solemn words of retribution as dropped from the lips of the Incarnate Love. There is nothing anywhere so dreadful as Christ's own words about what comes, and must come, to sinful men. Is there any depth of darkness in the Old Testament teaching of retribution half as deep, half as black, and as terrible, as the gulf that Christ opens at your feet and mine? Is there anything so awful as the threatenings of Infinite Love?And the same blending of the widest proclamation of, and the most perfect rejoicing confidence in, the universal and all-forgiving love of God, with the teaching of the sharpest retribution, lies in the writings of this very Apostle about whose words I am speaking. There are nowhere in Scripture more solemn pictures than those in that book of the Apocalypse, of the inevitable consequences of departure from the love and the faith of God, and John, the Apostle of love, is the preacher of judgment as none of the other writers of the New Testament are.Such is the fact, and there is a necessity for it. There must be this blending; for if you take away from your conception of God the absolute holiness which hates sin, and the rigid righteousness which apportions to all evil its bitter fruits, you have left a maimed God that has not power to love but is nothing but weak, good-natured indulgence. Impunity is not mercy, and punishment is never the negation of perfect love, but rather, if you destroy the one you hopelessly maim the other. The two halves are needed in order to give full emphasis to either. Each note alone is untrue; blended, they make the perfect chord.II. And now, let me ask you to look with me at another point, and that is, the relation of the grace to the punishment.Is it not love which proclaims judgment? Are not the words of my first text, if you take them all, merciful, however they wear a surface of threatening? 'Lest I come.' Then He speaks that He may not come, and declares the issue of sin in order that that issue may never need to be experienced by us that listen to Him. Brethren! both in regard to the Bible and in regard to human ministrations of the Gospel, it is all-important, as it seems to me at present, to insist that it is the cruellest kindness to keep back the threatenings for fear of darkening the grace; and that, on the other hand, it is the truest tenderness to warn and to proclaim them. It is love that threatens; 'tis mercy to tell us that the wrath will come.And just as one relation between the grace and the retribution is that the proclamation of the retribution is the work of the grace, so there is another relation -- the grace is manifested in bearing the punishment, and in bearing it away by bearing it. Oh! there is no adequate measure of what the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is except the measure of the smiting destruction from which He frees us. It is because every transgression receives its just recompense of reward, because the wages of sin is death, because God cannot but hate and punish the evil, that we get our truest standard of what Christ's love is to every soul of us. For on Him have met all the converging rays of the divine retribution, and burnt the penal fire into His very heart. He has come between every one of us, if we will, and that certain incidence of retribution for our evil, taking upon Himself the whole burden of our sin

and of our guilt, and bearing that awful death which consists not in the mere dissolution of the tie between soul and body, but in the separation of the conscious spirit from God, in order that we may stand peaceful, serene, untouched, when the hail and the fire of the divine judgment are falling from the heavens and running along the earth. The grace depends for all our conceptions of its glory, its tenderness, and its depth, on our estimate of the wrath from which it delivers.So, dear brethren, remember, if you tamper with the one you destroy the other; if there be no fearful judgment from which men need to be delivered, Christ has borne nothing for us that entitles Him to demand our hearts; and all the ascriptions of praise and adoration to Him, and all the surrender of loving hearts, in utter self-abandonment, to Him that has borne the curse for us, fade and are silent. If you strike out the truth of Christ's bearing the results of sin from your theology, you do not thereby exalt, but you fatally lower the love; and in the interests of the loftiest conceptions of a divine loving-kindness and mercy that ever have blessed the world, I beseech you, be on your guard against all teachings that diminish the sinfulness of sin, and that ask again the question which first of all came from lips that do not commend it to us -- 'Hath God said?' or advance to the assertion -- 'Ye shall not surely die.' If 'I come to smite the earth with a curse' ceases to be a truth to you, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' will fade away for you likewise. III. Now, still further, let me ask you to consider, lastly, the alternative which these texts open for us.I believe that the order in which they stand in Scripture is the order in which men generally come to believe them, and to feel them. I am old-fashioned enough and narrow enough to believe in conversion; and to believe further that, as a rule, the course through which the soul passes from darkness into light is the course which divine revelation took: first, the unveiling of sin and its issues, and then the glad leaping up of the trustful heart to the conception of redeeming grace.But what I seek briefly to suggest now is, not only the order of manifestation as brought out in these words, but also the alternative which they present to us, one branch or other of which every soul of you will have to experience. You must have either the destruction or the grace. And, more wonderful still, the same coming of the same Lord will be to one man the destruction, and to another the manifestation and reception of His perfect grace. As it was in the Lord's first coming, 'He is set for the rise and the fall of many in Israel.' The same heat softens some substances and bakes others into hardness. A bit of wax and a bit of clay put into the same fire -- one becomes liquefied and the other solidified. The same light is joy to one eye and torture to another. The same pillar of cloud was light to the hosts of Israel, and darkness and dismay to the armies of Egypt. The same Gospel is 'a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death,' by the giving forth of the same influences killing the one and reviving the other; the same Christ is a Stone to build upon or a Stone of stumbling; and when He cometh at the last, Prince, King, Judge, to you and me, His coming shall be prepared as the morning; and ye 'shall have a song as when one cometh with a pipe to the mountain of the Lord'; or else it shall be a day of darkness and not of light. He comes to me, to you; He comes to smite or He comes to glorify.Oh, brethren! do not believe that God's threatenings are wind and words; do not let teachings that sap the very foundations of morality and eat all the power out of the Gospel persuade you that the solemn words, 'The soul that sinneth it shall die,' are not simple verity.And then, my brethren, oh! then, do you turn yourselves to that dear Lord whose grace is magnified in this most chiefly, that 'He hath borne our sins and carried our sorrows'; and taking Him for your Saviour, your King, your Shield, your All, when He cometh it will be life to you; and the grace that He imparts will be heaven for ever more.* * * * *

Chapter 52

MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST

'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.2. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; 3. And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; 4. And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; 5. And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; 6. And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; 7. And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; 8. And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; 9. And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; 10. And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; 11. And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon: 12. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; 13. And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; 14. And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; 15. And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; 16. And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.' -- MATT.1.1-16. To begin a Gospel with a genealogy strikes us modern Westerns as singular, to say the least of it. To preface the Life of Jesus with an elaborate table of descents through forty-one generations, and then to show that the forty-second had no real connection with the forty-first, strikes us as irrelevant. Clause after clause comes the monotonous 'begat,' till the very last, when it fails, and we read instead: 'Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus.' So, then, whoever drew up this genealogy knew that Jesus was not Joseph's son. Why, then, was he at the pains to compile it, and why did the writer of the Gospel, if he was not the compiler, think it important enough to open his narrative? The answer lies in two considerations: the ruling idea of the whole Gospel, that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah, David's son and Israel's king; and the characteristic ancient idea that the full rights of sonship were given by adoption as completely as by actual descent. Joseph was 'of the house and lineage of David,' and Joseph took Mary's first-born as his own child, thereby giving Him inheritance of all his own status and claims. Incidentally we may remark that this presentation of Jesus as Joseph's heir seems to favour the probability that He was regarded as His reputed father's first-born child, and so disfavours the contention that the 'brethren' of Jesus were Joseph's children by an earlier marriage. But, apart from that, the place of this table of descent at the beginning of the Gospel makes it clear that the prophecies of the Messiah as David's son were by the Hebrew mind regarded as adequately fulfilled by Jesus being by adoption the son of Joseph, and that such fulfilment was regarded as important by the evangelist, not only for strengthening his own faith, but for urging his Lord's claims on his fellow-countrymen, whom he had chiefly in view in writing. Such external 'fulfilment' goes but for little with us, who rest Jesus' claims to be our King on more inward and spiritual grounds, but it stands on the same level as other similar fulfilments of prophecy which meet us in the Gospels; such as the royal entry into Jerusalem, 'riding upon an ass,' in which the outward, literal correspondence is but a finger-post, pointing to far deeper and truer realisation of

the prophetic ideal in Jesus. What, then, did the evangelist desire to make prominent by the genealogy? The first verse answers the question. We need not discuss whether the title, 'The book of the generations of Jesus Christ,' applies to the table of descent only, or to the whole chapter. The former seems the more probable conclusion, but the point to note is that two facts are made prominent in the title; viz. that Jesus was a true Jew, 'forasmuch as He also is a son of Abraham,' and was the true king of Israel, being the 'Son of David,' of whom prophets had spoken such great things. If we would take in the full significance of Matthew's starting-point, we must set by the side of it those of the other three evangelists. Mark plunges at once, without preface or allusion to earlier days, into the stir and stress of Christ's work, slightly touching on the preliminaries of John's mission, the baptism and temptation, and hurrying on to the call of the fishermen, and the busy scenes on the Sabbath in Capernaum. Luke has his genealogy as well as Matthew, but, in accordance with his universalistic, humanist tone, he traces the descent from far behind Abraham, even to 'Adam, which was the son of God,' and he works in the reverse order to Matthew, going upwards from Joseph instead of downwards to him. John soars high above all earthly birth, and begins away back in the Eternities before the world was, for his theme is not so much the son of Joseph who was the son of David and the son of Abraham, or the son of Adam who was the son of God, as the Eternal 'Word' who 'was with God,' and entered into history and time when He 'became flesh.' We must take all these points of view together if we would understand any of them, for they are not contradictory, but complementary. The purpose of Matthew's genealogy is further brought out by its symmetrical arrangement into three groups of fourteen generations each -- an arrangement not arrived at without some free manipulating of the links. The sacred number is doubled in each case, which implies eminent completeness. Each of the three groups makes a whole in which a tendency runs out to its goal, and becomes, as it were, the starting-point for a new epoch. So the first group is pre-monarchical, and culminates in David the King. Israel's history is regarded as all tending towards that consummation. He is thought of as the first King, for Saul was a Benjamite, and had been deposed by divine authority. The second group is monarchical, and it, too, has a drift, as it were, which is tragically marked by the way in which its last stage is described: 'Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time that they were carried away to Babylon.' Josiah had four successors, all of them phantom kings; -- Jehoahaz, who reigned for three months and was taken captive to Egypt; his brother Jehoiakim, a puppet set up by Egypt, knocked down by Babylon; his son Jehoiachin, who reigned eleven years and was carried captive to Babylon; and last, Zedekiah, Josiah's son, under whom the ruin of the kingdom was completed. The genealogy does not mention the names of these ill-starred 'brethren,' partly because it traces the line of descent through 'Jeconias' or Jehoiachin, partly because it despises them too much. A line that begins with David and ends with such a quartet! This was what the monarchy had run out to: David at the one end and Zedekiah at the other, a bright fountain pouring out a stream that darkened as it flowed through the ages, and crept at last into a stagnant pond, foul and evil-smelling. Then comes the third group, and it too has a drift. Unknown as the names in it are, it is the epoch of restoration, and its 'bright consummate flower' is 'Jesus who is called the Christ.' He will be a better David, will burnish again the tarnished lustre of the monarchy, will be all that earlier kings were meant to be and failed of being, and will more than bring the day which Abraham desired to see, and realise the ideal to which 'prophets and righteous men' unconsciously were tending, when as yet there was no king in Israel. A very significant feature of this genealogical table is the insertion in it, in four cases, of the names of the mothers. The four

women mentioned are Thamar a harlot, Rachab another, Ruth the Moabitess, and Bathsheba; three of them tainted in regard to womanly purity, and the fourth, though morally sweet and noble, yet mingling alien blood in the stream. Why are pains taken to show these 'blots in the scutcheon'? May we not reasonably answer -- in order to suggest Christ's relation to the stained and sinful, and to all who are 'strangers from the covenants of promise.' He is to be a King with pity and pardon for harlots, with a heart and arms open to welcome all those who were afar off among the Gentiles. The shadowy forms of these four dead women beckon, as it were, to all their sisters, be they stained however darkly or distant however remotely, and assure them of welcome into the kingdom of the king who, by Jewish custom, could claim to be their descendant. The ruling idea of the genealogy is clearly though unostentatiously shown by the employment of the names 'Jesus Christ' and 'Christ,' while throughout the rest of this Gospel the name used habitually is Jesus. In verse 1 we have the full title proclaimed at the very beginning; then in verse 16, 'Jesus who is called Christ' repeats the proclamation at the end of the genealogy proper, while verse 17 again presents the three names with which it began as towering like mountain peaks, Abraham, David, and -- supreme above the other two, the dominant summit to which they led up, we have once more 'Christ.' Similarly the narrative that follows is of 'the birth of Jesus Christ.' That name is never used again in this Gospel, except in one case where the reading is doubtful; and as for the form 'Jesus who is called Christ,' by which He is designated in the genealogy itself, the only other instance of it is on the mocking lips of Pilate, while the uniform use of Jesus in the body of this Gospel is broken only by Peter in his great confession, and in, at most, four other instances. Could the purpose to assert and establish, at the very outset, His Messianic, regal dignity, as the necessary pre-supposition to all that follows, be more clearly shown? We must begin our study of His life and works with the knowledge that He, of whom these things are about to be told, is the King of Israel.

Chapter 53

THE NATIVITY

'Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.19. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.20. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins.22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.24. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: 25. And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son: and he called His name JESUS.' -- MATT.1.18-25. Matthew's account of the Nativity sets Joseph in the foreground. His pain and hesitation, his consideration for Mary, the divine communication to him, and his obedience to it, embarrassing as his position must have been, take up larger space than the miracle of the birth itself. Probably in all this we have an unconscious disclosure of the source of the evangelist's information. At all events, he speaks as if from Joseph's point of view. Luke, on the other hand, has most to say about Mary's maidenly wonder and meek submission, her swift hurrying to find help from a woman's sympathy, as soon as the Angel of the Annunciation had spoken, and the hymn of exultation which Elisabeth's salutation heartened her to pour forth. Surely that narrative could have come from none but her meek and faithful lips? The two accounts beautifully supplement each other, and give two vivid pictures of these two devout souls, each sharply tried in a different fashion, each richly blessed by variously moulded obedience. Joseph took up his burden, and Mary hers, because God had spoken and they believed. The shock to Joseph of the sudden discovery, crashing in on him after he was bound to Mary, and in what would else have been the sweet interval of love and longing 'before they came together,' is delicately and unconsciously brought out in verse 18. 'She was found' -- how the remembrance of the sudden disclosure, blinding and startling as a lightning flash, lives in that word! And how the agony of perplexity as to the right thing to do in such a cruel dilemma is hinted at in the two clauses that pull in opposite directions! As a 'just man' and 'her husband,' Joseph owed it to righteousness and to himself not to ignore his betrothed's condition; but as her lover and her husband, how could he put her, who was still so dear to him, to public shame, some of which would cloud his own name? To 'put her away' was the only course possible, though it racked his soul, and to do it 'privily' was the last gift that his wounded love could give her. No wonder that 'these things' kept him brooding sadly on them, nor that his day's troubled thinkings coloured his sleeping hours! The divine guidance, which is ever given to waiting minds, was given to him by the way of a dream, which is one of the Old Testament media of divine communications, and occurs with striking frequency in this and the following chapter, there being three recorded as sent to Joseph and one to the Magi. It is observable, however, that to Joseph it is always 'the'or 'an angel of the Lord' who appears in the dream, whereas the dream only is

mentioned in the case of the Magi. The difference of expression may imply a difference in the manner of communication. But in any case, we need not wonder that divine communications were abundant at such an hour, nor shall we be startled, if we believe in the great miracle of the Word's becoming flesh, that a flight of subsidiary miracles, like a bevy of attendant angels, clustered round it. The most stupendous fact in history is announced by the angel chiefly as the reason for Joseph's going on with his marriage. Surely that strange inversion of the apparent importance of the two things speaks for the historical reliableness of the narrative. The purpose in hand is mainly to remove his hesitation and point his course, and he is to take Mary as his wife, for 'that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.' Could 'the superstitious veneration of a later age', which is supposed to have originated the story of a supernatural birth, have spoken so? As addressed to Joseph, tortured with doubts of Mary and hesitations as to his duty, the sequence of the two things is beautifully appropriate, otherwise it is monstrous. The great mystery, which lies at the foundation of Christianity, is declared in the fewest and simplest words. That He who is to show God to men, and to save them from their sins, must be born of a woman, is plainly necessary. Because 'the children are partakers of flesh and blood,' He also must 'take part of the same.' That He must be free from the taint in nature, which passes down to all 'who are born of the will of the flesh or of man,' is no less obviously requisite. Both requirements are met in the supernatural birth of Jesus, and unless both have been met, He is not, and cannot be, the world's saviour. Nor is that supernatural birth less needful to explain His manifestly sinless character than it is to qualify Him for His unique office. The world acknowledges that in Him it finds a man without blemish and without spot. How comes He to be free from the flaws which, like black streaks in Parian marble, spoil the noblest characters? Surely if, after millions of links in the chain, which have all been of mingled metal, there comes one of pure gold, it cannot have had the same origin as the others. It is part of the chain, 'the Word was made flesh'; but it has been cast and moulded in another forge, for it is 'that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.' 'She shall bring forth a son.' The angel does not say, 'a son to thee,' but yet Joseph was to assume the position of father, and by naming the child to acknowledge it as his. The name of Jesus or Joshua was borne by many a Jewish child then. There was a Jesus among Paul's entourage. It recalled the warrior leader, and, no doubt, was often given to children in these days of foreign dominion by fathers who hoped that Israel might again fight for freedom. But holier thoughts were to be Joseph's, and the salvation from God which was expressed by the name was to be of another kind than Joshua had brought. It was to be salvation from sin and from sins. This child was to be a leader too, a conqueror and a king, and the mention of 'His people,' taken in connection with Joseph's having been addressed as 'the son of David,' is most significant. He, too, is to have a subject people, and the deliverance which He is to bring is not political or to be wrested from Rome by the sword, but inward, moral, and spiritual, and therefore to be effected by moral and spiritual weapons. It is the evangelist, not the angel, who points to Isaiah's prophecy. He does so with a certain awe, as he thinks of the greatness of 'all these things'. Undoubtedly the Hebrew word rendered in Matthew, after the Septuagint, 'virgin', does not necessarily imply the full meaning of that word; and as undoubtedly the prophecy, as it stands in Isaiah, pointed to an event to occur in the immediate future; yet it is clear, from the further development of the prophecy by Isaiah, and especially from the fourfold name given to the child in Isaiah ix.6, and the glorious dominion there foretold for Him, that Isaiah conceives of Him as the Messiah. And, since any 'fulfilment' of the glowing prophecies attached to the Child were, in Isaiah's time, but poor and partial, the great Messianic hope was necessarily

trained to look further down the stream of time. He who should fill the role set forth was yet to come. Matthew believed that it was completely filled by Jesus, and we know that he was right. The fulfilment does not depend on the question whether or not the idea of Virginity is contained in the Hebrew word, but on the correspondence between the figure seen by the prophet in the golden haze of his divinely quickened imagination, and the person to be described in the gospel, and we know that the correspondence is complete. The name Immanuel, to be given to the prophetic child, breathed the certainty that in 'God with us' Israel would find the secret of its charmed existence, even while an Ahaz was on the throne. The name takes on a deeper meaning when applied to Him to whom alone it in fullest truth belongs. It proclaims that in Jesus God dwells among us, and it lays bare the ground of the historical name Jesus, for only by a man who is one of ourselves, and in whom God is with us, can we be saved from our sins. The one Name is the deep, solid foundation, the other is the fortress refuge built upon it. He is Jesus, because He is Immanuel. How different the world and his own life looked to Joseph when he woke! Hesitations and agonising doubts of his betrothed's purity had vanished with the night, and, instead of the dread that her child would be the offspring of shame, had come a divinely given certainty that it was 'a holy thing.' In the rush of the sudden revulsion, all that was involved would not be clear, but the duty that lay nearest him was clear, and his obedience was as swift as it was glad. He believed, and his faith took the burden off him, and brought back the sweet relations which had seemed to be rent for ever. The Birth was foretold by the angel in a single clause, it is recorded by the evangelist in another. In both cases, Mary's part and Joseph's are set side by side ('she shall bring forth ... and thou shalt call: she had brought forth ... and he called'), and the birth itself is in verse 25 recorded mainly in its bearing on Joseph's marital relations. Could such a perspective in the narrative be conceived of from any other point of view than Joseph's? We do not enter on the controversy as to whether that 'till' and the expression 'first-born' shut us up to the conclusion that Joseph and Mary had children. The words are not decisive, and probably opinions will always differ on the point. Mediaevally-minded persons will reject with horror the notion that Jesus had brethren in the proper sense of the word, while those who believe that the perfect woman is a happy wife and mother, will not feel that it detracts from Mary's sacredness, nor from her purity, to believe that she had other children than 'her first-born Son'.

Chapter 54

THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME

'... Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins'. -- MATT.1.21. I. THE historical associations of the name. It was a very common Jewish name, and of course was given in memory of the great leader who brought the hosts of Israel to rest in the promised land. There is no sharper contrast conceivable than between Joshua and Jesus. The contrast and the parallel are both most significant. (a) The contrast. Joshua is perhaps one of the least interesting of the Old Testament men; a mere soldier, fit for the fierce work which he had to do, rough and hard, ready and prompt, of an iron will and a brave heart. The one exhortation given him when he comes to the leadership is 'be strong and of a good courage,' and that seems to have been the main virtue of his character. The task he had to do was a bloody one, and thoroughly he did it. The difficulties that have been found in the extermination of the Canaanites may be met by considerations of the changed atmosphere between then and now, and of their moral putrescence. But no explanation can make the deed other than terrible, or the man that did it other than fierce and stern. No traits of chivalrous generosity are told of him, nothing that softens the dreadfulness of war. He showed no touch of pity or compunction, no lofty, statesmanlike qualities, nothing constructive; he was simply a rough soldier, with an iron hand and an iron heel, who burned and slew and settled down his men in the land they had devastated. The very sharpness of the contrast in character is intended to be felt by us. Put by the side of this man the image of Jesus Christ, in all His meekness and gentleness. Does not this speak to us of the profound change which He comes to establish among men? The highest ideal of character is no longer the rough soldier, the strong man, but the man of meekness, and gentleness, and patience. How far the world yet is from understanding all that is meant in the contrast between the first and the second bearers of the name! We have done with force, and are come into the region of love. There is no place in Christ's kingdom for arms and vulgar warfare. The strongest thing is love, armed with celestial armour. 'Truth and meekness and righteousness' are our keenest-edged weapons -- this is true for Christian morals; and for politics in a measure which the world has not yet learned.'Put up thy sword into its sheath,'(b) The parallel.It is not to be forgotten that the work which the soldier did in type is the work which Christ does. He is the true Moses who leads us through the wilderness. But also He is the Captain who will bring us into the mountain of His inheritance.But besides this, we too often forget the soldier-like virtues in the character of Christ.We have lost sight of these very much, but certainly they are present and most conspicuous. If only we will look at our Lord's life as a real human one, and apply the same tests and terms to it which we do to others, we shall see these characteristics plainly enough.What do we call persistence which, in spite of all opposition, goes right on to the end, and is true to conscience and duty, even to death? What do we call the calmness which forgets self even in the agonies of pain on the cross? What do we call the virtue which rebukes evil in high places and never blanches nor falters in the utterance of unwelcome truths?Daring courage. "

Promptness of action. " All conspicuous in Jesus.

Iron will. "It has become a commonplace thing now to say that the bravery which dares to do right in the face of all opposition is higher than that of the soldier who flings away his life on the battlefield. The soldiers of peace are known now to deserve the laurel no less than the heroes of war.But who can tell how much of the modern world's estimate of the superiority of moral courage to mere brute force is owing to the history of the life of Christ?We find a further parallel in the warfare through which He conquers for us the land.His own struggle ('I have overcome'), and the lesson that we too must fight, and that all our religious life is to be a conflict. It is easy to run off into mere rhetorical metaphor, but it is a very solemn and a very practical truth which is taught us, if we ponder that name of the warrior Leader borne by our Master as explained to us by Himself in His words, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'Ps. cx. 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.'II. The significance of the name.Joshua means God is Saviour. As borne by the Israelitish leader, it pointed both him and the people away from him to the unseen and omnipotent source of their victory, and was in one word an explanation of their whole history, with all its miracles of deliverance and preservation of that handful of people against the powerful nations around. It taught the leader that he was only the lieutenant of an unseen Captain. It taught the soldiers that 'they got not the land in possession by their own arms, but because He had a favour unto them.'1. God as Saviour appears in highest manifestation in Jesus.I do not now mean in regard to the nature of the salvation, but in regard to the relation between the human and the divine. Joshua was the human agent through which the divine will effected deliverance, but, as in all helpers and teachers, he was but the instrument. He could not have said, 'I lead you, I give you victory.' His name taught him that he was not to come in his own name. But 'he shall save' -- not merely God shall save through him. And 'his people' -- not 'the people of God'All this but points to the broad distinction between Christ and all others, in that God, the Saviour, is manifest in Him as in none other.We are not detracting from the glory of God when we say that Christ saves us.Christ's consciousness of being Himself Salvation is expressed in many of His words. He makes claims and puts forward His own personality in a fashion that would be blasphemy in any other man, and yet all the while is true to His name, 'God is the Saviour.'The paradox which lies in these earliest words, the great gulf between the name and the interpretation on the angel's lips, is only solved when we accept the teaching which tells us that in that Word made flesh and dwelling among us, we behold 'God manifest in the flesh,' and 'in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.'The name guards us, too, from that very common error of thinking of Christ as if He were more our Saviour than God is. We are not without need of this warning. Christ does not bend the divine will to love, is not more tender than our Father God.2. The Salvation brought by Jesus is in its nature the loftiest.It is with strong emphasis that the angel defines the sphere of salvation as being 'their sins.' The Messianic expectation had been degraded as it flowed through the generations, as some pure stream loses its early sparkle, and gathers scum on its surface from filth flung into it by men. Mere deliverance from the Roman yoke was all the salvation that the mass wanted or expected, and the tragedy of the Cross was foreshadowed in this prophecy which declares an inward emancipation from sin as the true work of Mary's unborn Son. We can discern the Jewish error in externalising and materialising the conception of salvation, but many of us repeat it in essence. What is the difference between the Jew who thought that salvation was deliverance from Rome, and the 'Christian' who thinks that it is deliverance not from sin but from its punishment?We have to think of a liberation from sin itself, not merely from its penalties. This

thought has been often obscured by preachers, and often neglected by Christians, in whom selfishness and an imperfect understanding of the gospel have too often made salvation appear as merely a means of escape from impending suffering. All deep knowledge of what Sin is teaches us that it is its own punishment, and that the hell of hell is to be under the dominion of evil.3. God's people are His people.Israel was God's portion -- and Joshua was but their leader for a time. But the people of God are the people of Christ.The way by which we become the people of Jesus is simply by faith in Him.III. The usage of the name.It was a common Jewish name, but seems to have been almost abandoned since then by Jews from abhorrence, by Christians from reverence.The Jewish fanatic who during the siege stalked through Jerusalem shrieking, 'Woe to the city', and, as he fell mortally wounded, added, 'and to myself also,' was a Jesus. There is a Jesus in Colossians.We find it as the usual appellation in the Gospels, as is natural. But in the Epistles it is comparatively rare alone.The reason, of course, is that it brings mainly before us the human personality of Jesus. So when used alone in later books it emphasises this: 'This same Jesus shall so come'. 'We see Jesus, made a little, etc.'Found in frequent use by two classes of religionists -- Unitarian and Sentimental.We should seek to get all the blessing out of it, and to dwell, taught by it, on the thoughts of His true manhood, tempted, our brother, bone of our bone.We should beware of confining our thoughts to what is taught us by that name. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Even with thoughts of His lovely human character let us blend thoughts of His Messianic office and of His divine nature. We shall not see all the beauty of Jesus unless we know Him as the Christ, the Son of the Highest.And besides the name written on His vesture and his thigh, He bears a name which no man knoweth but Himself. Beyond our grasp is His uncommunicable name, His deep character, but near to us for our love and for our faith is all we need to know. That name which He bore in His humiliation He bears still in His glory, and the name which is above every name, and at which every knee shall bow, is the name by which Jewish mothers called their children, and through eternity we shall call His name Jesus because He hath finally and fully saved us from our sins.

Chapter 55

THE FIRST-FRUITS OF THE GENTILES

'Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 2. Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.3. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6. And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.7. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.9. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.11. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.31. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.' -- MATT. ii.1-12. Matthew's Gospel is the gospel of the King. It has a distinctly Jewish colouring. All the more remarkable, therefore, is this narrative, which we should rather have looked for in Luke, the evangelist who delights to emphasise the universality of Christ's work. But the gathering of the Gentiles to the light of Israel was an essential part of true Judaism, and could not but be represented in the Gospel which set forth the glories of the King. There is something extremely striking and stimulating to the imagination in the vagueness of the description of these Eastern pilgrims. Where they came from, how long they had been in travelling, how many they were, what was their rank, whither they went, -- all these questions are left unsolved. They glide into the story, present their silent adoration, and as silently steal away.' The tasteless mediaeval tradition knows all about them: they were three; they were kings. It knows their names; and, if we choose to pay the fee, we can see their bones to-day in the shrine behind the high altar in Cologne Cathedral. How much more impressive is the indefiniteness of our narrative! How much more the half sometimes is than the whole! I. We see here heathen wisdom led by God to the cradle of Christ. It is futile to attempt to determine the nationality of the wise men. Possibly they were Persian magi, whose astronomy was half astrology and wholly observation, or they may have travelled from some place even deeper in the mysterious East; but, in any case, they were led by God through their science, such as it was. The great lesson which they teach remains the same, however subordinate questions about the nature of the star and the like may be settled. The sign in the heavens and its explanation were both of God, whether the one was a natural astronomical phenomenon or a supernatural light, and the other the conclusions of their science or the inbreathing of His wisdom. So they stand as representatives of the great truth, that, outside the limits of the people of revelation, God moved on hearts and led seeking souls to the light in divers

manners. These silent strangers at the cradle carry on the line of recipients of divine messages outside of Israel which is headed by the mysterious Melchizedek, and includes that seer who saw a star arise out of Jacob, and which, in a wider sense, includes many a 'poet of their own' and many a patient seeker after truth. Human wisdom, as it is called, is God's gift. In itself, it is incomplete. It raises more questions than it solves. Its highest function is to lead to Jesus. He is Lord of the sciences, as of all that belongs to man; and notwithstanding all the appearances to the contrary at present, we may be sure that the true scope of all knowledge, and its certain end, is to lead to the recognition of Him. May we not see in these Magi, too, a type of the inmost meaning of heathen religions? These faiths have in them points of contact with Christianity. Besides their falsehoods and abhorrent dark cruelties and lustfulnesses, they enshrine confessions of wants which the King in the cradle alone can supply. Modern unbelieving teachers tell us that Christianity and they are alike products of man's own religious faculty. But the truth is that they are confessions of need, and Christianity is the supply of the need. At bottom, their language is the question of the wise men, 'Where is He?' Their sacrifices proclaim man's need of reconciliation. Their stories of the gods coming down in the likeness of men, speak of his longing for a manifestation of God in the flesh. The cradle and the cross are Heaven's answer to their sad questions. II. The contrast of these Gentiles' joyful eagerness to worship the King of Israel, with the alarm of his own people at the whisper of his name, is a prelude of the tragedy of his rejection, and the passing over of the kingdom to the Gentiles. Notice the bitter and scornful emphasis of that 'Herod the king' coming twice in the story in immediate connection with the mention of the true King. He was a usurper, caricaturing the true Monarch. Like most kings who have had 'great' tacked to their names, his greatness consisted mainly in supreme wickedness. Fierce, lustful, cunning, he had ruled without mercy; and now he was passing through the last stages of an old age without love, and ringed round by the fears born of his misdeeds. He trembles for his throne, as well he may, when he hears of these strangers. Probably he does not suppose them mixed up with any attempt to unseat him, or he would have made short work of them; unless, indeed, his craft led him to dissemble until he had sucked them dry and had used them to lead him to the infant rival, after which he may have meant to murder them too. But he recognises in their question the familiar tones of the Messianic hope, which he knew was ever lying like glowing embers in the breast of the nation, ready to be blown into a flame. His creatures in the capital might disown it, but he knew in his secret heart that he was a usurper, and that at any moment that smouldering hatred and hope might burn up him and his upstart monarchy. An evil conscience is full of fears, and shrinks from the good news that the King of all is at hand. His coming should be joy, as is that of the bursting spring or the rosy dawn; but our own sin makes the day of the Lord darkness and not light, and sends us cowering into our corners to escape these searching eyes. Nor less tragic and perverted is the trouble which 'all Jerusalem' shared with Herod. The Magi had naturally made straight for the capital, expecting to find the new-born King there, and His city jubilant at His birth. But they traverse its streets only to meet none who know anything about Him. They must have felt like men who see, gleaming from far on some hill-side, a brightness which has all vanished when they reach the spot, or like some of our mission converts brought to our 'Christian country,' and seeing how little our people care for the Christ whom they have learned to know. Their question indicates utter bewilderment at the contrast between what they had seen in the East and what they found in Jerusalem. They must have been still more perplexed if they observed the effect of their question. Nobody in Jerusalem knew anything about their King. That was strange enough. But

nobody wanted Him. That was stranger still. A prophet had long ago called on 'Zion' to 'rejoice greatly' because 'thy King cometh'; but now anxiety and terror cloud all faces. It was partly because self-interest bound many to Herod, and partly because they all feared that any outburst of Messianic hopes would lead to fresh cruelties inflicted by the relentless, trembling tyrant. So the Magi, who represented the eagerness of Gentile hearts grasping the new hopes, and claiming some share in Israel's Messiah, saw His own people careless, and, if moved from their apathy, alarmed at the unwelcome tidings that the promise which had shone as a great light through dreary centuries was at last on the eve of fulfilment. So the first page on the gospel history anticipates the sad issue: 'They shall come from the east, and from the west,' and you yourselves shall be thrust out. III. Then followed the council of the theologians, with its solemn illustration of the difference between orthodoxy and life, and of the utter hollowness of mere knowledge, however accurate, of the letter of Scripture. The questions as to the composition of this gathering of authorities, and of the variations between the quotation of Micah in the text and its form in the Hebrew, do not concern us now. We may remark on the evident purpose of God to draw forth the distinct testimony of the ecclesiastical rulers to the place of Messiah's birth, and on the fact that this, the most ancient interpretation of the prophecy, is vouched to us by existing Jewish sources as having been the traditional one until the exigencies of controversy with Christians pushed it aside Notice the different conduct of Herod, the Magi, and the scribes. The first is entangled in a ludicrous contradiction. He believes that Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, and yet he determines to set himself against the carrying out of what he must, in some sense, believe to be God's purpose. 'If this infant is God's Messiah, I will kill Him,' is surely as strange a piece of policy gone mad as ever the world heard of. But it is perhaps not more insane than much of our own action, when we set ourselves against what we know to be God's will, and consciously seek to thwart it. A child trying to stop a train by pushing against the locomotive has as much chance of success. The scribes, again, are quite sure where Messiah is to be born; but they do not care to go and see if He is born. These strangers, to whom the hope of Israel is new, may rush away, in their enthusiasm, to Bethlehem; but they, to whom it had lost all gloss, and become a commonplace, would take no such trouble. Does not familiarity with the gospel produce much the same effect on many of us? Might not the joy and the devotion, however ignorant if compared with our better knowledge of the letter, which mark converts from heathenism, shame the tepid zeal and unruffled composure of us, who have heard all about Christ, till it has become wearisome? Here on the very threshold of the gospel story is the first instance of the lesson taught over and over again in it, namely, the worthlessness of head knowledge, and the constant temptation of substituting it for that submission of the will and that trust of the heart, which alone make religion. The most impenetrable armour against the gospel is the familiar and lifelong knowledge of the gospel. The Magi, on their part, accept with implici confidence the information. They have followed the star; they have now a more sure word, and they will follow that. They were led by their science to contact with the true guide. He that is faithful in his use of the dimmest light will find his light brighten. The office of science is not to lead to Christ by a road discovered by itself, but to lead to the Word of God which guides to Him. Not by accident, nor without profound meaning, did both methods of direction unite to point these earnest seekers, who were ready to follow every form of guidance, to the Monarch whom they sought. IV. Herod's crafty counsel need not detain us. We have already remarked on its absurdity. If the child were not Messiah, he need not have been alarmed; if it were, his efforts were fruitless. But he does not see this, and so plots and works

underground in the approved fashion of kingcraft. His reason for questioning the Magi as to the time was, of course, to get an approximate age of the infant, that he might know how widely to fling his net. He did it privately, so as to keep any inkling of his plot secret till he had secured the further information which he hoped to delude them into bringing. Like other students and recluses fed upon great thoughts, the Magi were very easily deceived. Good, simple people, they were no match for Herod, and told him all without suspicion, and set off to look for the child, quite convinced of his good faith; while he, no doubt, breathed more freely when he had got them out of Jerusalem, and congratulated himself on having done a good stroke of business in making them his spies. He was probably within a few months of his death. The world was already beginning to slip from him. But before he passed to his account, he too was brought within sight of the Christ, and summoned to yield his usurped dominion to the true King How different this old man's reception of the tidings of the nativity from Simeon's! His hostility, in its cruelty, its blundering cunning and its impotence, is a type of the relations of the world-power to Christ. 'The rulers take counsel together, ... against His anointed. ... He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.' V. We have next the discovery of the King. The reappearing star becomes the guide to the humble house. It cannot have been an ordinary star, for no such could have pointed the precise house among all the homes of Bethlehem. The burst of joy at its reappearance vividly suggests the perplexity of the recent days, and the support given by its welcome beam to the faith which had accepted, not perhaps without some misgivings caused by the indifference of the teachers, the teaching of the prophecy. Surely that faith would be more than ever tried by the humble poverty in which they found the King. The great paradox of Christianity, the manifestation of divinest power in uttermost weakness, was forced upon them in its most startling form. 'This child on His mother's lap, with none to do Him homage, and in poverty which makes our costly gifts seem out of place, -- this is the King, whose coming set stars ablaze and drew us hither. Is this all?' Their Eastern religions were not unfamiliar with the idea of incarnation. Their Eastern monarchies were splendid. They must have felt a shock at the contrast between what they expected and what they found. They learned the lesson which all have to learn, that Christ disappoints as well as fulfils the expectations of men, that the mightiest power is robed in lowliness, and the highest manifestation of God begins with a helpless infant on His mother's knee. These wise men were not repelled. Our modern 'wise men are not all as wise as they. VI. Adoration and offering follow discovery. The 'worship' of the Magi cannot have been adoration in the strict sense. We attribute too much to them if we suppose them aware of Christ's divinity. But it was clearly more than mere reverence for an earthly King. It hovered on the border-line, and meant an indefinite submission and homage to a partially discerned superiority, in which the presence of God was in some sort special. The old mediaeval interpretation of the offered gold as signifying recognition of His kingship, the frankincense of His deity, and the myrrh of His death, is so beautiful that one would fain wish it true. But it cannot pretend to be more than a fancy. We are on surer ground when we see in the gifts the choicest products of the land of the Magi, and learn the lesson that the true recognition of Christ will ever be attended by the spontaneous surrender to Him of our best. These gifts would not be of much use to Mary. If there had been a 'practical man' among the Magi, he might have said, 'What is the use of giving such things to such a household?' And it would have been difficult to have answered. But love does not calculate, and the impulse which leads to consecrate the best we have to Him is acceptable in His sight. This earliest page in the gospel history is a prophecy of the latest. These are the first-fruits of the Gentiles unto Christ. They bear 'in their hands a glass

which showeth many more,' who at last will come like them to the King of the whole earth. 'They shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord.' There were Gentiles at the cradle and at the cross. The Magi learned the lessons which the East especially needed, of power in weakness, royalty in lowliness. Incarnation not in monstrous forms or with destructive attributes, but in feeble infancy which passes through the ordinary stages of development. The Greeks who sought to see Jesus when near the hour of His death, learned the lesson for want of which their nation's culture rotted away, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone' So these two groups, one at the beginning, the other at the end, one from the mysterious East, the other from the progressive and cultured West, received each a half of the completed truth, the gospel of Incarnation and Sacrifice, and witness to the sufficiency of Christ for all human needs, and to the coming of the time when all the races of men shall gather round the throne to which cradle and cross have exalted Him, and shall recognise in Him the Prince of all the kings of the earth, and the Lamb slain for the sins of the world.

Chapter 56

THE KING IN EXILE

'And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him.14. When he arose, he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt; 15. And was there until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My son.16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, 18. In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.19. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth to a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20. Saying, Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young child's life.21. And he arose, and took the young child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.22. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither; notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: 23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.' -- MATT. ii.13-23. Delitzsch, in his New Investigations into the Origin and Plan of the Canonical Gospels, tries to show that Matthew is constructed on the plan of the Pentateuch. The analogy is somewhat strained, but there are some striking points of correspondence. He regards Matthew i. to ii.15 as answering to Genesis. It begins with the 'genesis of Jesus,' and, as the Old Testament book ends with the migration of Israel to Egypt, so this section of the Gospel ends with the flight of the Holy Family to the same land. The section from ii.15 to the end of the Sermon on the Mount answers to Exodus, and here the parallels are striking. The murder of the innocents at Bethlehem by Herod answers to Pharaoh's slaughter of Hebrew children; the Exodus, to the return to Nazareth; the call of Moses at the bush, to the baptism of Jesus; the forty years in the wilderness, to the forty days' desert hunger and temptation; and the giving of the law from Sinai, to the Sermon on the Mount, which contains the new law for the kingdom of God. Without supposing that the evangelist moulded his Gospel on the plan of the Pentateuch, we cannot but see that there is a real parallel between the beginnings of the national life of Israel and the commencement of the life of Christ. Our present text brings this parallel into great prominence. It is divided into three sections, each of which has for its centre an Old Testament prophecy. I. We have first the flight into Egypt and the prophecy fulfilled therein. The appearance of the angel seems to have followed immediately on the departure of the Magi. They were succeeded by a loftier visitor from a more distant land, coming to lay richer gifts and a more absolute homage at the infant's feet. The angel of the Lord, who had already eased Joseph's honest and troubled heart by disclosing the secret of Mary's child, comes again. To Mary he had appeared waking; her meek eyes could look on him, and her obedient ears hear his voice. But Joseph, who stood on a lower spiritual level,

needed the lower form of revelation by dream, which betokens less susceptibility in the recipient and less importance in the communication. It is the only form appropriate to his power of receiving, and four times it is mentioned as granted to him. The warning to the wise men was also conveyed in a dream. We can scarcely help recalling the similar prominence of dreams in the history of the earlier Joseph, whose life was moulded in order to bring Israel into Egypt. The angel speaks of 'the young child and His mother,' reversing the order of nature, as if he bowed before the infant, 'Lord of men as well as angels,' and would deepen the lesson which so many signs gathering round the cradle were teaching the silent Joseph, -- that Mary and he were but humble ministers of the child's. The partial instruction given, and the darkness left lying over the future, are in accordance with the methods of God's leading, which always gives light enough for the next duty, and never for the one after that. The prompt and precise obedience of Joseph to the heavenly vision is emphatically expressed by the verbal repetition of the command in the account of its fulfilment. There was no hesitation, no reluctance, no delay. On the very night, as it appears, of the dream, he rose up; the simple preparations were quickly made; the wise men's gifts would help to sustain their modest wants, and before the day broke they were on their road. How strangely blended in our Lord's life, from the very dawning, are dignity and lowliness, glory and reproach! How soon His brows are crowned with thorns! The adoration of the Magi witnesses to Him as the King of Israel and the hope of the world. The flight of which that adoration was the direct cause witnesses no less clearly to Him as despised and rejected, tasting sorrow in His earliest food, and not having where to lay His head. But the most important part of the story is the connection which Matthew discerns between it and Hosea's words. In their original place they are not a prophecy at all, but simply a part of a tender historical resume of God's dealings with Israel, by which the prophet would touch his contemporaries' hearts into penitence and trust. How, then, is the evangelist justified in regarding them as prophetic, and in looking on Christ's flight as their fulfilment? The answer is to be found in that analogy between the national and the personal Israel which runs through all the Old Testament, and reaches its greatest clearness in the second part of Isaiah's prophecies. Jesus Christ was what Israel was destined and failed to be, the true Servant of God, His Anointed, His Son, the medium of conveying His name to the world. The ideal of the nation was realised in Him. His brief stay in Egypt served the very same purpose in His life which their four hundred years there did in theirs, -- it sheltered Him from enemies, and gave Him room to grow. Just as the infant nation was unawares fostered in the very lap of the country which was the symbol of the world hostile to God, so the infant Christ was guarded and grew there. The prophecy is a prophecy just because it is history; for the history was all a shadow of the future, and He is the true Israel and the Son of God. It would have been fulfilled quite as really, that is to say, the parallel between Christ and the nation would have been as fully carried out, if His place of refuge had been in some other land; but the precise outward identity helps to point the parallel to unobservant eyes. The great truth taught by it of the typical relation between the nation and the Person is the key to large regions of Old Testament history and prophecy. Rightly, therefore, does Matthew call our attention to this pregnant fact, and bid us see in the divine selection of the place where the young life of God manifest in the flesh was sheltered, a fulfilment of prophecy. Egypt was the natural asylum of every fugitive from Palestine, but a deeper reason bent the steps of the Holy Family to the shelter of its palms and temples. II. The slaughter of the innocents, and the prophecy fulfilled therein. -- Herod's fierce rage, enflamed by the dim suspicion that these wily Easterns have gone away laughing in their sleeves at having tricked him, and by the dread that

they may be stirring up armed defenders of the infant King, is in full accord with all that we know of him. The critics who find the story of the massacre 'unhistorical,' because Josephus does not mention it, must surely be very anxious to discredit the evangelist, and very hard pressed for grounds to do so, or they would not commit themselves to the extraordinary assumption that nothing is to be believed outside of the pages of Josephus. A splash or two of 'blood of poor innocents,' more or less, found on the Idumean tyrant's bloody skirts, could be of little consequence in the eyes of those who knew what a long saturnalia of horrors his reign had been; and the number of the infants under two years old in such a tiny place as Bethlehem would be small, so that their feeble wail might well fail to reach the ears even of contemporaries. But there is no reason for questioning the simple truth of a story so like the frantic cruelty and sleepless suspicion of the grey-headed tyrant, who was stirred to more ferocity as the shades of death gathered about him, and power slipped from his rotting hands. Of all the tragic pictures which Scripture gives of a godless old age, burning with unquenchable hatred to goodness and condemned to failure in all its antagonism, none is touched with more lurid hues than this. What a contrast between the king de jure, the cradled infant; and the king de facto, going down to his loathsome death, which all but he longed for! He may well stand as a symbol of the futility of all opposition to Christ the King. The fate of these few infants is a strange one. In their brief lives they have won immortal fame. They died for the Christ whom they never knew. These lambs were slain for the sake of the Lamb who lived while 'Little flowers of martyrdom,

Roses by the whirlwind shorn,' That quotation, from Jeremiah xxxi.16, requires a brief consideration. The original is still less a prophecy than was the passage in Hosea. It is a highly imaginative and grandly weird personification of the mighty mother of three of the tribes, stirring in her tomb, and lifting up the shrill lamentation of Eastern grief over her children carried away to captivity. That hopeless wail from the grave by Bethlehem is heard as far north as Ramah, beyond Jerusalem. Once again, says Matthew, the same grief might have been imaginatively heard from the long-silent tomb so near the scene of this pitiful tragedy. And the second ancestral weeping was fuller of woe than the bitterness of that first lament; for this bewailed the actual slaughter of innocents, and wept the miseries that so soon gathered round the coming of the King, so long waited for. Seeing that the prophet's words do not describe a fact, but are a poetical personification to convey simply the idea of calamity, which might make the dead mother weep, the word 'fulfilled' can obviously be applied to them only in a modified and somewhat elastic sense, and is sufficiently defended if we recognise in the slaughter of these children a woe which, though small in itself, yet, when considered in reference to its inflicter, a usurping king of the Jews, and in reference to its occasion, the desire to slay the God-sent King, and in reference to its innocent victims, and in reference to its place as first of the tragic series of martyrdoms for Messiah, was heavy with a sorer burden of national disaster, when seen by eyes made wise by death, than even the captivity which seemed to falsify the promises of God and the hopes of a thousand years. III. The return to Nazareth, and the prophecy fulfilled therein. -- They who patiently wait for guidance, and move not till the cloud moves, are never disappointed, nor left undirected. Joseph is a pattern of self-abnegating submission, and an example of its rewards. The angel ever comes again to those who have once obeyed him and continue to wait. This third appearance is described in the same words as the former. His coming was the appearance of a familiar presence His command begins by a verbal repetition of the former summons, 'Arise and take the young child and His mother, and go,' and then passes to a singular allusion to that command to Moses which was the

first step towards the former calling of God's son -- the nation -- out of Egypt. 'All the men are dead which sought thy life,' was the encouragement to Moses to go back. 'They are dead that sought the young child's life,' is the encouragement to Joseph. It sums up in one sentence the failure of the first attempt, and is like an epitaph cut on a tombstone for a man yet living, -- a prophecy of the end of all succeeding efforts to crush Christ and thwart His work. 'The dreaded infant's hand' is mightier than all mailed fists, or fingers that hold a pen. Christ lives and grows; Herod rots and dies. Apparently Joseph's intention was to return to Bethlehem. He may have thought that Nazareth would scarcely satisfy the angel's injunction to go to the 'Land of Israel,' or that David's city was the right home for David's heir. At all events, his perplexity appeals to Heaven for direction; and, for the fourth time, his course is marked for him by a dream, whether through the instrumentality of the angel who knew the way to his couch so well, we are not told, Archelaus, Herod's son, who had received Judaea on the partition at his father's death, was a smaller Herod, as cruel and less able. There was more security in the obscurity of Nazareth, under the less sanguinary sway of Antipas, whose share of his father's vices was his lust, rather than his ferocity. So, after so many wanderings, and with such strange new experience and thoughts, the silent, steadfast Joseph and the meek mother bring back their mysterious charge and secret to the humble old home. Matthew does not seem to have known that it had formerly been their home, but his account is no contradiction of Luke's. Again he is reminded of a prophecy, or perhaps, rather, of many prophecies, for he uses the plural 'prophets,' as if he were summing up the tenor of more than one utterance. The words which he gives are not found in any prophet. But we know that to call a man 'a Nazarene' was the same thing as to call him lowly and despised. The scoff of the Pharisee to Nicodemus's timid appeal on Christ's behalf, and the guileless Nathaniel's quest ion, show that. The fact that Christ by His residence in Nazareth became known as the 'Nazarene,' and so shared in the contempt attaching to all Galileans, and especially to the inhabitants of that village, is a kind of concentration of all the obscurity and ignominy of His lot. The name was nailed over His head on the cross as a scornful reductio ad absurdum of His claims to be King of Israel This explanation of the evangelist's meaning does not exclude a reference in his mind to the prophecy in Isaiah xi.1, where Messiah is called 'a branch' or more properly, 'a shoot' for which the Hebrew word is netzer. The name Nazareth is probably etymologically connected with that word, and may have been given to the little village contemptuously to express its insignificance. The meaning of the prophecy is that the offspring of David, who should come when the Davidic house was in the lowest depths of obscurity, like a tree of which only the stump is left, should not appear in royal pomp, or in a lofty condition, but as insignificant, feeble, and of no account. Such prophecy was fulfilled in the very fact that He was all His life known as 'of Nazareth' and the verbal assonance between that name, 'the shoot' and the word 'Nazarene' is a finger-post pointing to the meaning of the place of abode chosen for Him. The mere fact of residence there, and the consequent contempt, do not exhaust the prophecies to which reference is made. These might have been fulfilled without such a literal and external fulfilment. But it serves, like the literal riding upon an ass, and many other instances in Christ's life, to lead dull apprehensions to perceive more plainly that He is the theme of all prophecy, and that in His life the trivial is significant and nothing is accidental.

Chapter 57

THE HERALD OF THE KING

'In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2. And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.3. For this is He that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.4. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.5. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, 6. And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8. Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 9. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.10. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the flre, 11. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to clean he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: 12. Whose fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' -- MATT. iii.1-12. Matthew's Gospel is emphatically the Gospel of the kingdom. The keynote sounded in the story of the Magi dominates the whole. We have stood by the cradle of the King, and seen the homage and the dread which surrounded it. We have seen the usurper's hatred and the divine guardianship. Now we hear the voice of the herald of the King. This section may be conveniently treated as falling into two parts: the first, from verse 1 to verse 6, a general outline of the Baptist's person and work; the second, from verse 7 to end, a more detailed account of his preaching. I. We have an outline sketch of the herald and of his work. The voice of prophecy had fallen silent for four hundred years. Now, when it is once more heard, it sounds in exactly the same key as when it ceased. Its last word had been the prediction of the day of the Lord, and of the coming of Elijah once more. John was Elijah over again. There were the same garb, the same isolation, the same fearlessness, the same grim, gaunt strength, the same fiery energy of rebuke which bearded kings in the full fury of their self-will. Elijah, Ahab, and Jezebel have their doubles in John, Herod, and Herodias. The closing words of Malachi, which Matthew, singularly enough, does not quote, are the best explication of the character and work of the Baptist. His portrait is flung on the canvas with the same startling abruptness with which Elijah is introduced. Matthew makes no allusion to his relationship to Jesus, has nothing to say about his birth or long seclusion in the desert. He gives no hint that his vague expression 'in these days' covers thirty years. John leaps, as it were, into the arena full grown and full armed. His work is described by one word -- 'preaching'; out of which all modern associations, which have too often made it a synonym for long-winded tediousness and toothless platitudes, must be removed. It means proclaiming, or acting as a herald, and implies the uplifted voice and the brief, urgent message of one who runs before the chariot, and shouts, 'The king! the king!' His message is summed up in two sentences, two blasts of the trumpet: the call to repentance, and the rousing proclamation that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. In the former he but reproduces

the tone of earlier prophecy, when he insists on a thorough change of disposition and a true sorrow for sin. But he advances far beyond his precursors in the latter, which is the reason for repentance. They had seen the vision of the kingdom and the King, 'but not nigh.' He has to peal into the drowsy ears of a generation which had almost forgotten the ancient hope, that it was at the very threshold. Like some solitary stern crag which catches the light of the sun yet unrisen but hastening upwards, long before the shadowed valleys, John flamed above his generation all aglow with the light, as the witness that in another moment it would spring above the eastern horizon. But he sees that this is no joyful message to them. Nothing is more remarkable in his preaching than the sombre hues with which his expectation of the day of the Lord is coloured. 'To what purpose is the day of the Lord to you? It is darkness and not light'; it is to be judgment, therefore repentance is the preparation. The gleam and purity of lofty spiritual ideas are soon darkened, as a film forms on quicksilver after short exposure. John's contemporaries thought that the kingdom of heaven meant exclusive privileges, and their rule over the heathen. They had all but lost the thought that it meant first God's rule over their wills, and their harmony with the glad obedience of heaven. They had to be rudely shaken out of their self-complacency and taught that the livery of the King was purity, and the preparation for His coming, penitence. The next touch in this outline sketch is John's fulfilment of prophecy. Matthew probably knew that wonderfully touching and lowly answer of his to the deputation from the ecclesiastical authorities, which at once claimed prophetic authority and disclaimed personal importance, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.' The prophecy in its original application refers to the preparation of a path in the desert, for Jehovah coming to redeem His people from captivity. The use made of it by Matthew, and endorsed by all the evangelists, rests on the principle, without which we have no clue to the significance of the Old Testament, that the history of Israel is prophetic, and that the bondage and deliverance are types of the sorer captivity from which Christ redeems, and of the grander deliverance which He effects. Our evangelist gives a vivid picture of the asceticism of John, which was one secret, as our Lord pointed out, of his hold on the people. The more luxuriously self-indulgent men are, the more are they fascinated by religious self-denial. A man 'clothed in soft raiment' would have drawn no crowds. A religious teacher must be clearly free from sensual appetites and love of ease, if he is to stir the multitude. John's rough garb and coarse food were not assumed by him to create an impression. He was no mere imitator of the old prophets, though he wore a robe like Elijah's. His asceticism was the expression of his severe, solitary spirit, detached from the delights of sense, and even from the softer play of loves, because the coming kingdom flamed ever before him, and the age seemed to him to be rotting and ready for the fire. There is no need to bring in irrelevant learning about Essenes to account for his mode of life. The thoughts which burned in him drove him into the wilderness. He who was possessed with them could not 'come eating and drinking,' and might well seem to sense-bound wonderers as if some demonic force, other than ordinary motives, tyrannised over him. The last point in this brief resume of John's work is the universal excitement which it produced. He did not come out of the desert with his message. If men would hear it, they must go to him. And they went. All the southern portion of the country seemed to empty itself into the wilderness. Sleeping national hopes revived, the awe of the coming judgment seized all classes. It was so long since a fiery soul had scattered flaming words, and religious teachers had for so many centuries been mumbling the old well-worn formulas, and splitting hairs, that it was an apocalypse to hear once more the accent of conviction from a man who really believed every word he said, and himself thrilled with the solemn truths which he thundered.

Wherever a religious teacher shows that he has John's qualities, as our Lord in His eulogium analysed them -- namely, unalterable resolution, like an iron pillar, and not like a reed shaken with the wind, conspicuous superiority to considerations of ease and comfort, a direct vision of the unseen, and a message from God, the crowds will go out to see him; and even if the enthusiasm be shallow and transient, some spasm of conviction will pass across many a conscience, and some will be pointed by him to the King. II. The second portion of this section is a more detailed account of John's preaching, which Matthew gives as addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees. We are not to suppose that at any time John had a congregation exclusively made up of such; nor that these words were addressed to them only. What is emphasised is the fact that among the crowds were many of both these parties, the religious aristocrats who represented two tendencies of mind bitterly antagonistic, and each unlikely to be drawn to the prophet. Self-righteous pedants who had turned religion into a jumble of petty precepts, and very superior persons who keenly appreciated the good things of this world, and were too enlightened to have much belief in anything, and too comfortable to be enthusiasts, were not hopeful material. If they were drawn into the current, it must have run strong indeed. These representatives of the highest and coldest classes of the nation had the very same red-hot words flung at them as the mob had. Luke tells us that the first words in this summary were spoken to the people. Both representations are true. All fared alike. So they should, and so they always will, if a real prophet has to talk to them. John's salutation is excessively rough and rude. Honeyed words were not in his line; he had not lived in the desert for all these years, and held converse with God and his own heart, without having learned that his business was to smite on conscience with a strong hand, and to tear away the masks which hid men from themselves. The whole spirit of the old prophets was revived in his brusque, almost fierce, address to such very learned, religious, and distinguished personages. Isaiah in his day had called their predecessors 'rulers of Sodom'; John was not scolding when he called his hearers 'ye offspring of vipers' but charging them with moral corruption and creeping earthliness. The summary of his preaching is like a succession of lightning flashes. We can but note in a word or two each flash as it flames and strikes. The remarkable thing about his teaching is that, in his hands, the great hope of Israel became a message of terror, the proclamation of the impending kingdom passed into a denunciation of 'the wrath to come,' set forth with a tremendous wealth of imagery as the axe lying at the root of the trees, the fan winnowing the wheat from the chaff, the destroying fire. That wrath was inseparable from the coming of the King; for His righteous reign necessarily meant punishment of unrighteousness. So all the older prophets had said, and John was but carrying on their testimony. So Christ has said. No more terrible warnings of the certain judgment of evil which is involved in His merciful work, have ever been given, than fell from the lips into which grace was poured. We need to-day a clearer discernment of the truth which flamed before John's eyes, that the full proclamation of the kingdom of heaven must include the plain teaching of 'the wrath to come.' Next comes the urgent demand for reformation of life as the sign of real repentance. John's exhortation does not touch the deepest ground for repentance which is laid in the heart-softening love of God manifested in the sacrifice of His Son, but is based wholly on the certainty of judgment. So far, it is incomplete; but the demand for righteous living as the only test of religious emotion is fully Christian, and needed in this generation as much as it ever was. All preachers and others concerned in 'revivals' may well learn a lesson, and while they follow John in seeking to arouse torpid consciences by the terrors which are a part of the gospel, should not forget to demand, not merely an emotional repentance, but the solid fruits which alone

guarantee the worth of the emotion. The next flash strikes the lofty structure of confidence in their descent. John knows that every man in that listening crowd believes that his birth secured him joy and dominion when Messiah came. So he wrenches away this shield against which his sharpest arrows were blunted. What a murmur of angry denial must have met his contemptuous, audacious denial of their trusted privilege! The pebbles on the Jordan beach, or the loose rocks scattered so plentifully over the desert, could be made as good sons of Abraham as they. A glimpse of the transference of the kingdom to the despised Gentiles passed across his vision. And in these far-reaching words lay the anticipation, not only of the destruction of all Jewish exclusiveness, but of the miracles of quickening to be wrought on the stony hearts of those beyond its pale.Once more with a new emblem the immediate beginning of the judgment is proclaimed, and its principles and issues are declared. The sharp axe lies at the roots of the tree, ready to be lifted and buried in its bark. The woodman's eye is looking over the forest; he marks with the fatal red line the worthless trees, and at once the swinging blows come down, and the timber is carted away to be burned. The trees are men. The judgment is an individualising one, and all-embracing. Nothing but actual righteousness of life will endure. All else will be destroyed.The coming of the kingdom implied the coming of the King. John knew that the King was a man, and that He was at the door. So his sermon reaches its climax in the ringing proclamation of His advent. The first noticeable feature in it is the utter humility of the dauntless prophet before the yet veiled Sovereign. All the fiery force, the righteous scorn and anger, the unflinching bravery, melt into meek submission. He knows the limits of his own power, and gladly recognises the infinite superiority of the coming One. He never moved from that lowly attitude. Even when his followers tried to stir up base jealousy in him at being distanced by the Christ, who, as they suggested, owed His first recognition to him, all that his immovable self-abnegation cared to answer was, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' He was glad 'to fade in the light of the Sun that he loved.' What a wealth of suppressed emotion and lowly love there is in the words so pathetic from the lips of the lonely ascetic, whom no home joys had ever cheered: 'He that hath the bride is the bridegroom.... My joy is fulfilled'!Note, too, the grand conception of the gifts of the King. John knew that his baptism was, like the water in which he immersed, cold, and incapable of giving life. It symbolised, but did not effect, cleansing, any more than his preaching righteousness could produce righteousness. But the King would come, bringing with Him the gift of a mighty Spirit, whose quick energy, transforming dead matter into its own likeness, burning out the foul stains from character, and melting cold hearts into radiant warmth, should do all that his poor, cold, outward baptism only shadowed. Form and substance of this great promise gather up many Old Testament utterances. From of old, fire had been the emblem of the divine nature, not only, nor chiefly, as destructive, but rather as life-giving, cleansing, gladdening, fructifying, transforming. From of old, the promise of a divine Spirit poured out on all flesh had been connected with the kingdom of Messiah; and John but reiterates the uniform voice of prophecy, even as he anticipates the crowning gift of the gospel, in this saying.Note, further, the renewed prophecy of judgment. There is something very solemn in the stern refrain at the end of each of three consecutive verses, -- 'with fire.' The first and the third refer to the destructive fire; the second, to the cleansing Spirit. But the fire that destroys is not unconnected with that which purifies. And the very same divine flame, if welcomed and yielded to, works purity, and if repelled and scorned, consumes. The rustic simplicity of the figures of the husbandman with his winnowing-shovel, the threshing-floor exposed to every wind, the stored wheat, the rootless, lifeless, worthless chaff, and the fierce fire in some corner of the autumn field

where it is utterly burned up -- needs no comment. They add nothing but another vivid picture to the thoughts already dealt with. But the question arises as to the whole of the representation of judgment here: Does it look beyond the present world? I see no reason for supposing that John was speaking about anything but the sifting and destroying which would attend the coming of the looked-for kingdom on earth. The principles which he laid down are, no doubt, true for both worlds; but the application of them which his prophetic mission embraced, lies on this side of the grave.Note, further, the limitations in John's knowledge of the King. His prophecy unites, as contemporaneous, events which, in fact, are widely separate, -- the coming of Christ, and the judgments which He executes, whether on Israel or in the final 'great day of the Lord.' There is no perspective in prophecy. The future is foreshortened, and great gulfs of centuries are passed over, as, standing on a plain, we see it as continuous, though it may really be cleft by deep ravines. He did not know 'what manner of time' the spirit which was in him did 'signify.' No doubt his expectations were correct, in so far as Christ's coming really sifted and separated, and was the rising and the falling of many; but it was not attended by such tokens as John inferred. Hence we can understand his doubts when in prison, and learn that a prophet was often mistaken as to the meaning of his message. Again, while we have here a clear prediction of the Spirit as bestowed by Christ, we find no hint of His work as the sacrifice for sin, through whom the guilt which no repentance and no outward baptism could touch was taken away. The Gospel of John gives us later utterances of the Baptist's, by which we learn that he advanced beyond the point at which he stood here. 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,' was his message after Christ's baptism. It is the last, highest voice of prophecy. The proclamation of a kingdom of heaven, of a king mighty and righteous, whose coming kindled a fire of judgment, and a blessed fire of purifying, into one or other of which all men must be plunged, contained elements of terror, as well as of hope. It needed completion by that later word.When John stretched out his forefinger, and with awe-struck voice bade his hearers look at Jesus coming to him, prophecy had done its work. The promise had been gradually concentrated on the nation, the tribe, the house, and now it falls on the person. The dove narrows its circling flight till it lights on His head. The goal has been reached, too, in the clear declaration of Messiah's work. He is King, Giver of the Spirit, Judge, but He is before all else the Sacrifice for the world's sins. Therefore he to whom it was given to utter that great saying was a prophet, and more than a prophet; and when he had spoken it, there was nothing more for him to do but to decrease. He was like the breeze before sunrise, which springs up, as crying 'The dawn! the dawn!' and dies away.

Chapter 58

THE BAPTISM IN FIRE

'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.' -- MATT. iii.11 There is no more pathetic figure in Scripture than that of the forerunner of our Lord. Lonely and ascetic, charged to light against all the social order of which he was a part, seeing many of his disciples leave him for another master; then changing the free wilderness for a prison cell, and tortured by morbid doubts; finally murdered as the victim of a profligate woman's hate and a profligate man's perverse sense of honour: he had indeed to bear 'the burden of the Lord.' But perhaps most pathetic of all is the combination in his character of gaunt strength and absolute humility. How he confronts these people whom he had to rebuke, and yet how, in a moment, the flashing eye sinks in lowest self-abasement before 'Him that cometh after me'! How true, amidst many temptations, he was to his own description of himself: 'I am a voice' -- nothing more. His sinewy arm was ever pointed to the 'Lamb of God.' It is given to very few to know so clearly their limits, and to still fewer -- and these, men who keep very near God -- to abide so contentedly within them, and to acquiesce so thankfully in the brightening glories of One whom self-importance and ambition would prompt to take for a rival and an enemy. The words before us signalise at once John's lofty conception of the worth of his work, and his humble consciousness of its worthlessness as compared with Christ's. 'I indeed baptize you with water, but He with fire.' As is the difference between the two elements, so is the difference between His ministry and mine -- the one effecting an outward cleansing, the other being an inward penetrating power, which shall search men through and through, and, burning, shall purge away dross and filth. The text comes in the midst of a triple representation of our Lord's work in its relation to his, each portion of which ends with the refrain, 'the fire.' But these three fires have not the same effects. The first and last destroy, the second cleanses. These are threatenings, but this is altogether a promise. There is a fire that consumes the barren tree and the light chaff that is whirled from the threshing-floor by the wind of His fan; but there is also a fire that, like the genial heat in some greenhouse, makes even the barren tree glow with blossom and loads its branches with precious fruit. His coming may kindle fire that will destroy, but its merciful purpose is to plunge us into that fiery baptism of the Holy Ghost, whereof the result is cleansing and life. Looking at the words before us, then, they lead us to think of that emblem of the Spirit of God, of Christ as bestowing it, and of its effects on us. I venture to offer a few considerations now on each of these points. I. The Holy Spirit is fire. It would scarcely be necessary to spend any time in illustrating that truth, but for the strange misapprehension of the words of our text which I believe to be not uncommon. People sometimes read them as if the first portion referred to those who trust in Christ, and who therefore receive the blessings of His sanctifying energy, whilst the latter words, on the other hand, were a threatening against unbelievers. Now, whatever may be the meaning of the emblem in the preceding and subsequent clauses, it can have but one meaning in our text itself -- and that is, the purifying influence of the Spirit of God. Baptism with the Holy Ghost is not one thing and baptism with fire another, but the former is the reality of which the latter is the symbol. It may be worth while to dwell briefly on the force of the emblem, which is often misunderstood. Fire, then, all over the world has been taken to represent the divine energy. Even in heathendom, side by side with the worship of light was the worship of fire. Even that cruel

Moloch-worship, with all its abominations rested upon the notion that the swift power and ruddy blaze of fire were symbols of glorious attributes. Though the thought was darkened and marred, wrongly apprehended and ferociously worked out in ritual, it was a true thought for all that. And Scripture has from the beginning used it. It would carry us too far to enumerate the instances which might be adduced. But we may quote a few. When the covenant was made between God and Abraham, upon which all the subsequent revelation reposed, the divine presence was represented by a smoking furnace, and a lamp of fire that passed between the divided pieces of the sacrifice. When the great revelation of the divine Name was given to Moses, which prepared for the great deliverance from Egypt, the sign of it was a thorn-bush -- one of the many dotted over the desert -- burning and unconsumed. Surely the ordinary interpretation, which sees, in that undying flame, an emblem of Israel undestroyed in the furnace of bondage, is less natural than that which sees in it a sign having the same purpose and the same meaning as the deep words, 'I am that I am.' The Name, the revelation proper, is accompanied by the sign which expresses in figure the very same truth -- the unwearied power, the undecaying life of the great self-existent God, who wills and does not change, who acts and does not faint, who gives and is none the poorer, who fills the universe and is Himself the same, who burns and is not consumed -- the 'I am.' Further, we remember how to Israel the pledge and sacramental seal of God's guardianship and guidance was the pillar which, in the fervid light of the noonday sun, seemed to be but a column of wavering smoke, but which, when the darkness fell, glowed at the heart and blazed across the sleeping camp, a fiery guard. 'Who among us,' says the prophet, 'shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' The answer is a parallel to the description given in one of the Psalms in reply to the question, 'Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle?' From which parallelism, as well as from the whole tone of the passage, the conclusion is unavoidable that to Isaiah 'everlasting burnings' was a symbolic designation of God. And, passing by all other references, we remember that our Lord Himself used the same emblem, as John does, with apparently the same meaning, when, yearning for the fulfilment of His work, He said,' I am come to send fire on earth -- oh that it were already kindled!' The day of Pentecost teaches the same lesson by its fiery tongues; and the Seer in Patmos beheld, burning before the throne, the sevenfold lamps of fire which are 'the seven spirits of God.' Thus, then, there is a continuous chain of symbolism according to which some aspect of the divine nature, and especially of the Spirit of God, is set forth for us by fire. The question, then, comes to be -- what is that aspect? In answer, I would remind you that the attributes and offices of the Spirit of God are never in Scripture represented as being destructive, and are only punitive, in so far as the convictions of sin, which He works in the heart, may be regarded as being punishments. The fire of God's Spirit, at all events, is not a wrathful energy, working pain and death, but a merciful omnipotence, bringing light and joy and peace. The Spirit which is fire is a Spirit which giveth life. So the symbol, in the special reference in the text, has nothing of terror or destruction but is full of hope and bright with promise. Even in its more general application to the divine nature, the same thing is to a large extent true. The common impression is the reverse of this. The interpretation which most readers unconsciously supply to the passages of Scripture where God is spoken of as flaming fire, is that God's terrible wrath is revealed in them. I am very far from denying that the punitive and destructive side of the divine character is in the symbol, but certainly that is not its exclusive meaning, nor does it seem to me to be its principal one. The emblem is employed over and over again, in connections where it must mean chiefly the blessed and joyous aspect of God's Name to men. It is unquestionably part of the felicity of the

symbol that there should be in it this double force -- for so is it the fitter to show forth Him who, by the very same attributes, is the life of those who love Him and the death of those who turn from Him. But, still, though it is true that the bright and the awful aspects of that Name are in themselves one, and that their difference arises from the difference of the eyes which behold them, yet we are justified, I think, in saying that this emblem of fire regards mainly the former of these and not the latter. The principal ideas in it seem to be swift energy and penetrating power, which cleanses and transforms. It is fire as the source of light and heat; it is fire, not so much as burning up what it seizes into ashes, but rather as laying hold upon cold dead matter, making it sparkle and blaze, and turning it into the likeness of its own leaping brightness; it is fire as springing heavenwards, and bearing up earthly particles in its shooting spires; it is fire, as least gross of visible things; -- in a word, it is fire as life, and not as death, that is the symbol of God. It speaks of the might of His transforming power, the melting, cleansing, vitalising influence of His communicated grace, the warmth of His conquering love. It has, indeed, an under side of possible judgment, punishment, and destruction, but it has a face of blessing, of life-giving, of sanctifying power. And therefore the Baptist spake glad tidings when he said, 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.' II. Christ plunges us into this divine fire. I presume that scarcely any one will deny that our version weakens the force of John's words by translating 'with water, with the Holy Ghost,' instead of 'in water, in the Holy Ghost.' One of the most accurate of recent commentators,[2] for instance, in his remarks on this verse, says that the preposition here 'is to be understood in accordance with the idea of baptism that is immersion, not as expressing the instrument with which, but as meaning "in," and expressing the element in which the immersion takes place.' I suppose that very few persons would hesitate to agree with that statement. If it is correct, what a grand idea is conveyed by that metaphor of the completeness of the contact with the Spirit of God into which we are brought! How it represents all our being as flooded with that transforming power! But, apart from the intensity communicated to the promise by such a figure, there is another important matter brought distinctly before us by the words, and that is Christ's personal agency in effecting this saturating of man's coldness with the fire from God. This testimony of John's is in full accord with Christ's claims for Himself, and with the whole tenor of Scripture on the subject. He is the Lord of the Spirit. He is come to scatter that fire on the earth. He brings the ruddy gift from heaven to mortals, carrying it in the bruised reed of His humanity; and, in pursuance of His merciful design, He is bound and suffers for our sakes, but, loosed at last from the bands by which it was not possible that He should be holden, and 'being by the right hand of God exalted, He hath shed forth this.' His mighty work opens the way for the life-giving power of the Spirit to dwell as an habitual principle, and not as a mere occasional gift, among men, sanctifying their characters from the foundation, and not merely, as of old, bestowing special powers for special functions. He claims to send us the Comforter. We know but little of such high themes, but we can clearly see that, while there may be many other reasons for the full bestowment of the Spirit of God having to be preceded by the gift of Christ, one reason must be that the measure of individual and subjective inspiration varies according to the amount of objective revelation. The truth revealed is the condition and the instrument of the Spirit's working. The sharper that sword of the Spirit is, the mightier will be His power. Hence, only when the revelation of God is complete by the message of His Son, His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, was the full, permanent gift of the Spirit possible, not to make new revelations, but to unfold all that lay in the Word spoken once for all, in whom the whole Name of God is contained. [2] Meyer. However that may be, the main thing for

us, dear friends, is this -- that Christ gives the Spirit. In and by Jesus, you and I are brought into real contact with this cleansing fire. Without His work, it would never have burned on earth; without our faith in His work it will never purify our souls. The Spirit of God is not a synonym for the moral influence which the principles of Christianity exert on men who believe them; but these principles, the truths revealed in Jesus Christ, are the means by which the Spirit works its noblest work. Our acceptance of these truths, then, our faith in Him whom these truths reveal, is absolutely essential to our possession of that cleansing power. The promise is of 'that Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive.' If we have no faith in Jesus, then, however we may fancy that the gift of God can be ours by other means, the stern answer comes to our fond delusions and mistaken efforts, 'Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter.' Oh! you who are seeking for spiritual elevation, for intellectual enlightenment, for the fire of a noble enthusiasm, for the consecration of pure hearts, anywhere but in Christ your Lord, will you not listen to the majestic and yet lowly voice, which blends in its tones grave and loving rebuke, gentle pity, wonder and sorrow at our blindness, earnest entreaty, and divine authority -- 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that speaketh to thee, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water'?Here are we cold, foul, dark, dead: there is that fire of God able to cleanse, to enlighten, to give life. How is true contact to be effected between our great need and His all-sufficient energy? One voice brings the answer for every Christian soul, 'I will send the Comforter.' Brethren, let us cleave to Him, and in humble faith ask Him to plunge us into that fiery stream which, for all its fire, is yet a river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. 'He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and in fire.'III. That fiery baptism quickens and cleanses.In John's mind, the difference between the two baptisms, his and the Christ's, expresses accurately the difference between the two ministries and their effects. As has been truly and beautifully said, he is conscious of something 'cold and negative' in his own teaching, of which the water of his baptism is a fit representation. His message is divine and true, but it is hard: 'Repent, do what you ought, wait for the Kingdom and its King.' And, when his command has been obeyed, his disciples come up out of Jordan, at the best but superficially cleansed, and needing that the process begun in them should be perfected by mightier powers than any which his message wields. They need more than that outward washing -- they need an inward cleansing; they need more than the preaching of repentance and morality -- they need a gift of life; they need a new power poured into their souls, the fiery steam of which, as it rolls along, like a lava current through mountain forests, shall seize and burn every growth of evil in their natures. They need not water, but Spirit; not water, but Fire. They need what shall be life to their truest life, and death to all the death within, that separates them from the life of God.So the two main effects expressed here are these: quickening and cleansing.Fire gives warmth. We talk about ardent desires, warm hearts, the glow of love, the fire of enthusiasm, and even the flame of life. We draw the contrast with cold natures, which are loveless and unemotional, hard to stir and quicken; we talk about thawing reserve, about an icy torpor, and so on. The same general strain of allusion is undoubtedly to be traced in our text. Whatever more it means, it surely means this, that Christ comes to kindle in men's souls a blaze of enthusiastic, divine love, such as the world never saw, and to set them aflame with fervent earnestness, which shall melt all their icy hardness of heart, and turn cold self-regard into self-forgetting consecration.Here, then, our text touches upon one of the very profoundest characteristics of Christianity considered as a power in human life. The contrast between it and all other religions and systems of ethics lies, amongst other things, in the stress which it lays upon love and on the earnestness which comes from love; whereas these

are scarcely regarded as elements in virtue according to the world, and have certainly no place at all in the world's notion of 'temperate religion.' Christ gives fervour by giving His Spirit. Christ gives fervour by bringing the warmth of His own love to bear upon our hearts through the Spirit, and that kindles ours. Where His great work for men is believed and trusted in, there, and there only, is there excited an intensity of consequent affection to Him which glows throughout the life. It is not enough to say that Christianity is singular among religious and moral systems in exalting fervour into a virtue. Its peculiarity lies deeper -- in its method of producing that fervour. It is kindled by that Spirit using as His means the truth of the dying love of Christ. The secret of the Gospel is not solved by saying that Christ excites love in our souls. The question yet remains -- how? There is but one answer to that. He loved us to the death. That truth laid on hearts by the Spirit, who takes of Christ's and shows them to us, and that truth alone, makes fire burst from their coldness. Here is the power that produces that inner fervour without which virtue is a name and religion a yoke. Here is the contrast, not only to John's baptism, but to all worldly religion, to all formalism and decent deadness of external propriety. Here is the consecration of enthusiasm -- not a lurid, sullen heat of ignorant fanaticism, but a living glow of an enkindled nature, which flames because kindled by the inextinguishable blaze of His love who gave Himself for us. 'He shall baptize you in fire.'Then, dear brethren, if we profess to have come into personal contact with Jesus Christ, here is a sharp test for us, and a solemn rebuke to much of our lives. For a Christian to be cold is sin. Our coldness can only come from our neglecting to stir up the gift that is in us. People reproach us with extravagant emotion: let us confess that we have never deserved that reproach half as much as we ought. The world's ideal of religion is decorous coldness -- has not the world's ideal been our practice? We are afraid to be fervent, but our true danger is icy torpor. We sit frost-bitten and almost dead among the snows, and all the while the gracious sunshine is pouring down, that is able to melt the white death that covers us, and to free us from the bonds that hold us prisoned in their benumbing clasp.No evil is more marked among the Christian Churches of this day than precisely the absence of this 'spirit of burning.' There is plenty of liberality and effort, there is much interest in religious questions, there is genial tolerance and wide culture, there is a high standard of morality, and, on the whole, a tolerable adherence to it -- but there is little love, and little fervour. 'I have somewhat against thee, that thou hast left thy first love.'Where is that Spirit which was poured out on Pentecost? Where are the cloven tongues of fire, where the flame which Christ died to light up? Has it burned down to grey ashes, or, like some house-fire, lit and left untended, has it gone out after a little ineffectual crackling among the lighter pieces of wood and paper, without ever reaching the solid mass of obstinate coal? Where? The question is not difficult to answer. His promise remains faithful. He does send the Spirit, who is fire. But our sin, our negligence, our eager absorption with worldly cares, and our withdrawal of mind and heart from the patient contemplation of His truth, have gone far to quench the Spirit. Is it not so? Are our souls on fire with the love of God, aglow with the ardour caught from Christ's love? Does that love which fills our hearts coruscate and flame in our lives, making us lights in the darkness, as some firebrand caught up from the hearth will serve for a torch and blaze out into the night? 'He shall baptize with fire.''O Thou that earnest from above,

The pure celestial fire to impart,

Kindle a flame of sacred love

On the mean altar of my heart.'Then there is another thought expressed by this symbol, namely, that this baptism gives cleansing as well as warmth, or rather gives cleansing by warmth. Fire purifies. That Spirit, which is fire, produces holiness in heart and character, by this most chiefly among all His manifold operations, that He excites the flame of love to God, which burns our souls clear with its white fervours. This is the Christian method of making men good, -- first, know His love, then believe it, then love Him back again, and then let that genial heat permeate all your life, and it will woo forth everywhere blossoms of beauty and fruits of holiness, that shall clothe the pastures of the wilderness with gladness. Did you ever see a blast-furnace? How long would it take a man, think you, with hammer and chisel, or by chemical means, to get the bits of ore out from the stony matrix? But fling them into the great cylinder, and pile the fire and let the strong draught roar through the burning mass, and by evening you can run off a golden stream of pure and fluid metal, from which all the dross and rubbish is parted, which has been charmed out of all its sullen hardness, and will take the shape of any mould into which you like to run it. The fire has conquered, has melted, has purified. So with us. Love 'shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us,' love that answers to Christ's, love that is fixed upon Him who is pure and separate from sinners, will purify us and sever us from our sins. Nothing else will. All other cleansing is superficial, like the water of John's baptism. Moralities and the externals of religion will wash away the foulness which lies on the surface, but stains that have sunk deep into the very substance of the soul, and have dyed every thread in warp and woof to its centre, are not to be got rid of so. The awful words which our great dramatist puts into the mouth of the queenly murderess are heavy with the weight of most solemn truth. After all vain attempts to cleanse away the stains, we, like her, have to say, 'There's the smell of the blood still -- will these hands ne'er be clean?' No, never; unless there be something mightier, more inward in its power, than the water with which we can wash them, some better gospel than 'Repent and reform.' God be thanked, there is a mightier detergent than all these -- even that divine Spirit which Christ gives, and that divine forgiveness which Christ brings. There, and there alone, dear brethren, we can lose all the guilt of our faultful past, and receive a new and better life which will mould our future into growing likeness to His great purity. Oh do not resist that merciful searching fire, which is ready to penetrate our very bones and marrow, and burn up the seeds of death which lurk in the inmost intents of the heart! Let Him plunge you into that gracious baptism, as we put some poor piece of foul clay into the fire, and like it, as you glow you will whiten, and all the spots will melt away before the conquering tongues of the cleansing flame. In that furnace, heated seven times hotter than any earthly power could achieve, they who walk live by the presence of the Son of Man, and nothing is consumed but the bonds that held them. His Spirit is fire, and that Spirit of fire is, therefore, the Spirit of holiness. But take one warning word in conclusion. The alternative for every man is to be baptized in the fire or to be consumed by it. The symbol of which we have been speaking sets forth the double thought of purifying and destruction. Nothing which we have said as to the former in the least weakens the completing truth that there is in it an under side of possible terror. One of the felicities of the emblem is its capacity to set forth this twofold idea. There is that in the divine nature which the Bible calls wrath, the necessary displeasure and aversion of holy love from sin and wrong-doers. There is in the divine procedure even now and here, the manifestation of that aversion in punishment. 'The light of Israel becomes a flaming fire.'I have no panorama of hell to exhibit, and I would speak with all reticence on matters so awful; but this much, at any rate, is clear, that the very same revelation of God, thankfully accepted and submitted to, is the medium of

cleansing and the source of joyful life, and, rejected, becomes the source of sorrow and the occasion of death. Every man sees that aspect of God's face which he has made himself fit to see. Every gift of God is to men either a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death. Most chiefly is this so in regard to Christ and His gospel, who, though He came not to judge but to save, yet by reason of that very universal purpose of salvation, becomes a judge in the act of saving, and a condemnation to those in whom, by their own faults, that purpose is not fulfilled.The same pillar of fire which gladdened the ranks of Israel as they camped by the Red Sea, shone baleful and terrible to the Egyptian hosts. The same Ark of the Covenant whose presence blessed the house of Obed-edom, and hallowed Zion, and saved Jerusalem, smote the Philistines, and struck down their bestial gods. Christ and His gospel even here hurt the men whom they do not save.And we have only to carry that process onwards into another world, and suppose it made more energetic there, as it will be, to feel dimly in how awful a sense it may be that the same fire which gives life may be the occasion of death -- and how profound a truth lies in the words -- 'What maketh Heaven, that maketh Hell.'Yes, verily; to be salted with fire or to be consumed by it, to be baptized in it or to be cast into it, is the choice offered to us all; to thee, my brother, and to me. Israel made its choice, and in seventy years, the Roman standards on Zion and the flames leaping round the Temple, interpreted John's words in one of their halves, while the growing energy of the fire that was lit on Pentecost fulfilled them in the other. Many a nation and Church has made its choice since then. You have to make yours. 'The fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is.' Shall our work be gold, and silver, and precious stones which shall gleam and flash in the light, or wood, hay, and stubble which shall writhe for a moment in the blaze and perish? 'Our God is a consuming fire.' Shall that be the ground of my confidence that I shall one day be pure from all my sins, or shall it be the parent of my ghastliest fear that I may be, like the chaff, destroyed by contact with a holy love rejected, with a Saviour disbelieved, with a Spirit grieved and quenched? Choose which.

Chapter 59

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

'Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.14. But John forbad Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? 15. And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him.16. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: 17. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' -- MATT. iii.13-17. When Jesus set out from Galilee to seek baptism from John, He took the first step on His path of public work; and it is noteworthy that He took it, apparently, from self-originated impulse, and not, as in the case of the prophets of old, from obedience to a 'prophetic call.' 'The Word of the Lord came to' them; His Messianic consciousness needed no external stimulus to kindle it into flame. What did He mean by seeking baptism? John recognised the incongruity of His submitting to a rite which professed repentance and promised cleansing. It does not follow that John recognised His Messianic character, but only that he knew His blameless life. The remonstrance witnesses at once to John's humble consciousness of sin and to Jesus' acknowledged purity. Christ's answer has a sound of authority, even in its gentle lowliness, and it confirms the belief in His sinlessness by the absence of any reference to repentance, and by regarding His baptism, not as a token of repented transgression to be washed away, but as an act which completed the perfect circle of righteousness, which His life had hitherto drawn. He submitted to the appointed rite, because He would be one with His brethren in all obedience. So, then, the principle underlying His baptism is the principle underlying His incarnation, His life of obedience and identification of Himself with us, and His death. 'He also Himself likewise took part of' whatsoever His brethren were partakers of, and therefore He was 'numbered with the transgressors' in that, needing no repentance, He submitted to the baptism of repentance, and cleansed the cleansing water by being plunged in it. What was the significance of the descent of the Spirit on Him? Matthew's account implies that the appearance of the descending dove was to Jesus. John i.32 states that it was also visible to John. The accompanying voice is as if principally directed to John, according to Matthew, while Mark and Luke represent it as addressed to Jesus. Both appearance and voice were the tokens of the Father's approval, and acceptance of the Son's consecration of Himself to the Messianic work. The dove descending on Him was the token that henceforward His manhood should be anointed with the unbroken influences of the divine Spirit, and possess the unbroken consciousness of the Father's good pleasure, lying like sunshine on the stormy sea on which He had launched. How different the conception of the Spirit as a dove, which was Jesus' experience of it, from the Baptist's, which was that of fire! Jesus is in this incident, as in all, our pattern and example, teaching us that we too must yield ourselves to do the Father's will, and must identify ourselves with sinners, if we are to help them and to have the Father's approval sounding in our hearts, and the dove of God nestling there, and teaching us, too, that gentleness is the divinest and strongest power to win men from evil and for God.

Chapter 60

THE DOVE OF GOD

'He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him.' MATT. iii.16. This Gospel of Matthew is emphatically the gospel of the Kingdom. It sets forth Jesus as the long-promised Messiah, the Son of David. And this conception of Him and of His work, whilst it runs through the whole of the Gospel, is more obviously influential in shaping the selection of incidents and colouring the cast of the language, in the early portion. Hence the genealogy with which the Gospel begins dwells with emphasis on His royal descent from David. Hence the story of the wise men of the East is given, who came to do their homage to the new-born King of the Jews, whose innocent poverty and infancy are set in contrast with the court and character of the cruel Herod who had for an hour usurped the title. Hence, also, the mission of John the Baptist is all summed up in his proclamation: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' He is the herald that runs before the chariot of the advancing Monarch, and shouts to a slumbering nation, 'The King! the King!' Preserving the same reference to the royal dignity of Jesus, we may look at His baptism as being His public assumption of His Messianic office, and at this descent of the Holy Spirit as the anointing or coronation of the King. As His meek head rose, glistening from the waters of the baptism, there fluttered down upon Him the gentle token of the manifest designation from the Heavens, which solemnly declared Him to be the Son of God, anointed Messias, King of Israel and of the world. So in looking at this incident, I take simply two points of view, and consider its bearing on Jesus, and on us. I. As to the former, we have here the Coronation of the King. We need not spend time upon the question which we have no materials for answering, viz. -- What was the 'objective material reality' here? We do not know enough about what constitutes 'objective material reality,' nor about what are the laws of prophetic ecstasy and vision, to discuss such a question as that. Nor is there any need to moot it. It does not matter one rush whether bystanders would have seen anything or not. It does not matter in the least whether there was any actual excitation of auditory or visual nerves. It does not matter whether there was anything which people are contented to call material -- a word which covers a depth of ignorance. Enough for us that this was no fancy, born in a man's brain, but an actual manifestation, whether through sense or apart from sense, to consciousness, of a divine outpouring and communication. Enough for us that the voice which spoke was God's, and that that which descended was the Spirit of God. As to all other questions, they may be amusing and interesting, but they are insoluble, and therefore unimportant. Well, then, taking that point of view, the next question that arises is as to the purpose of this descent of the Spirit. Plainly, as I have said, it was the coronation and anointing of the Monarch. But a man is king before he is crowned. Coronation is the consequence and not the cause of his royalty. It is but the official and solemn announcement of a previous fact. No additional power, no fresh authority, comes of the crowning. And so the first purpose of this great fact is distinctly stated, in John's Gospel, as having been the solemn, divine pointing out of Messiah to the Baptist primarily, but in order that he might bear witness of Him to others. The words which follow are a commentary on, and part of the explanation of, the descent of the Holy Spirit. They are God's finger, pointing to Jesus and saying, 'Arise, anoint Him, for this is He.' But it must be remembered always that this was neither the beginning of that divine Spirit's operation upon Jesus, nor the

beginning of His Messianic nature and consciousness; nor the beginning of His Sonship. That day was not in deepest truth the 'day' on which the Son was 'begotten.' Before the baptism there was the consciousness of Messiahship witnessed in these words, so singularly compacted of humility and authority: 'Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness'; and before His baptism, and even before His birth, that divine Spirit wrought His manhood, and ere the heavens opened, or the dove fluttered down upon His head, He from everlasting was the Son in the bosom of the Father. So we see here, I think, if we follow the lead of the Scriptural teaching, not the beginning of powers or communications, but an advance in these. Christ's baptism was an epoch in His human development, inasmuch as it was the public official assumption of His Messianic office. He came from out of the sheltering obscurity of the Galilean village nestling among its hills. He had now put His foot upon the path, set with knives and hot ploughshares, along which He had to walk to the Cross. Inasmuch as it was an epoch in His development (for His manhood was capable of growth and maturing), and inasmuch as new tasks needed increase of gifts, and inasmuch as His man's nature was subject to the conditions of time, and capable of expansion and increase of capacity, therefore, I believe that when Christ rose from the waters of baptism, no new gift indeed was His, but such an advance in the communication to His manhood of the sustaining Spirit, as fully equipped Him for the new calls of His Messianic work. His manhood needed, as ours does, the continual communication of the divine Spirit, and His manhood, because it was sinless, was capable of a complete reception of that Spirit. Sinless though He knew Himself to be, as His own words declare, He yet bowed His head to the baptism of repentance, which He needed not for Himself, just as He afterwards bowed His head to a darker, a sadder baptism, which He had to be baptized with, though it likewise He needed not for Himself, because in both the one and the other He would make Himself one with His brethren. The Spirit of God had shaped His manhood ere His birth. The Spirit of God had been abiding in His holy infancy and growing youth, but now it came in larger measure for new needs and His Messiah's work. So, dear friends, we see in Christ, baptized with the Spirit of God, the realised ideal of manhood, ever dependent, ever needing for its purity that holy influence, and receiving at every pore that divine gift. What a contrast to our limited partial reception, broken and interrupted so often! All the doors that are barred in our hearts by sin, all the windows that are darkened in our souls by vice and self, in Him stood open to the day, and brilliantly receptive of the illumination. And so 'the Father giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.' Notice, too, the meaning of the symbol. Think of what John, with his incomplete though not inaccurate conceptions, expected in the Messiah whom he proclaimed. To him the coming of the King was first and chiefly a coming to judgment. There is nothing more remarkable than the aspect of terror which drapes the old hope of Israel as it comes from John's lips. He believes that the King is coming, that His coming is to be an awful thing. Judgment is to go before Him, He bears 'His fan in His hand,' and kindles 'unquenchable fire,' into which the leafy trees that have no fruit upon them are to be flung, there to shrivel and crackle and disappear. This is what he expects at the worst, and at the best a baptism in the Holy Ghost, from Messiah's hands, which, however, is likewise to be fiery even whilst it quickens, and searching and destructive even whilst it gladdens. When, then, his carpenter cousin is designated as Messiah, John sees two wonders: that this is the Christ, and that the Spirit which he had thought of as searching and consuming, should come fluttering down upon His head in the likeness of a dove. Old Testament symbols and natural poetry unite in giving felicity to that emblem. 'The Spirit of God brooded on the face of the deep,' says Genesis; and the word

employed describes accurately the action of the mother-bird, with her soft breast and outstretched wings quickening the life that lies beneath. The dove was pure and allowed for sacrifice. All nations have made it the symbol of meekness, gentleness, faithfulness. All these associations determined the form which the descending Benediction took.What then does it proclaim as to the character of the King? Purity is the very foundation of His royalty. Meekness and gentleness are the very weapons of His conquest and the sceptre of His rule. The dove will outfly all Rome's eagles and all rapacious, unclean feeders, with their strong wings, and curved talons, and sharp beaks. The lesson as to the true nature of the true Kingdom, which was taught of old when the prophet said 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, riding on an ass,' and not upon the warhorse of secular force; the lesson which was taught unwittingly, as to the true nature of the true Kingdom, when the scoffers, speaking a deeper truth than they understood, put upon His brow the crown of thorns, and forced into His hand the sceptre of reed, was taught here -- the lesson that meekness conquers, and that His kingdom is founded in suffering, and wielded in gentleness. The lesson of the ancient psalm, which in rapture of prophetic vision beheld the coming of the Bridegroom, and said with strange blending of images of war and of peace: 'Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; in Thy majesty ride prosperously, because of meekness; and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things'; -- that same lesson was taught when the King was crowned, and in the day of His coronation, that which fell upon His bowed, glistening head, was the Dove from Heaven, the proclamation that meekness and gentleness are the garment of Omnipotence.II. Consider this incident as showing us the gifts of the King to His subjects.Christ has nothing which He keeps to Himself. Christ received the Spirit that He might diffuse it through the whole world. Whatsoever He has received of the Father He gives unto us. This conception of the gift that Christ has to bestow upon men, as being the very life-spirit that dwelt in His manhood, and made and kept it pure, is the highest thought that we can have of what the gospel does for us. You do not understand its meaning if you content yourself with thinking of it as simply the means of escape from wrath. You do not understand its meaning -- though, blessed be God! that is the first part of its mercy to us -- if you think of Christ's gift as only pardon by means of His sacrifice on the Cross. We must rise higher than that; we must feel, if we would understand the 'unspeakable gift,' that it is the gift of Himself to dwell within us by His Spirit as the very spirit of our lives. Assimilation by reception of a supernatural life from Him, is the teaching of Pentecost. Christ is our life; 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death.'Therefore, all Christian men are spoken of in the New Testament in the same language which is used in reference to their Master. Is He the Son of God? They are sons through Him. Is He the High Priest? They are priests unto God. Is He the Light of the World? They are, in their places, kindled and derived lights. Is He the Christ, the Messias, the Anointed? 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One,' and He hath anointed us in Him. So that it is no arrogance, though it may be a questionably wise form of expression, when we say that the object of Christ's coming is to make us all Christs, God's anointed, and to make us so because He Himself in His Spirit dwells in us.Christ can do that. He can give this Spirit. That is the very thing that all other teachers cannot do. They can teach tricks of imitation, they can galvanise men, for a little while, into some kind of copy of their characteristics. They can give them the principles which they themselves have been living on, but to repeat and to continue the spirit of the Teacher is the very thing that cannot be done. 'Let a double portion fall upon me,' said Elisha; and Elijah, knowing the limits of the human relationship between master and disciple, could only shake his head in

doubt and say, 'Thou askest a hard thing; perhaps thou wilt get it, perhaps thou wilt not, but it will not be I that will give it you.' But Christ says: 'I give My Spirit to you all.' And let us remember, too, how full of blessed teaching, of rebuke, and of instruction that symbol is, in reference to ourselves. To all of us there is offered, if we like to have it, this dove-like Spirit. What does that mean? Let us for a moment dwell upon the various uses of the emblem, for they all carry important lessons. Our hearts are like that wild chaos which preceded the present ordered state of things. And over the seething darkness, full of all formless horrors and half-discerned dead monstrosities, over all the chaos of disordered wills, rebellious appetites, stinging conscience, darkened perceptions, there will come, if we will (and we may will by His help, which is never far away from us), gently, but quickening us into life and reducing confusion into order, and flooding our cloudy night with light, that divine Spirit. The dove that brooded over Chaos and made it Cosmos, will brood over your nature, and re-create the whole. 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.' 'The old things are passed away.' Creator Spirit! create a clean heart in me.And then again let me remind you that this emblem brings to us another cognate and yet distinct hope, inasmuch as the dove was the emblem of purity and clean for sacrifice. This is the characteristic of the scriptural doctrine of inspiration, by which it is distinguished from all heathen and secular conceptions of a similar sort, viz., that it puts the moral in the foreground, and that the Spirit, which is the Spirit of truth, and of wisdom and of power, is first and foremost the Spirit of holiness. So that if a man is not clean, no matter what his gifts, no matter what his wisdom, no matter what his intellectual force, no matter what his supernatural and miraculous power, he has not the Spirit of God in him. The Dove comes, and where it comes there is peace, there is purity, there is sacrifice. If any man have not the Spirit of holiness he is none of Christ's.So, brethren, remember that not in shining faculty, not in piercing vision into mystery, not in the eloquence of honeyed tongue, nor the power of a swift hand, not in any of the lesser and subordinate gifts which the world exclusively honours as inspiration, is the power of the indwelling Spirit to be manifested. If the Spirit of God is in you, it is making you clean.Still further, remember how, as for the King so for His subjects, the Dove that crowns Him and that dwells in them is the Spirit of meekness and of gentleness. That is the true force. Light, which is silent, is mightier than all lightnings. The Spirit, which is the 'Spirit of love,' is therefore 'the Spirit of power.' The true type of Christian character, which the gospel has brought into being, looks modest, inconspicuous and humdrum, by the side of the more brilliant and vulgar beauties of the world's ideals. Just as the iridescent hues on a dove's neck, and the quiet blue of its plumage, look modest and Quaker-like beside gaudy parroquets and other bedizened birds, so the Christian type of character, patient, meek, gentle, not self-asserting, seems pale and sober-tinted beside the world's heroes. But gentleness is the mightiest and will conquer at last. For Christ and Christ's followers go forth, through universal love to universal power.And the last suggestion that I offer to you about the significance of this symbol is one that I freely admit to be fanciful, and yet it strikes me as being very beautiful. Noah's dove came back to the ark with one leaf in his beak. That was the prophecy and the foretaste of a whole world of beauty and of verdure. The dove that comes to us, bearing with it some leaf plucked from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God, is the earnest of our inheritance until the day of redemption. All the gifts of that divine Spirit, gifts of holiness, of gentleness, of wisdom, of truth -- all these are forecasts and anticipations of the perfectness of the heavens. To us, sailing over a dismal sea, the Spirit comes bearing with it a message that tells us of the far-off land and the fair garden of God in which the blessed shall walk.Dear friends, remember the one condition on which is suspended our possession of the Spirit

of God. It is that we shall have Christ for our very own by our humble faith. If we are trusting in Him, He will come and put His Spirit within our hearts. Without Him these hearts are cages of unclean and hateful birds. But the meek presence of the dove of God will drive out the obscene, twilight-loving creatures that build and scream there, and will fill our hearts with the tranquillity, the purity, the gentleness, the hope, which are 'the fruit of the Spirit.'

Chapter 61

THE VICTORY OF THE KING

'Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.2. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungred.3. And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.4. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.5. Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, 6. And saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone.7. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.8. Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; 9. And saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.10. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.11. Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him.' -- MATT. iv.1-11. Every word of the first verses of this narrative is full of meaning. 'Then' marks the immediate connection, not only in time but in causation, between the baptism and the temptation. The latter followed necessarily on the former. 'Of the Spirit' -- then God does lead His Son into temptation. For us all, as for Christ, it is true that, though God does not tempt as wishing us to fall, He does so order our lives that they carry us into places where the metal of our religion is tried. 'To be tempted' -- then a pure, sinless human nature is capable of temptation, and the King has to begin his career by a battle. 'Of the devil' -- then there is a dark kingdom of evil, and a personal head of it, the prince of darkness. He knows His rival, and yet He knows him but partially. He strides out to meet him in desperate duel, as Goliath did the stripling whom he despised; and both hosts pause and gaze. To a sinless nature no temptation can arise from within, but must be presented from without. We leave untouched the question as to the manner of this temptation, which remains equally real, whether we conceive that the tempter appeared in bodily form, and actually carried the body of our Lord from place to place, or whether we suppose that, during it all, Christ sat silent, and apparently alone in the wilderness. We only divert attention from the true importance of the incident by giving prominence to picturesque or questionable externals of it. I. The first assault and repulse, in the desert. Unlike John the Baptist, whose austere spirit was unfolded in the desert, Jesus grew up among men, passing through and sanctifying childhood and youth, home duties, and innocent pleasures. But ere He enters on His work, the need which every soul appointed to high and hard tasks has felt, namely, the need for seclusion and communion with God in solitude, was felt by Him. As it had been for Moses and Elijah, the wilderness was His school; and as the collective Israel, so the personal Son of God, has to be led into the wilderness, that there God may 'speak to His heart.' So deep and rapt was the communion, that, for forty days, spirit so mastered flesh that the need and desire for food were suspended. But when He touched earth again, the pinch of hunger began. Analogous cases of the power of high emotion to hold physical wants in abeyance are sufficiently familiar to make so extreme an instance explicable. We have to distinguish in the first temptation between the sphere

in which it moves, the act suggested, and the true nature of the act as dragged to light in Christ's answer. The sphere is that of the physical nature. Hunger has nothing to do with right or wrong. It asserts itself independent of all considerations. In itself neutral, it may, like all physical cravings, lead to sin. Most men are most tempted by fleshly desires. Satan had tried the same bait before on the first Adam. It had answered so well then, that he thinks himself wise in bringing it out once more. Adam, in his garden, surrounded by all that sense needed, had yielded, and thereby had turned the garden into desert; Christ, in the desert, pressed by hunger, does not yield, and thereby turns the desert into a garden again. At the beginning of His course He is tempted by the innocent desire to secure physical support; at its close He is tempted by the innocent desire to avoid physical pain. He overcomes both, and by His victories in the wilderness so unlike the garden, and in Gethsemane, another garden, so unlike the first, He brings 'a statelier Eden back to man.' The act suggested seems not only innocent, but in accordance with His dignity. It was a strange anomaly for 'the Son of God,' on whose head the dove had descended, and in whose ears the voice had sounded, to be at the point of starving. What more unbecoming than that one possessed of His mysterious closeness to God should be suffering from such ignoble necessities? What more foolish than to continue to hunger, when a word could spread a table in the wilderness? John had said that God could make children of Abraham out of these stones. Could He not make bread out of them? The suggestion sounds benevolent, sensible, almost religious. The need is real, the remedy possible and easy; the result desirable as preserving valuable life, and putting an end to an anomaly, and the objections apparently nil. The bait is skilfully wound over the barbed hook. Christ's answer tears it away, and discloses the sharp points. He will not discuss with Satan whether He is Son of God or no. To the Jews He was wont to answer, 'I say unto you'; to Satan He answers, 'It is written.' He puts honour on 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,' and sets us an example of how to wield it. The words quoted are found in the account of Israel's miraculous sustenance in the desert by the manna, and are applied by Christ to Himself, not as Son of God, but as simple man. They contain the great truth that God can feed men, in their physical life, by bread or without bread. When He does it by bread or other ordinary means, it is even then not the material substance in itself, but His will operating through it, which feeds. He can abolish all the outward means, and still keep a man alive. There is no reference to the truth which is sometimes forcibly inserted into this saying, that man has a higher than bodily life, and needs more than material bread to feed the hunger of the soul. The whole scope of the words is to state the law of physical nourishment as dependent at last on the divine will, and therefore equally capable of being accomplished with or without bread, by ordinary means or apart from these. The bearing of the words on Christ's hunger is twofold: First, He will not use His miraculous powers to provide food, for that would be to distrust God, and so to cast off His filial dependence; second, He will not separate Himself from His brethren, and provide for Himself by a way not open to them, for that would really be to reverse the very purpose of His incarnation and to defeat His whole work. He has come to bear all man's burdens, and shall He begin by separating Himself from them? Therefore He answers in words which declare the law for 'man,' and thereby merges all that was distinctive in His position in a loving participation in our lot. If the Captain of our Salvation had begun by refusing to share the privations of the rank and file, and had provided dainties for Himself, what would have become of His making common cause with them? The temptation addressed to Christ's physical nature was, to put it roughly, 'Look out for yourself.' His answer was, 'As Son of God, I hold by My filial dependence. As man, I share My brethren's lot, and am content

to live as they live.' II. The second assault and repulse, on the temple. We need not touch on the questions as to whether our Lord's body was really transported to the temple, and, if so, to what part of it. But we may point out that there is nothing in the narrative to warrant the usual interpretation of this temptation, as being addressed to the desire of recognition, and as equivalent to the suggestion that our Lord should show Himself, by a stupendous miracle before the multitude, as the Messiah. There is nothing about spectators, and no sign that the dread solitude wrapping these two was broken by others. We must seek for the point of the second temptation in another direction. The very locality chosen for it helps us to the right understanding of it. There were plenty of cliffs in the desert, down which a fall would have been fatal. Why not choose one of them? The temple was God's house, the fitting scene for an attempt to work disaster by the abuse of religious ideas. The former temptation underlies this. That had sought to move Jesus to cast off His filial confidence; this seeks to pervert that confidence, and through it to lead Him to cast off filial obedience. Therefore 'the Devil quotes Scripture for his purpose.' What could be more religious than an act of daring based upon faith, which again was based on a word which proceeded 'out of the mouth of God'? It is not in the suppression of certain words in the quotation that Satan's error lies. The omitted words are not material. What did he hope to accomplish by this suggestion? If Jesus was, in bodily reality, standing on the summit of the temple, the tempter, profoundly disbelieving the promise, may have thought that the leap would end his anxieties by the death of his rival. But, at any rate, he sought to lead His faith into wrong paths, and to incite to what was really sinful self-will under the guise of absolute trust.Our Lord's answer, again drawn from Deuteronomy, strips off the disguise from the action which seemed so trustful. He changes the plural verb of the original passage into the singular, thus at once taking as His own personal obligation the general command, and pointing a sharp arrow at His foe, who was now knowingly or unknowingly so flagrantly breaking that law. If God had bidden Jesus cast Himself down, to do it would have been right. As He had not, to do it was not faith, but self-will. To cast Himself into dangers needlessly, and then to trust God (whom He had not consulted about going into them) to get Him out, was to 'tempt God.' True faith is ever accompanied with true docility. He had come to do His Father's will. A divine 'must' ruled His life. Was He to begin His career by throwing off His allegiance on pretext of trust? If the Captain of our Salvation commences the campaign by rebellion, how can He lead the rank and file to that surrender of their own wills which is victory?The lessons for us from the second temptation are weighty. Faith may be perverted. It may even lead to abandoning filial submission. God's promised protection is available, not in paths of our own choosing, but only where He has sent us. If we take the leap without His command, we shall fall mangled on the very temple pavement. It is when we are 'in the way' which He has prescribed that 'the angels of God' whom He has promised 'meet' us. How many scandals in the falls of good men would have been avoided, and how many mad enterprises would have been unattempted, and how much more clearly would the relations of filial faith and filial obedience have been understood, if the teaching of this second temptation had been laid to heart!III. The final assault and repulse, on the mountain.Again the scene changes, because the stress of the temptation is different. The 'exceeding high mountain' is not to be looked for in our atlases. The manner in which all the glories of the world's kingdoms were flashed in one dazzling panorama, like an instantaneous photograph, before Christ's eyes, is beyond our knowledge. We note that Satan has no more to say about 'the Son of God.' He has been foiled in both his assaults on Christ in that character. If He stood firm in filial trust and in filial submission, there was no more to be

done. So the tempter tries new weapons, and seeks to pervert the desire for that dominion over the world which was to be a consequence of the sonship. He has not been able to touch Him as Son; can he not spoil Him as King? They are rivals: can they not strike up a treaty? Jesus thinks that He is going to reign as God's viceroy; can He not be induced, as a much quicker way of getting to His end, to become Satan's? Such a scheme sounds very stupid; but Satan is very stupid, for all his wisdom, and the hopeless folly of his proposal is typical of the absurdities which lie in all sins. There is an old play, the title of which would be coarse if it were not so true, 'The Devil is an Ass.'His boast, like all his wiles, is a little truth and a great lie. It is true that his servants do often manage to climb into thrones and other high places. It is true that beggars and worse than beggars on horseback, and princes and better than princes walking, is often the rule. It is true that the crowned saints of the world might be counted on the fingers. But, for all that, the Father of lies was like himself in this promise. He did not say that, if he gives a kingdom to one of his servants, he takes it from another. He did not say that his gifts are shams, and fade away when the daylight comes. He did not say that he and his are, after all, tools in God's hands.What was it that he thought he was appealing to in Christ? Ambition? He knew that Jesus was destined to be King of the earth, and he blunders to the conclusion that His reign is to be such as he could help Him to. How impossible it is for Satan to penetrate the depths of that loving heart! How mole-blind evil is to the radiant light of goodness! How hate fails when it tries to fathom love! If all that Satan meant by 'the glory' of the world had been Christ's, He would have been no nearer His heart's desire. The temptation was not only to fling away the ideal of His kingdom, but to reverse the means for its establishment. Neither temptation could originate within Christ's heart, but both beset Him all His life. The cravings of His followers, the expectations of His race, the certainty of an enthusiastic response if He would put Himself at their head, and the equal certainty of death if He would not, were always urging Him to the very same thing.'There is nothing weaker,' says an old school-man, 'than the Devil stripped naked.' The mask is thrown off at last, and swift and smiting comes the gesture and the word of abhorrence, 'Get thee hence, Satan,' -- now revealed in thy true colours. Jesus still couches His refusal in Scripture words, as if sheltering Himself behind their broad shield. It is safest to meet temptation, not by our own reasonings and thoughts, but by the words which cannot lie. As He had held unmoved, by His filial trust and His filial submission, now He clings to the foundation principle of all religion, -- the exclusive worship and service of God. His kingdom is to be a kingdom of priests; therefore to begin it by such an act would be suicide. It is to be the victorious antagonist of Satan's kingdom, because it is to lead all men to worship God alone; therefore enmity, not alliance, is to be between these two. Christ's last words are not only His final refusal of all the baits, but the ringing proclamation of war to the death, and that a war which will end in victory. The enemy's quiver is empty. He feels that he has met more than his match, so he skulks from the field, beaten for the first time by having encountered a heart which all his fiery darts failed to inflame, and dimly foreseeing yet more utter defeat.The last temptation teaches us both the nature of Christ's kingdom and the means of its establishment. It is a rule over men's hearts and wills, swaying them to goodness and the exclusive worship and service of God. That being so, the way to found it follows of course. It can only be set up by suffering, utter self-sacrifice, gentleness, and goodness. Christ is King of all because He is servant of all. His cross is His throne. His realm is of hearts softened, cleansed, made gladly obedient, and growingly like Himself. For such a king, weapons of force are impossible, and for His subjects the same law holds. They have often tried to fight for Christ with the Devil's weapons, to make compliance with

him for ends which they thought good, to keep terms with evil, or to adopt worldly policy, craft, or force. They have never succeeded, and, thank God! they never will.That duel was fought for us. There we all conquered, if we will hold fast by Him who conquered then, and thereby taught our 'hands to war' and our 'fingers to fight.' The strong man is bound. The spoiling of his house follows of course, and is but a question of time.

Chapter 62

THE SPRINGING OF THE GREAT LIGHT

'Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, He departed into Galilee; 13. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: 14. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 15. The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; 16. The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.' -- MATT. iv.12-16. Though the narrative of the Temptation is immediately followed by the notice of Jesus' return to Galilee, there was a space between wide enough to hold all that John's Gospel tells of the gathering of the first disciples, the brief stay in Galilee, the Jerusalem ministry, and the journey through Samaria. John i.43 refers to the same point of time as verses 12-16 of this chapter. It is rash to conclude Matthew's ignorance from his silence, and it is plain, from his own words, that he did not suppose that the return to Galilee followed the Temptation as closely in time as it does in his narrative. For he does link the Temptation to the Baptism immediately, by 'Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit' (verse 1), and so some interval of time must be allowed, during which Jesus left the wilderness, and went to some place where He could hear of John's imprisonment. A gap is necessary. Its extent is not indicated, nor are the reasons for silence as to its contents. But we may as reasonably conjecture that Matthew's eagerness to get to his main subject, the Galilean ministry, led him to regard the short visit to Jerusalem as an episode from which little came, as put his silence down to a very improbable ignorance. The same explanation may account for the slight mention made of His 'leaving Nazareth,' of which Luke has given the memorable story. John was silenced, and that moved Jesus to go back to Galilee and take up His ministry there. His reason has been thought to have been the wish to avoid a similar fate, but He was safer from Herod in Jerusalem than in Capernaum, within reach of the tyrant's arm, stretched out from Tiberias close by, and the supposition is more probable, as well as more worthy, that a directly opposite motive impelled Him. The voice that had cried, 'After me cometh a greater than I,' was stifled in a dungeon. It was fitting that He, of whom John had spoken, should at once stand forth. There must be no interval between the ringing proclamation by the herald and the appearance of the king, lest men should say that one more hope had been dashed, and one more prophet proved a dreamer. And is there not a lesson for all times in the fact that when John is silenced, Jesus begins to speak? Is not the quenching of a light kindled to bear witness to the true Light, ever the occasion for that unkindled and unquenchable Light to burn the more brightly, though tear-dimmed eyes often fail to see it? The choice of Capernaum as a residence suggested to Matthew Isaiah's prophecy, which he quotes freely, fusing into one sentence the geographical terms, in verse 15, which, in the Hebrew, are the close of one paragraph, and the prophecy in verse 16 which, in the Hebrew, begins another. The territory of Zabulon lay in what is now called Lower Galilee, stretching right across from the northern end of the Sea of Gennesaret to the coast of the Mediterranean, while that of Naphtali lay further north. 'The way of the sea' is here not the designation of another district, but a specification of those named in the preceding clauses, and may be rendered 'towards the sea,' while 'beyond Jordan' is the almost heathen territory on the

east bank of the river, and 'Galilee of the Gentiles' is the general name for all three, the two tribal territories and the trans-Jordanic district. These are all smelted into one designation, 'the people which sat in darkness,' and thus the whole of verse 15 and the first clause of verse 16 make the nominative of the verb 'saw.' There is something very impressive in that long-drawn-out accumulation of geographical names, and in their being all massed in the one sad description of their inert darkness, and then equally massed as seeing the great light that springs up. The intense pathos of that description and its sad truth to experience should not be unnoticed. They sit in the dark -- the attitude of listless languor and constrained inaction, too true an emblem of the paralysis which falls on all the highest activities of the spirit, if the light from God has been quenched. It is only wild beasts that are active in the night. The lower parts of man's nature may work energetically in that darkness, but all that makes his glory is torpid in it. Christ's light has been the great impulse to progress. Races without it sit and do not march. But that is not all, for the sad picture is sketched again with blacker shadows in the next clause, which substitutes for 'darkness' the still more tragic words, 'the region and shadow of death.' The realm of darkness is the region of death. That dread figure is the lord of it, and, grimly enough, its very intensity of blackness has power to throw a shadow even there where there is no light, and to deepen the gloom. The second clause advances on the first in another respect, for while the former spoke only of 'seeing' the light, the latter tells of the blessed suddenness with which it 'sprung up.' The one clause speaks of the human perception, the other of the divine revelation which precedes it and makes it possible. But had Matthew any right to see in Jesus' Galilean ministry the fulfilment of a prophecy which, as spoken, was simply a promise that the northern parts of Israel which, by geographical position, had to bear the first and worst brunt of Assyrian invasion, should have deliverance from the oppressor? Yes; for Isaiah's vision of the light rising on Israel, crushed beneath foreign oppression, was based on a distinctly Messianic prediction. It was because Messiah should come that he expected Assyria to be flung off and Israel to be set free, and he was right in the expectation, for though the Messiah did not come visibly then, His coming was the guarantee, and in some sense the cause, of Israel's deliverance. Nor was Matthew less right in seeing in that earlier deliverance but a germinant accomplishment of the prophecy, which, by its very transiency, outwardness, and incompleteness, pointed onwards to a better spring of the Light, and a fuller deliverance from a murkier darkness and a more mortal death. 'The life was the light of men,' the teacher of all knowledge of God, the source of all light of true joy, the giver of all light of white purity, and He has risen on a world sitting in darkness that all men may walk in the light, and be children of the light.

Chapter 63

THE EARLY WELCOME AND THE FIRST MINISTERS OF THE KING

'From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.18. And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.19. And He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.20. And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him.21. And going on from thence, He saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets: and He called them.22. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed Him.23. And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.24. And His fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them.25. And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.' -- MATT. iv.17-25. In these verses we have a summary of our Lord's early Galilean ministry. The events are so presented and combined as to give an impression as of a triumphal progress of the newly anointed monarch. He sweeps through the northern regions, everywhere exercising the twofold office of teaching and healing, and everywhere followed by eager crowds. This joyous burst of the new power, like some strong fountain leaping into the sunshine, and this rush of popular enthusiasm, are meant to heighten the impression of the subsequent hostility of the people. The King welcomed at first is crucified at last. It was 'roses, roses, all the way' in these early days, but they withered soon. There are three points in these verses: the King acting as His own herald; the King calling His first servants; and the King wielding His power and welcomed by His subjects. I. In verse 17 we have a striking picture of the King as His own herald. The word rendered 'preach' of course means, literally, to proclaim as a herald does. It is remarkable that this earliest phase of our Lord's teaching is described in the same words as John's preaching. The stern voice was silenced. Instead of the free wilderness, John had now the gloomy walls of Machaeus for the bound of his activity. But Jesus takes up his message, though with a difference. The severe imagery of the axe, the fan, the fire, is not repeated, as it would seem. Sterner words than John's could fall hot from the lips into which grace was poured; but the time for these was not yet come. It may seem singular that Christ should have spoken of the kingdom, and been silent concerning the King. But such silence was only of a piece with the reticence which marked His whole teaching, and was a sign of His wise adaptation of His words to the capacity of His hearers, as well as of His lowliness. He veiled His royalty by deigning to be His own herald; by substituting the proclamation of the abstract, the kingdom, for the concrete, the King; by seeming to careless hearers to be but the continuer of the forerunner's message; by the simple, remote region which He chose for His earliest work. The belief that the kingdom was at hand was equally necessary, and repentance equally indispensable as preparation for it, whoever the King might be. The same law of congruity between message and hearers, which He enjoined on His followers, when He bade them be careful where they flung their pearls, and which governed

His own fullest final revelations to His truest friends, when He said, 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot carry them now,' moulded His first words to the excited but ignorant crowds. II. The King's mandate summoning His servants. The call of the first four disciples is so told as to make prominent these points: the brotherhood of the two pairs; their occupation at the moment of their call; the brief, authoritative word of Christ; His investiture of them with new functions, which yet in some sense were the prolongation of the old; their unhesitating, instantaneous obedience and willing abandonment of their all. These points all help the impression of regal power, and do something to explain the nature of the kingdom and the heart of the King. Matthew does not seem to have known of the previous intercourse of the four with Jesus, as recorded In John 1. His narrative, taken alone, would lay stress on the strange influence wielded by Jesus over these busy fishermen. But that influence is no less remarkable, and becomes more explicable, on taking John's supplemental account into consideration. It tells us that one brother of each pair -- namely Andrew, and probably John -- had sought Jesus on the Baptist's testimony, and in that never-to-be-forgotten night had acquired the conviction that He was the King of Israel. It tells us, too, that Andrew first found his own brother, Simon; from which we may infer that the other one of the two next found his brother James, and that each brought his own brother to Jesus. The bond of discipleship was then riveted. But apparently, when Jesus went up to Jerusalem on that first journey recorded only in John's Gospel, the four went back to their fishing, and waited for His further call. It came in the manner which Matthew describes. The background, which John enables us to fill in, shows us that their following was no sudden blind impulse, but the deliberate surrender of men who knew well what they were doing, though they had not fathomed the whole truth as to His kingdom and their place in it. They knew, at any rate, that He was the Messiah and that they were called by a voice, which they ought to obey, to be His soldiers and partisans. They could not but know that the call meant danger, hardship, conflict. They rallied to the call, as soldiers might when the commander honours them by reading out their names, as picked for leaders of the storming-party. Was this the same incident which St. Luke narrates as following the first miraculous draught of fishes? That is one of the difficulties in harmonising the synoptic narratives which will always divide opinions. On the whole, I incline to think it most natural to answer 'no.' The reasons would take us too far afield. But accepting that view, we may note through how many stages Jesus led this group of His disciples before they were fully recognised as apostles. First there was their attachment to Him as disciples, which in no degree interfered with their trade. Then came this call to more close attendance on Him, which, however, was probably still somewhat intermittent. Then followed the call recorded by Luke, which finally tore them from their homes; and, last of all, their appointment as apostles. At each stage they 'might have had opportunity to have returned.' Their vocation in the kingdom dawns on them slowly. They and we are led on, by little and little and little, to posts and tasks of which we do not dream at the beginning. Duty opens before the docile heart bit by bit. Abram is led to Harran, and only there learns his ultimate destination. Obedience is rewarded by the summons to more complete surrender, which is also fuller possession of Him for whom the surrender is made. 'The word of a king is with power.' Christ's call is authoritative in its brevity. All duty lies in 'Come ye after Me.' He does not need to use arguments. From the very first this meek and lowly man assumes a tone which on other lips we call arrogant. His style is royal. His mouth is autocratic. He knows that He has the right to command. And, strangely enough, the world admits the right, and finds nothing unworthy of His meekness -- a meekness of which He was fully conscious, which is another

paradox -- in this unconditional claim of absolute submission to his curt orders. What is the explanation of this tone of authority? How comes it that the kingdom which is liberty is, from its very foundation, an absolute despotism? That same peremptory summons reaches beyond these four fishermen to us all. They were the first to hear it, and continued to hold pre-eminence among the disciples, for they make up the first group of the three quaternions into which the list of the apostles is always divided. But the very same voice speaks to us, and we are as truly summoned by the King to be His servants and soldiers as were they. Their prompt self-surrendering response is the witness of the power over their hearts which Jesus had won. The one pair of brothers left their nets floating in the water; the other left their father with the mesh and the twine in his old hands. It was not much wealth to leave. But he surrenders much who surrenders all, however little that all may be; and he surrenders nothing who keeps back anything. One sweet portion of their earthly happiness He left them to enjoy, heightened by discipleship, for each had his brother by his side, and natural affection was ennobled by common faith and service. If Zebedee was left, John still had James. True, Herod's sword cut their union asunder, and James died first, and John last, of the twelve; but years of happy brotherhood were to come before then. So both the surrender which outwardly gives up possessions or friends, and that which keeps them, sanctified by being held and used as for and from Him, were exemplified in the swift obedience of these four to the call of the King. 'I will make you fishers of men.' That shows a kindly wish to make as little as may be of the change of occupation. Their old craft is to be theirs still, only in nobler form. The patience, the brave facing of the storm and the night, the observance of the indications which taught where to cast, the perseverance which toiled all night though not a fin glistened in the net, would all find place in their new career. Nor are these words less royal than was the call. They contain profound hints as to the nature of the kingdom which could scarcely be apprehended at first. But this at least would be clear, that Jesus summoned them to service, to gather in men out of the dreary waves of worldly care and toil into a kingdom of stable rest, and that by summoning them to service He endowed them with power. So He does still. All whom He summons to follow Him are meant by Him to be fishers of men. It was not as apostles, but as simple disciples, that these four received this charge and ability. The same command and fitness are given to all Christians. Following Christ, surrender, the obligation of effort to win others, capacity to do so, belong to all the subjects of Christ's kingdom. III. The triumphal progress of the King. Our evangelist evidently masses together without regard to chronological order the broad features of the early Galilean ministry. He paints it as a time of joyful activity, of universal recognition, of swift and far-spreading fame. We do not exaggerate the impression of victorious publicity which they give, when we call these closing verses the record of the King's triumphal progress through His dominions. Observe the reiterated use of 'all,' -- all Galilee, all manner of sickness and all manner of disease, all Syria, all that were sick. Matthew labours to convey the feeling of universal stir and wide-reaching, 'full-throated' welcome. Observe, too, that the activity of Christ is confined to Galilee, but the fame of Him crosses the border into heathendom. The King stays on His own territory, but He conquers beyond the frontier. Syria and the mostly heathen Decapolis, and Peraea ('beyond Jordan'), are moved. The odour of the ointment not only fills the house, but enriches the scentless outside air. The prophecy contained in the coming of the Magi is beginning to be fulfilled. From its first preaching, the kingdom is diffusive. Note, too, the contrast between John's ministry and Christ's, in that the former stayed in one spot, and the crowds had to go out to him, while the very genius of Christ's mission expressed itself in that this shepherd king sought the sad and sick, and 'went about in all

Galilee.' Observe, too, that He teaches and preaches the good news of the kingdom, before He heals. John's proclamation of the kingdom had been so charged with threatenings and mingled with fire that it could scarcely be called a 'gospel'; but here that joyous word, used for the first time, is in place. As the tidings came from Christ's lips, they were good tidings, and to proclaim them was His first task. The miracles of healing came second. They were not 'the bell before the sermon,' but the benediction after it. They flowed from Christ in rich abundance. The eager receptiveness of the people, ignorant as it was, was greater then than ever afterwards. Therefore the flow of miraculous power was more unimpeded. But it may be questioned whether we generally have an adequate notion of the immense number of Christ's miracles. Those recorded are but a small proportion of those done. There were more grapes in the vineyards of Eshcol than the messengers brought in evidence to the camp. Our Lord's miracles are told by units; they seem to have been wrought by scores. These early ones were not only attestations of His claim to be the King, but illustrations of the nature of His kingdom He had conquered and bound the strong man, and now He was 'spoiling his house.' They were parables of His higher work on men's souls, which He comes to cleanse from the oppression of demons, from the foamings of epilepsy, from impotence as to doing right. They were tokens of the inexhaustible fountain of power, and of the swift and equally inexhaustible treasures of sympathy, which dwelt in Him. They were His first trophies in His holy war, His first gifts to His subjects. Thus compassed with enthusiasm, and shedding on the wearied new hopes, and on the sick unwonted health, and stirring in sluggish souls some aspirations that greatened and inspired, the King appeared. But no illusions deceived His calm prescience. From the beginning He knew the path which stretched before Him; and while the transient loyalty of the ignorant shouted hosannas around His steps, He saw the cross at the end, and the sight did not make Him falter.

Chapter 64

THE NEW SINAI

'And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: 2. And He opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God, 10. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.11. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake.12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.13. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be oast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.14. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' -- MATT. v.1-16. An unnamed mountain somewhere on the Sea of Galilee is the Sinai of the new covenant. The contrast between the savage desolation of the wilderness and the smiling beauty of the sunny slope near the haunts of men symbolises the contrast in the genius of the two codes, given from each. There God came down in majesty, and the cloud hid Him from the people's gaze; here Jesus sits amidst His followers, God with us. The King proclaims the fundamental laws of His kingdom, and reveals much of its nature by the fact that He begins by describing the characteristics of its subjects, as well as by the fact that the description is cast in the form of beatitudes. We must leave unsettled the question as to the relation between the Sermon on the Mount and the shorter edition of part of it given by Luke, only pointing out that in this first part of Matthew's Gospel we are evidently presented with general summaries; as, for example, the summary of the Galilean ministry in the previous verses, and the grand procession of miracles which follows in chapters viii. and ix. It is therefore no violent supposition that here too the evangelist has brought together, as specimens of our Lord's preaching, words which were not all spoken at the same time. His description of the Galilean ministry in ch. iv.23, as 'teaching' and 'healing,' governs the arrangement of his materials from chapter v. to the end of chapter ix. First comes the sermon, then the miracles follow. The Beatitudes, as a whole, are a set of paradoxes to the 'mind of the flesh.' They were meant to tear away the foolish illusions of the multitude as to the nature of the kingdom; and they must have disgusted and turned back many would-be sharers in it. They are like a dash of cold water on the fiery, impure enthusiasms which were eager for a kingdom of gross delights and vulgar conquest. And, no doubt, Jesus intended them to act like Gideon's test, and to sift out those whose appetite for carnal good was uppermost. But they were tests simply because they embodied everlasting truths as to the characters of His subjects. Our narrow space allows of only the most superficial treatment of these deep words. I. The foundation of all is laid in poverty of spirit. The word

rendered 'poor' does not only signify one in a condition of want, but rather one who is aware of the condition, and seeks relief. If we may refer to Latin words here, it is mendicus rather than pauper, a beggar rather than a poor man, who is meant. So that to be poor in spirit is to be in inmost reality conscious of need, of emptiness, of dependence on God, of demerit; the true estimate of self, as blind, evil, weak, is intended; the characteristic tone of feeling pointed to is self-abnegation, like that of the publican smiting his breast, or that of the disease-weakened, hunger-tortured prodigal, or that of the once self-righteous Paul, 'O wretched man that I am!' People who do not like evangelical teaching sometimes say, 'Give me the Sermon on the Mount.' So say I. Only let us take all of it; and if we do, we shall come, as we shall have frequent occasion to point out, in subsequent passages, to something uncommonly like the evangelical theology to which it is sometimes set up as antithetic. For Christ begins His portraiture of a citizen of the kingdom with the consciousness of want and sin. All the rest of the morality of the Sermon is founded on this. It is the root of all that is heavenly and divine in character. So this teaching is dead against the modern pagan doctrine of self-reliance, and really embodies the very principle for the supposed omission of which some folk like this Sermon; namely, that our proud self-confidence must be broken down before God can do any good with us, or we can enter His kingdom. The promises attached to the Beatitudes are in each case the results which flow from the quality, rather than the rewards arbitrarily given for it. So here, the possession of the kingdom comes by consequence from poverty of spirit. Of course, such a kingdom as could be so inherited was the opposite of that which the narrow and fleshly nationalism of the Jews wanted, and these first words must have cooled many incipient disciples. The 'kingdom of heaven' is the rule of God through Christ. It is present wherever wills bow to Him; it is future, as to complete realisation, in the heaven from which it comes, and to which, like its King, it belongs even while on earth. Obviously, its subjects can only be those who feel their dependence, and in poverty of spirit have cast off self-will and self-reliance. 'Theirs is the kingdom' does not mean 'they shall rule,' but 'of them shall be its subjects.' True, they shall rule in the perfected form of it; but the first, and in a real sense the only, blessedness is to obey God; and that blessedness can only come when we have learned poverty of spirit, because we see ourselves as in need of all things. II. Each Beatitude springs from the preceding, and all twined together make an ornament of grace upon the neck, a chain of jewels. The second sounds a more violent paradox than even the first. Sorrowing is blessed. This, of course, cannot mean mere sorrow as such. That may or may not be a blessing. Grief makes men worse quite as often as it makes them better. Its waves often flow over us like the sea over marshes, leaving them as salt and barren as it found them. Nor is sorrow always sure of comfort. We must necessarily understand the word here so as to bring it into harmony with the context, and link it with the former Beatitude as flowing from it, as well as with the succeeding. The only intelligible explanation is that this sorrow arises from the contemplation of the same facts concerning self as lead to poverty of spirit, and is, in fact, the emotional side of the same disposition. He who takes the true measure of himself cannot but sorrow over the frightful gulf between what he should and might be and what he is, for he knows that there is more than misfortune or unavoidable creatural weakness at work. The grim reality of sin has to be reckoned in. Personal responsibility and guilt are facts. The soul that has once seen its own past as it is, and looked steadily down into the depths of its own being, cannot choose but 'mourn.' Such contrition underlies all moral progress. The ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount puts these two, poverty of spirit and tears for sin, at the foundation. Do its admirers lay that fact to heart? This is

Christ's account of discipleship. We have to creep through a narrow gate, which we shall not pass but on our knees and leaving all our treasures outside. But once through, we are in a great temple with far-reaching aisles and lofty roof. Such sorrow is sure of comfort. Other sorrow is not. The comfort it needs is the assurance of forgiveness and cleansing, and that assurance has never been sought from the King in vain. The comfort is filtered to us in drops here; it pours in a flood hereafter. Blessed the sorrow which leads to experience of the tender touch of the hand that wipes away tears from the face, and plucks evil from the heart! Blessed the mourning, which prepares for the festal garland and the oil of gladness and the robe of praise, instead of ashes on the head and sackcloth on the spirit! III. Meekness here seems to be considered principally as exercised to men, and it thus constitutes the first of the social virtues, which henceforward alternate with those having exclusive reference to God. It is the grace which opposes patient gentleness to hatred, injury, or antagonism. The prominence given to it in Christ's teaching is one of the peculiarities of Christian morals, and is a standing condemnation of much so-called Christianity. Pride and anger and self-assertion and retaliation flaunt in fine names, and are called manly virtues. Meekness is smiled at, or trampled on, and the men who exercise it are called 'Quakers' and 'poor-spirited' and 'chicken-hearted' and the like. Social life among us is in flagrant contradiction of this Beatitude; and as for national life, all 'Christian nations' agree that to apply Christ's precept to it would be absurd and suicidal. He said that the meek should inherit the earth; statesmen say that the only way to keep a country is to be armed to the teeth, and let no man insult its flag with impunity. There does not seem much room for 'a spirited foreign policy' or for 'proper regard to one's own dignity' inside this Beatitude, does there? But notice that this meekness naturally follows the preceding dispositions. He who knows himself and has learned the depth of his own evil will not be swift to blaze up at slights or wrongs. The true meekness is not mere natural disposition, but the direct outcome of poverty of spirit and the consequent sorrow. So, it is a test of their reality. Many a man will indulge in confessions of sin, and crackle up in sputtering heat of indignation at some slight or offence. If he does, his lowly words have had little meaning, and the benediction of these promises will come scantily to his heart. Does Christ mean merely to say that meek men will acquire landed properly? Is there not a present inheritance of the earth by them, though they may not own a foot of it? They have the world who enjoy it, whom it helps nearer God, who see Him in it, to whom it is the field for service and the means for growing character. But in the future the kingdom of heaven will be a kingdom of the earth, and the meek saints shall reign with the King who is meek and lowly of heart. IV. Righteousness is conformity to the will of God, or moral perfection. Hunger and thirst are energetic metaphors for passionate desire, and imply that righteousness is the true nourishment of the Spirit. Every longing of a noble spirit is blessed. Aspiration after the unreached is the salt of all lofty life. It is better to be conscious of want than to be content. There are hungers which are all unblessed, greedy appetites for the swine's husks, which are misery when unsatisfied, and disgust when satiated. But we are meant to be righteous, and shall not in vain desire to be so. God never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them. Such longings prophesy their fruition. Notice that this hunger follows the experience of the former Beatitudes. It is the issue of poverty of spirit and of that blessed sorrow. Observe, too, that the desire after, and not the possession or achievement of, righteousness is blessed. Is not this the first hint of the Christian teaching that we do not work out or win but receive it? God gives it. Our attitude towards that gift should be earnest longing. Such a blessed hungerer shall 'receive ... righteousness from the God of his salvation.' The certainty that he will do so rests at last on the

faithfulness of God, who cannot but respond to all desires which He inspires. They are premonitions of His purposes, like rosy clouds that run before the chariot of the sunrise. The desire to be righteous is already righteousness in heart and will, and reveals the true bent of the soul. Its realisation in life is a question of time. The progressive fulfilment here points to completeness in heaven, when we shall behold His face in righteousness, and be satisfied when we awake in His likeness. V. Again we have a grace which is exercised to men. Mercy is more than meekness. That implied opposition, and was largely negative. This does not regard the conduct of others at all, and is really love in exercise to the needy, especially the unworthy. It embraces pity, charitable forbearance, beneficence, and is revealed in acts, in words, in tears. It is blessed in itself. A life of selfishness is hell; a life of mercy is sweet with some savour of heaven. It is the consequence of mercy received from God. Poverty of spirit, sorrow, hunger after righteousness bring deep experiences of God's gentle forbearance and bestowing love, and will make us like Him in proportion as they are real. Our mercifulness, then, is a reflection from His. His ought to be the measure and pattern of ours in depth, scope, extent of self-sacrifice, and freeness of its gifts. A stringent requirement!Our exercise of mercy is the condition of our receiving it. On the whole, the world gives us back, as a mirror does, the reflection of our own faces; and merciful men generally get what they give. But that is a law with many exceptions, and Jesus means more than that. Merciful men get mercy from God -- not, of course, that we deserve mercy by being merciful. That is a contradiction in terms; for mercy is precisely that which we do not deserve. The place of mercy in this series shows that Jesus regarded it as the consequence, not the cause, of our experience of God's mercy. But He teaches over and over again that a hard, unmerciful heart forfeits the divine mercy. It does so, because such a disposition tends to obscure the very state of mind to which alone God's mercy can be given. Such a man must have forgotten his poverty and sorrow, his longings and their rich reward, and so must have, for the time, passed from the place where he can take in God's gift. A life inconsistent with Christian motives will rob a Christian of Christian privileges. The hand on his brother's throat destroys the servant's own forgiveness. He cannot be at once a rapacious creditor and a discharged bankrupt.VI. If detached from its connection, there is little blessedness in the next Beatitude. What is the use of telling us how happy purity of heart will make us? It only provokes the despairing question, 'And how am I to be pure?' But when we set this word in its place here, it does bring hope. For it teaches that purity is the result of all that has gone before, and comes from that purifying which is the sure answer of God to our poverty, mourning, and longing. Such purity is plainly progressive, and as it increases, so does the vision of God grow. The more the glasses of the telescope are cleansed, the brighter does the great star shine to the gazer. 'No man hath seen God,' nor can see Him, either amid the mists of earth or in the cloudless sky of heaven, if by seeing we mean perceiving by sense, or full, direct comprehension by spirit. But seeing Him is possible even now, if by it we understand the knowledge of His character, the assurance of His presence, the sense of communion with Him. Our earthly consciousness of God may become so clear, direct, real, and certain, that it deserves the name of vision. Such blessed intuition of Him is the prerogative of those whose hearts Christ has cleansed, and whose inward eye is therefore able to behold God, because it is like Him. 'Unless the eye were sunlike, how could it see the sun?' We can blind ourselves to Him, by wallowing in filth. Impurity unfits for seeing purity. Swedenborg profoundly said that the wicked see only blackness where the sun is.Like all these Beatitudes, this has a double fulfilment, as the kingdom has two stages of here and hereafter. Purity of heart is the condition of the vision of God

in heaven. Without holiness, 'no man shall see the Lord.' The sight makes us pure, and purity makes us see. Thus heaven will be a state of ever-increasing, reciprocally acting sight and holiness. Like Him because we see Him, we shall see Him more because we have assimilated what we see, as the sunshine opens the petals, and tints the flower with its own colours the more deeply, the wider it opens.VII. Once more we have the alternation of a grace exercised to men. If we give due weight to the order of these Beatitudes, we shall feel that Christ's peacemaker must be something more than a mere composer of men's quarrels. For he has to be trained by all the preceding experiences, and has to be emptied of self, penitent, hungering for and filled with righteousness, and therefore pure in heart as well as, in regard to men, meek and merciful, ere he can hope to fill this part. That apprenticeship deepens the conception of the peace which Christ's subjects are to diffuse. It is, first and chiefly, the peace which enters the soul that has traversed all these stages; that is to say, the Christian peacemaker is first to seek to bring about peace between men and God, by beseeching them to be reconciled to Him, and then afterwards, as a consequence of this, is to seek to diffuse through all human relations the blessed unity and amity which flow most surely from the common possession of the peace of God. Of course, the relation which the subjects of the true King bear to all wars and fightings, to all discord and strife, is not excluded, but is grounded on this deeper meaning. The centuries that have passed since the words were spoken, have not yet brought up the Christian conscience to the full perception of their meaning and obligation. Too many of us still believe that 'great doors and effectual' can be blown open with gunpowder, and regard this Beatitude as a counsel of perfection, rather than as one of the fundamental laws of the kingdom. The Christian who moves thus among men seeking to diffuse everywhere the peace with God which fills his own soul, and the peace with all men which they only who have the higher peace can preserve unbroken in their quiet, meek hearts, will be more or less recognised as God-like by men, and will have in his own heart the witness that he is called by God His child. He will bear visibly the image of his Father, and will hear the voice that speaks to him too as unto a son.VIII. The last Beatitude crowns all the paradoxes of the series with what sounds to flesh as a stark contradiction. The persecuted are blessed. The previous seven sayings have perfected the portraiture of what a child of the kingdom is to be. This appends a calm prophecy, which must have shattered many a rosy dream among the listeners, of what his reception by the world will certainly turn out. Jesus is not summoning men to dominion, honour, and victory; but to scorn and suffering. His own crown, He knew, was first to be twisted of thorns, and copies of it were to wound His followers' brows. Yet even that fate was blessed; for to suffer for righteousness, which is to suffer for Him, brings elevation of spirit, a solemn joy, secret supplies of strength, and sweet intimacies of communion else unknown. The noble army of martyrs rose before His thoughts as He spoke; and now, eighteen hundred years after, heaven is crowded with those who by axe and stake and gibbet have entered there. 'The glory dies not, and the grief is past.' They stoop from their thrones to witness to us that Christ is true, and that the light affliction has wrought an eternal weight of glory.

Chapter 65

THE FIRST BEATITUDE

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.' -- MATT. v.2. 'Ye are not come unto the mount that burned with fire, nor unto the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of "awful" words.' With such accompaniments the old law was promulgated, but here, in this Sermon on the Mount, as it is called, the laws of the Kingdom are proclaimed by the King Himself; and He does not lay them down with the sternness of those written on tables of stone. No rigid 'thou shalt' compels, no iron 'thou shalt not' forbids; but each precept is linked with a blessing, and every characteristic that is required is enforced by the thought that it contributes to our highest good. It fitted well Christ's character and the lips 'into which grace is poured,' that He spake His laws under the guise of these Beatitudes. This, the first of them, is dead in the teeth of flesh and sense, a paradox to the men who judge good and evil by things external and visible, but deeply, everlastingly, unconditionally, and inwardly true. All that the world commends and pats on the back, Christ condemns, and all that the world shrinks from and dreads, Christ bids us make our own, and assures us that in it we shall find our true blessing. 'The poor in spirit,' they are the happy men. The reason for the benediction is as foreign to law and earthly thoughts as is the benediction of which it is the reason -- 'for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.' Poverty of spirit will not further earthly designs, nor be an instrument for what the world calls success and prosperity. But it will give us something better than earth, it will give us heaven. Do you think that that is better than earth, and should you be disposed to acquiesce in the benediction of those who may lose the world's gifts but are sure to have heaven's felicities? Now, I think I shall best deal with these words by considering, most simply, the fundamental characteristic of a disciple of Jesus Christ, and the blessed issues of that character. I. First, then, the fundamental characteristic of Christ's disciples. Now it is to be noticed that Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, which is much briefer than Matthew's, omits the words 'in spirit,' and so seems at first sight to be an encomium and benediction upon the outward condition of earthly poverty. Matthew, on the other hand, says 'poor in spirit.' And the difference between the two evangelists has given occasion to some to maintain that one or the other of them misunderstood Christ's meaning, and modified His expression either by omission or enlargement. But if you will notice another difference between the two forms of the saying in the two Gospels, you will, I think, find an explanation of the one already referred to; for Matthew's Beatitudes are general statements, 'Blessed are'; and Luke's are addressed to the circle of the disciples, 'Blessed are ye.' And if we duly consider that difference, we shall see that the general statement necessarily required the explanation which Matthew's version appends to it, in order to prevent the misunderstanding that our Lord was setting so much store by earthly conditions as to suppose that virtue and blessedness were uniformly attached to any of these. Jesus Christ was no vulgar demagogue flattering the poor and inveighing against the rich. Luke's 'ye poor' shows at once that Christ was not speaking about all the poor in outward condition, but about a certain class of such. No doubt the bulk of His disciples were poor men who had been drawn or driven by their sense of need to open their hearts to Him. Outward poverty is a blessing if it drives men to God; it is not a blessing if, as is often the case, it drives men from Him; or if, as is still oftener the case, it leaves men negligent of Him. So that Matthew's enlargement is identical in

meaning with Luke's condensed form, regard being had to the difference in the structure of the two Beatitudes. And so we come just to this question -- What is this poverty of spirit? I do not need to waste your time in saying what it is not. To me it seems to be a lowly and just estimate of ourselves, our character, our achievements, based upon a clear recognition of our own necessities, weaknesses, and sins. The 'poor in spirit.' -- I wonder if it would be very reasonable for a moth that flits about the light, or a gnat that dances its hour in the sunbeam, to be proud because it had longer wings, or prettier markings on them, than some of its fellows? Is it much more reasonable for us to plume ourselves on, and set much store by, anything that we are or have done? Two or three plain questions, to which the answers are quite as plain, ought to rip up this swollen bladder of self-esteem which we are all apt to blow. 'What hast thou that thou hast not received?' Where did you get it? How came you by it? How long is it going to last? Is it such a very big thing after all? You have written a book; you are clever as an operator, an experimenter; you are a successful student. You have made a pile of money; you have been prosperous in your earthly career, and can afford to look upon men that are failures and beneath you in social position with a smile of pity or of contempt, as the case may be. Well! I suppose the distance to the nearest fixed star is pretty much the same from the top of one ant-hill in a wood as from the top of the next one, though the one may be a foot higher than the other. I suppose that we have all come out of nothing, and are anything, simply because God is everything. If He were to withhold His upholding and inbreathing power from any of us for one moment, we should shrivel into nothingness like a piece of paper calcined in the fire, and go back into that vacuity out of which His fiat, and His fiat alone, called us. And yet here we are, setting great store, some of us, by our qualities or belongings, and thinking ever so much of ourselves because we possess them, and all the while we are but great emptinesses; and the things of which we are so proud are what God has poured into us. You think that is all commonplace. Bring it into your lives, brethren; apply it to your estimate of yourselves, and your expectations from other people, and you will be delivered from a large part of the annoyances and the miseries of your present. But the deepest reason for a habitual and fixed lowly opinion of ourselves lies in a sadder fact. We are not only recipient nothingnesses; we have something that is our own, and that is our will, and we have lifted it up against God. And if a man's position as a dependent creature should take all lofty looks and high spirit out of him, his condition as a sinful man before God should lay him flat on his face in the presence of that Majesty; and should make him put his hand on his lips and say, from behind the covering, 'Unclean! unclean!' Oh, brethren, if we would only go down into the depths of our own hearts, every one of us would find there more than enough to make all self-complacency and self-conceit utterly impossible, as it ought to be, for us for ever. I have no wish, and God knows I have no need, to exaggerate about this matter; but we all know that if we were turned inside out, and every foul, creeping thing, and every blotch and spot upon these hearts of ours spread in the light, we could not face one another; we could scarcely face ourselves. If you or I were set, as they used to set criminals, up in a pillory with a board hanging round our necks, telling all the world what we were, and what we had done, there would be no need for rotten eggs to be flung at us; we should abhor ourselves. You know that is so. I know that it is so about myself, 'and heart answereth to heart as in a glass.' And are we the people to perk ourselves up amongst our fellows, and say, 'I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing'? Do we not know that we are poor and miserable and blind and naked? Oh, brethren, the proud old saying of the Greeks, 'Know thyself,' if it were followed out unflinchingly and honestly by the purest saint this side

heaven, would result in this profound abnegation of all claims, in this poverty of spirit. So little has the world been influenced by Christ's teaching that it uses 'poor-spirited creature' as a term of opprobrium and depreciation. It ought to be the very opposite; for only the man who has been down into the dungeons of his own character, and has cried unto God out of the depths, will be able to make the house of his soul a fabric which may be a temple of God, and with its shining apex may pierce the clouds and seem almost to touch the heavens. A great poet has told us that the things which lead life to sovereign power are self-knowledge, self-reverence, and self-control. And in a noble sense it is true, but the deepest self-knowledge will lead to self-abhorrence rather than to self-reverence; and self-control is only possible when, knowing our own inability to cope with our own evil, we cast ourselves on that Lamb of God who beareth away the sin of the world, and ask Him to guide and to keep us. The right attitude for us is, 'He did not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.' And then, sweeter than angels' voices fluttering down amid the blue, there will come that gracious word, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'II. Turn, now, to the blessed issues of this characteristic.Christ does not say 'joyful,' 'mirthful,' 'glad.' These are poor, vulgar words by the side of the depth and calmness and permanence which are involved in that great word 'blessed.' It is far more than joy, which may be turbulent and is often impure. It is far deeper than any gladness which has its sources in the outer world, and it abides when joys have vanished, and all the song-birds of the spring are silent in the winter of the soul. 'Blessed are the poor ... for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'The bulk of the remaining Beatitudes point onward to a future; this deals with the present. It does not say 'shall be,' but 'is the Kingdom.' It is an all-comprehensive promise, holding the succeeding ones within itself, for they are but diverse aspects -- modified according to the necessities which they supply -- of that one encyclopaedia of blessings, the possession of the Kingdom of Heaven.Now the Kingdom of Heaven (or of God) is a state in which the will of God is absolutely and perfectly obeyed. It is capable of partial realisation here, and is sure of complete fulfilment hereafter. To the early hearers of these words the phrase would necessarily suggest the idea which bulked so large in prophecy and in Judaism, of the Messianic Kingdom; and we may well lay hold of that thought to suggest the first of the elements of this blessedness. That poverty of spirit is blessed because it is an indispensable condition of becoming Christ's men and subjects. I believe, dear friends, for my part, that the main reason why so many of us are not out-and-out Christian men and women, having entered really into that Kingdom which is obedience to God in Christ, is because we have a superficial knowledge, or no knowledge at all, of our own sinful condition, and of the gravity of that fact. Intellectually, I take it that an under-estimate of the universality and of the awfulness of sin has a great deal to do in shaping all the maimed, imperfect, partial views of Christ, His character and nature, which afflict the world. It is the mother of most of our heresies. And, practically, if you do not feel any burden, you do not care to hear about One who will carry it. If you have no sense of need, the message that there is a supply will fall perfectly ineffectual upon your ears. If you have not realised the truth that whatever else you may be, of which you might be proud -- wise, clever, beautiful, accomplished, rich, prosperous -- you have this to take all the self-conceit out of you, that you are a sinful man -- if you have not realised that, it will be no gospel to you that Jesus Christ has died, the just for the unjust, and lives to cleanse us.Brethren, there is only one way into the true and full possession of Christ's salvation, and that is through poverty of spirit. It is the narrow door, like the mere low slits in the wall which in ancient times were the access to some wealth-adorned palace

or stately structure -- narrow openings that a man had to stoop his lofty crest in order to enter. If you have never been down on your knees before God, feeling what a wicked man or woman you are, I doubt hugely whether you will ever stand with radiant face before God, and praise Him through eternity for His mercy to you. If you wish to have Christ for yours, you must begin, where He begins His Beatitudes, with poverty of spirit.It is blessed because it invites the riches of God to come and make us wealthy. It draws towards itself communication of God's infinite self, with all His quickening and cleansing and humbling powers. Grace is attracted by the sense of need, just as the lifted finger of the lightning rod brings down fire from heaven. The heights are barren; it is in the valleys that rivers run, and flowers bloom. 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' If we desire to have Him, who is the one source of all blessedness, in our hearts, as a true possession, we must open the door for His entrance by poverty of spirit. Desire brings fulfilment; and they who know their wants, and only they, will truly long that they may be supplied. This poverty of spirit is blessed because it is its own reward. All self-esteem and self-complacency are like a hedgehog, as some one has said, 'rolled up the wrong way, tormenting itself with its prickles.' And the man that is always, or often, thinking how much above A, B, or C he is, and how much A, B, or C ought to offer of incense to him, is sure to get more cuffs than compliments, more enmity than affection; and will be sore all over with wounded vanities of all sorts. But if we have learned ourselves, and have departed from these lofty thoughts, then to be humble in spirit is to be wise, cheerful, contented, simple, restful in all circumstances. You remember John Bunyan's shepherd boy, down in the valley of humiliation. Heart's-ease grew there, and his song was, 'He that is low need fear no fall.' If we have this true, deep-rooted poverty of spirit, we shall be below the tempest, which will go clean over our heads. The oaks catch the lightnings; the grass and the primroses are unscorched. 'The day of the Lord shall be upon all high things, and the loftiness of men shall be brought low.'So, dear brethren, blessedness is not to be found outside us. We need not ask 'who shall go up into the heavens, or who shall descend into the deep,' to bring it. It is in thee, if at all. Christ teaches us that the sources of all true blessedness are within us; there or nowhere is Eden. If we have the tempers and dispositions set forth in these Beatitudes, condition matters but very little. If the source of all blessedness is within us, the first step to it all is poverty of spirit. 'Be ye clothed with humility.' The Master girt Himself with the servant's towel, and His disciples are to copy Him who said: 'Take My yoke upon you.... I am meek and lowly in heart ... and ye shall find rest' -- and is not that blessedness? -- 'ye shall find rest unto your souls.'

Chapter 66

THE SECOND BEATITUDE

'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.' -- MATT. v.4. An ordinary superficial view of these so-called Beatitudes is that they are simply a collection of unrelated sayings. But they are a great deal more than that. There is a vital connection and progress in them. The jewels are not flung down in a heap; they are wreathed into a chain, which whosoever wears shall have 'an ornament of grace about his neck.' They are an outgrowth from a common root; stages in the evolution of Christian character. Now, I tried to show in the former sermon how the root of them all is the poverty of spirit which is spoken of in the preceding verse; and how it really does lie at the foundation of the highest type of human character, and in its very self is sure of possessing the Kingdom of Heaven. And now I turn to the second of these Beatitudes. Like all the others, it is a paradox, for it starts from a wholly different conception from the common one, of what is man's chief good. If the aims which usually engross us are really the true aims of life, then there is no meaning in this saying of our Lord, for then it had been better not to sorrow at all than to sorrow and be comforted. But if the true purpose for which we are all gifted with this solemn gift of life is that we may become 'imitators of God as dear children,' then there are few things for which men should be more thankful than the sacred sorrow, than which there are few instruments more powerful for creating the type of character which we are set here to make our own. All lofty, dignified, serious thinkers and poets (who for the most of men are the best teachers) had spoken this same thought as well as Christ. But He speaks it with a difference all His own, which deepens incalculably its solemnity, and sets the truth of the otherwise sentimental saying, which flies often in the face of human nature, upon immovable foundations. Let me ask you, then, to look with me, in the simplest possible way, at the two thoughts of our text, as to who are the mourners that are 'blessed,' and as to what is the consolation that they receive. I. The mourners who are blessed. 'Blessed are they that mourn.' Ah! that is not a universal bliss. All mourners are not blessed. It would be good news, indeed, to a world so full of miseries that men sometimes think it were better not to be, and holding so many wrecked and broken hearts, if every sorrow had its benediction. But just as we saw in the preceding discourse that the poverty which Christ pronounced blessed is not mere straitness of circumstances, or lack of material wealth, so here the sorrow, round the head of which He casts this halo of glory, is not that which springs from the mere alteration of external circumstances, or from any natural causes. The influence of the first saying runs through all the Beatitudes, and since it is 'the poor in spirit' who are there pronounced happy, so here we must go far deeper than mere outward condition, in order to find the ground of the benediction pronounced. Let us be sure, to begin with, of this, that no condition, be it of wealth or woe, is absolutely and necessarily good, but that the seat of all true blessedness lies within, in the disposition which rightly meets the conditions which God sends. So I would say, first, that the mourners whom Christ pronounces 'blessed' are those who are 'poor in spirit.' The mourning is the emotion which follows upon that poverty. The one is the recognition of the true estimate of our own characters and failings; the other is the feeling that follows upon that recognition. The one is the prophet's clear-sighted 'I am a man of unclean lips'; the other is the same prophet's contemporaneous wail, 'Woe is me, for I am undone!' And surely, brethren, if you and I have ever

had anything like a glimpse of what we really are, and have brought ourselves into the light of God's face, and have pondered upon our characters and our doings in that -- not 'fierce' but all-searching, 'light' that flashes from Him, there can be no attitude, no disposition, more becoming the best, the purest, the noblest of us, than that 'Woe is me, for I am undone!' Oh, dear friends, if -- not as a theological term, but as a clinging, personal fact -- we realise what sin against God is, what must necessarily come from it, what aggravations His gentleness, His graciousness, His constant beneficence cause, how facilely we do the evil thing and then wipe our lips and say, 'We have done no harm,' we should be more familiar than we are with the depths of this experience of mourning for sin. I cannot too strongly urge upon you my own conviction -- it may be worth little, but I am bound to speak it -- that there are few things which the so-called Christianity of this day needs more than an intenser realisation of the fact, and the gravity of the fact, of personal sinfulness. There lies the root of the shallowness of so much that calls itself Christianity in the world to-day. It is the source of almost all the evils under which the Church is groaning. And sure I am that if millions of the people that complacently put themselves down in the census as Christians could but once see themselves as they are, and connect their conduct with God's thought about it, they would get shocks that would sober them. And sure I am that if they do not thus see themselves here and now, they will one day get shocks that will stupefy them. And so, dear friends, I urge upon you, as I would upon myself, as the foundation and first step towards all the sunny heights of God-likeness and blessedness, to go down, down deep into the hidden corners, and see how, like the elders of Israel whom the prophet beheld in the dark chamber, we worship creeping things, abominable things, lustful things, in the recesses within. And then we shall possess more of that poverty of spirit, and the conscious recognition of our own true character will merge into the mourning which is altogether blessed. Now, note, again, how such sorrow will refine and ennoble character. How different our claims upon other men would be if we possessed this sober, saddened estimate of what we really are! How our petulance, and arrogance, and insisting upon what is due to us of respect and homage and deference would all disappear! How much more rigid would be our guard upon ourselves, our own emotions, our own inclinations and tastes! How much more lenient would be our judgment of the openly and confessedly naughty ones, who have gone a little further in act, but not an inch further in essence, than we have done! How different our attitude to our fellows; and how lowly our attitude to God! Such sorrow would sober us, would deliver us from our lusting after the gauds of earth, would make us serious and reflective, would bring us to that 'sad, wise valour' which is the conquering characteristic of humanity. There is nothing more contemptible than the lives which, for want of this self-knowledge, foam away in idle mirth, and effervesce in what the world calls 'high spirits.''There is no music in the life

That sounds with idiot laughter solely,

There's not a string attuned to mirth

But has its chords in melancholy.'So said one whose reputation in English literature is mainly that of a humorist. He had learned that the only noble humanity is that in which the fountains of laughter and of tears lie so close together that their waters intermingle. I beseech you not to confound the 'laughter of fools,' which is the 'crackling of thorns under the pot,' with the true, solemn, ennobling gladness which lives along with this sorrow of my text.Further, such mourning infused into the sorrow that comes from external disasters will make it blessed too. As I have said,

there is nothing in any condition of life which necessarily and universally makes it blessed. Though poets and moralists and Christian people have talked a great deal, and beautifully and truly, about the sanctifying and sweetening influences of calamity, do not let us forget that there are perhaps as many people made worse by their sorrows as are made better by them. There is such a thing as being made sullen, hard, selfish, negligent of duty, resentful against God, hopeless, by the pressure of our calamities. Blessed be God, there is such a thing as being drawn to Him by them! Then they, too, come within the sweep of this benediction of the Master, and outward distress is glorified into the sorrow which is blessed. A drop or two of this tincture, the mourning which comes from poverty of spirit, slipped into the cup of affliction, clears and sweetens the waters, and makes them a tonic bitter. Brethren, if our outward losses and disappointments and pains help us to apprehend, and are accepted by us in the remembrance of, our own unworthiness, then these, too, are God's sweet gifts to us.One word more. This mourning is perfectly compatible with, and indeed is experienced in its purest form only along with, the highest and purest joy. I have been speaking about the indispensable necessity of such sadness for all noble life. But let us remember, on the other hand, that no one has so much reason to be glad as he has who, in poverty of spirit, has clasped and possesses the wealth of the Kingdom. And if a man, side by side with this profound and saddened sense of his own sinfulness, has not a hold of the higher thing -- Christ's righteousness given to penitence and faith -- then his knowledge of his own unworthiness is still too shallow to inherit a benediction. There is no reason why, side by side in the Christian heart, there should not lie -- there is every reason why there should lie -- these two emotions, not mutually discrepant and contradictory, but capable of being blended together -- the mourning which is blessed, and the joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.II. And now a word or two with regard to the consolation which such mourning is sure to receive.It is not true, whatever sentimentalists may say, that all sorrow is comforted and therefore blessed. It may be forgotten. Pain may sting less; men may betake themselves to trivial, or false, unworthy, low alleviations, and fancy that they are comforted when they are only diverted. But the sorrow meant in my text necessarily ensures for every man who possesses it the consolation which follows. That consolation is both present and future.As for the present, the mourning which is based, as our text bases it, on poverty of spirit, will certainly bring after it the consolation of forgiveness arid of cleansing. Christ's gentle hand laid upon us, to cause our guilt to pass away, and the inveterate habits of inclination towards evil to melt out of our nature, is His answer to His child's cry, 'Woe is me, for I am undone!' And anything is more probable than that Christ, hearing a man thus complain of himself before Him, should fail to send His swift answer.Ah, brethren! you will never know how deep and ineffably precious are the consolations which Christ can give, unless you have learned despair of self, and have come helpless, hopeless, and yet confident, to that great Lord. Make your hearts empty, and He will fill them; recognise your desperate condition, and He will lift you up. The deeper down we go into the depths, the surer is the rebound and the higher the soaring to the zenith. It is they who have poverty of spirit, and mourning based upon it, and only they, who pass into the sweetest, sacredest, secretest recesses of Christ's heart, and there find all-sufficient consolation.In like manner, that consolation will come in its noblest and most sufficing form to those who take their outward sorrows and link them with this sense of their own ill-desert. Oh, dear friends, if I am speaking to any one who to-day has a burdened heart, let such be sure of this, that the way to consolation lies through submission; and that the way to submission lies through recognition of our own sin. If we will only 'lie still, let Him strike home, and bless the rod,'

the rod will blossom and bear fruit. The water of the cataract would not flash into rainbow tints against the sunshine, unless it had been dashed into spray against black rocks. And if we will but say with good old Dr. Watts, 'When His strokes are felt,

His strokes are fewer than our crimes,

And lighter than our guilt,'it will not be hard to bow down and say, 'Thy will be done,' and with submission consolation will be ours.Is there anything to say about that future consolation? Very little, for we know very little. But 'God Himself shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' The hope of that consolation is itself consolation, and the hope becomes all the more bright when we know and measure the depths of our own evil. Earth needs to be darkened in order that the magic, ethereal beauty of the glow in the western heavens may be truly seen. The sorrow of earth is the background on which the light of heaven is painted.So, dear friends, be sure of this, that the one thing which ought to move a man to sadness is his own character. For all other causes of grief are instruments for good. And be sure of this, too, that the one thing which can ensure consolation adequate to the grief is bringing the grief to the Lord Christ and asking Him to deal with it. His first word of ministry ran parallel with these two Beatitudes. When He spoke them He began with poverty of spirit, and passed to mourning and consolation, and when He opened His lips in the synagogue of Nazareth He began with, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the poor, to give unto them that mourn in Zion a diadem for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.'

Chapter 67

THE THIRD BEATITUDE

'Blessed are the meek! for they shall inherit the earth,' -- MATT, v.5. The originality of Christ's moral teaching lies not so much in the novelty of His precepts as in the new relation in which He sets them, the deepening which He gives them, the motives on which He bases them, and the power which He communicates to keep them. Others before Him had pronounced a benediction on the meek, but our Lord means far more than they did, and, both in His description of the character and in the promise which He attaches to it, He vindicates the uniqueness of His notion of a perfect man. The world's ideal is, on the whole, very different from His. It inclines to the more conspicuous and so-called heroic virtues; it prefers a great, flaring, yellow sunflower to the violet hiding among the grass, and making its presence known only by fragrance. 'Blessed are the strong, who can hold their own,' says the world. 'Blessed are the meek,' says Christ. The Psalmist had said it before Him, and had attached verbally the same promise to the word. But our Lord means more than David did when he said, 'The meek shall inherit the earth.' I ask you to think with me now, first, what this Christian meekness is; then, whence it issues; and then, whither it leads. I. What Christian meekness is. Now, the ordinary use of the word is to describe an attitude, or more properly a disposition, in regard to men, especially in regard to those who depreciate, or wrong, or harm us. But the Christian conception of meekness, whilst it includes that, goes far deeper; and, primarily, has reference to our attitude, or rather our disposition, towards God. And in that aspect, what is it? Meek endurance and meek obedience, the accepting of His dealings, of whatever complexion they are, and however they may tear or desolate our hearts, without murmuring, without sulking, without rebellion or resistance, is the deepest conception of the meekness which Christ pronounces blessed. When sorrow comes upon us, unless we have something more than natural strength bestowed upon us, we are all but certain, like fractious children when beaten, to kick and plunge and scream, or to take the infliction of the sorrow as being an affront and an injury. If we have any claim to this benediction, we must earn it by accepting our sorrows; then the accepted sorrow becomes a solemn joy, or almost akin thereto. The ox that kicks against the goads only does two things thereby; it does not get away from them, but it wounds its own hocks, and it drives the sharp points deeper into the ragged wounds. Let Him strike, dear friend, for when He strikes He cuts clean; and there is no poison on the edge of His knife. Meekness towards God is, first, patient endurance of His Will. And, in reference to Him, it is, next, unquestioning docility and obedience. Its seat is in the will. When the will is bowed, a man is far on his road to perfection; and the meaning of all that God does with us -- joys and sorrows, light and darkness, when His hand gives, and when His hand withdraws, as when His authoritative voice commands, and the sweet impulses of His love graciously constrain -- is that our wills may be made plastic and flexible, like a piece of wrought leather, to every touch of His hand. True meekness goes far deeper down than any attitude towards men. It lays hold on the sovereign will of God as our supreme good, and delights in absolutely and perfectly conforming itself thereto. And then there follows, as a matter of course, that which is usually the whole significance of the word, the meekness which is displayed in our attitude towards men. The truly meek heart remains unprovoked amidst all provocation. Most men are like dogs that answer bark for bark, and only

make night hideous and themselves hoarse thereby. But it is our business to meet evil with good; and the more we are depreciated, the more we are harmed, the more we are circled about by malice and by scorn, the more patiently and persistently to love on. Ah, brethren, it is easy to say and hard to do thus; but it is a plain Christian duty. Old-fashioned people believe that the sun puts out the fire. I know not how that may be, but sure I am that the one thing that puts out the fire of antagonism and wrath and malice in those who dislike or would harm us is that we should persistently shine upon, and perchance overcome, evil with good. Provoked, we remain, if we are truly meek, masters of ourselves and calm and equable, and so are blessed in ourselves. Meekness makes no claims upon others. Plenty of people are sore all over with the irritation caused by not getting what they consider due respect. They howl and whine because they are not appreciated. Do not expect much of men. Make no demands, if for no better reason than because the more you demand the less you will get; and the less you seem to think to be your due, the more likely you are to receive what you desire. But that is a poor, shallow ground. The true exhortation is, 'Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.' Ah, what a different world we should live in if the people that say, 'Oh, the Sermon on the Mount is my religion,' really made it their religion! How much friction would be taken out of all our lives; how all society would be revolutionised, and earth would become a Paradise! But there is another thing to be taken into account in the description of meekness. That grace, as the example of our Lord shows, harmonises with undaunted bravery and strenuous resistance to the evil in the world. On our own personal account, there are to be no bounds to our patient acceptance of personal wrong; on the world's account, there are to be no bounds to our militant attitude against public evils. Only let us remember that 'the wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God.' If contending theologians, and angry philanthropists, and social reformers, that are ready to fly at each other's throats for the sacred cause of humanity, would only remember that there is no good to be done except in this spirit, there would be more likelihood of the errors and miseries of mankind being redressed than, alas! there is to-day. Gentleness is the strongest force in the world, and the soldiers of Christ are to be priests, and to fight the battles of the Kingdom, robed, not in jingling, shining armour or with sharp swords, nor with fierce and eager bitterness of controversy, but in the meekness which overcomes. You may take all the steam-hammers that ever were forged and batter at an iceberg, and, except for the comparatively little heat that is developed by the blows and melts some smell portion, it will be ice still, though pulverised instead of whole. But let it get into the silent drift of the Arctic current, and let it move quietly down to the southward, then the sunbeams smite its coldness to death, and it is dissipated in the warm ocean. Meekness is conqueror. 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.'II. Notice whence this Christian meekness flows.You observe the place which this Beatitude holds in the linked series of these precious sayings. It follows upon 'poverty of spirit' and 'mourning.' And it follows, too, upon the 'comfort' which the mourner is promised that he will receive. It is the conduct and disposition towards God and man which follows from the inward experience described in the two former Beatitudes, which had relation only to ourselves.The only thing that can be relied upon as an adequate cold water douche to our sparks of anger, resentment, retaliation, and rebellion is that we shall have passed through the previous experiences, have learned a just and lowly estimate of ourselves, have learned to come to God with penitence in our hearts, and have been raised by His gracious hand from the dust where we lay at His feet, and been welcomed to His embrace. He who thus has learned himself, and has felt repentance, and has received the comfort of forgiveness and

cleansing, he, and he only, is the man who, under all provocation and in any and every circumstance, can be absolutely trusted to live in the spirit of meekness.If I have found out anything of my own sin, if my eyes have been filled with tears and my heart with conscious unworthiness before Him, oh, then, surely I shall not kick or murmur against discipline of which the main purpose is to rid me of the evil which is slaying me; but rather I shall recognise in the sorrows that do fall upon me, in the losses and disappointments and empty places in my life and heart, one way of God's fulfilling His great promise, 'From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you.' The man who has thus learned the purpose, the highest purpose, of sorrow, is not likely to remonstrate with God for giving him too much of the cleansing medium.In like manner, if we have, in any real way, received for our own the comfort which God gives to the penitent heart, we shall be easily pleased with anything that He sends. And if we have measured ourselves, not against ourselves, but against His law, and have found out how much we owe unto our Lord, it is not likely that we shall take our brother by the throat and say, 'Pay me that thou owest.' If any treat me badly, try to rob me, harm me, sneer at me, or turn the cold shoulder to me, who am I that I should resent that? Oh, brethren, we need, for our right relation to our fellows, a deeper conviction of our sinfulness before Him. Many of us are blessed with natural tendencies to meekness, but these are insufficient. Many of us seek to cultivate this grace from true and right, though not the deepest, motives. Let us reinforce them by that which comes from the consideration of the place which this Beatitude holds in the wreathed chain, and remember that 'poverty of spirit' and 'mourning' must precede it.Now, there is a sharp test for us Christian people. If I have learned myself, and have penitently received God's pardon, I shall be meek with God and with man. If I am not meek with God and with man, have I received God's pardon? One great reason why so many of you Christian people have so little consciousness of God's forgiving mercy, as a constant joy in your lives, is because you have so little obeyed the commandment, 'Be ye imitators of God, and walk in love, as God hath forgiven and loved us.' III. And now, lastly, note whither this meekness leads.'They shall inherit the earth.' The words are quoted, as I have already said, from one of the psalms, and in the Psalmist's mouth they had, I suppose, especial reference to Israel's peaceful possession of the promised land, which in that Old Dispensation was made contingent on the people's faithfulness. In that aspect, and looking at this Sermon on the Mount as the programme of the King Himself, what a bucket of cold water such words as these must have poured on the hot Messianic expectations of the carnal Jew! Here was a King that did not expect to win back the land by armed rebellion against the Roman legions, but said, 'Be meek, and you will truly possess it, whether there is a Pilate in the procurator's house at Caesarea or not.'But for us the words have a double reference, as all the promises annexed to these Beatitudes have. They apply to the present; they apply to the future. And that is no mere looseness of interpretation, eking out an insufficient verification of them here upon earth by some dim hopes of a future fulfilment, but it flows from the plain fact that the gifts which a man receives on condition of his being a true disciple are one and the same in essence, and only differ in degree, here and hereafter. Circumstances alter, no doubt, and there will be much in that heavenly state unlike that which we experience here. But the essence of Christian blessedness is the same in this world and in the furthest reach of the shining but dim eternity beyond. And so we take the double reference of these words to be inherent in the facts of the case, and not to be a makeshift of interpretation.There is a present inheritance of the earth which goes, as certainly as the shadow with the sunshine, with the meekness spoken of in our text. Not literal, of course, for it is not true that this Christian grace has

in it any tendency whatever to draw to itself material good of any sort. The world in outward possession belongs to the strong men, to the men of faculty, of force and push and ambition. If you want to get through a crowd, make your elbows as sharp, and your feet upon the toes of your neighbours as heavy as you can, and a road will be made for you; but, in the majority of cases, the meek man on the edge of the crowd will stop there.Nor is it true that there would be any real blessedness, though the earth were ours in that outward sense. For you cannot measure happiness by the acre, nor does an outward condition of the most full-fed abundance, and of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, and above the gnawings of care, ensure to any man even the shabby blessedness that the world knows, to say nothing of the solid beatitude that Christ proclaims.So we must go deeper than that for the meaning of 'inherit.' Whatever are our circumstances, it is true that this calm, equable, submissive acceptance of the divine will and obedience to it, and this loving and unresentful attitude towards men, bring with them necessarily a peacefulness of heart which gets the highest good out of the modicum of material supplies which God's providence may send us. It used to be the idea that gods and beatified spirits were nourished, not by the gross, material flesh of the sacrifices, but by a certain subtle aroma and essence that went up in the incense smoke. So Christ's meek men do live and thrive, and are blessed in a true possession of earthly good, even though their outward portion of it may be very small. 'Better is a little that a righteous man hath than the riches of many wicked.'And, beyond that, there is a further fulfilment of this promise, upon which I venture to say but very little. It seems to me very probable that our Lord's words here fall in with what appears to be a general stream of representation throughout Scripture, to the effect that the perfected form of the Kingdom of God is to be realised in this renovated earth, when it becomes the 'new earth in which dwelleth righteousness.' Whether that be so or no, at all events we may fairly gather from the words the thought that in the ultimate state of assimilation and fellowship with God and Christ to which Christian people have a right to look forward, there will be an external universe on which they will exercise their activities, and from which they will draw as yet unimagined delights.But, at all events, dear brethren, we may be sure of this blessed thought, that they who meekly live, knowing and mourning their sin, and who meekly take to their hearts as their only hope the comfort of Christ's pardon and cleansing, who are meekly recipient, meekly enduring, meekly obedient, shall have in their hearts, even here, a quiet fountain of peace which shall make the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose, and hereafter shall be crowned with the lordship of all. Meekness overcomes, 'and he that overcometh shall inherit all things.'

Chapter 68

THE FOURTH BEATITUDE

'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.' -- MATT. v.6. Two preliminary remarks will give us the point of view from which I desire to consider these words now. First, we have seen, in previous sermons, that these paradoxes of the Christian life which we call the Beatitudes are a linked chain, or, rather, an outgrowth from a common root. Each presupposes all the preceding. Now, of course, it is a mistake to expect uniformity in the process of building up character, and stages which are separable and successive in thought may be simultaneous and coalesce in fact. But none the less is our Lord here outlining successive stages in the growth of a true Christian life. I shall have more to say about the place in the series which this Beatitude holds, but for the present I simply ask you to remember that it has a background and set of previous experiences, out of which it springs, and that we shall not understand the depth of Christ's meaning if we isolate it from these and regard it as standing alone. Then, another consideration is the remarkable divergence in this Beatitude from the others. The 'meek,' the 'merciful,' the 'pure in heart' the 'peacemakers,' have all attained to certain characteristics. But this is not a benediction pronounced upon those who have attained to righteousness, but upon those who long after it. Desire, which has reached such a pitch as to be comparable to the physical craving of a hungry man for food or to the imperious thirst of parched throats, seems a strange kind of blessedness; but it is better to long for a higher -- though it be unattained -- good than to be content with a lower which is possessed. Better to climb, though the summit be far and the path be steep, than to browse amongst the herds in the fat valleys. Aspiration is blessedness when it is worthily directed. Let us, then, look at these two points of this Beatitude; this divine hunger of the soul, and its satisfaction which is sure. I. Note, then, the hunger which is blessed. Now 'righteousness' has come to be a kind of theological term which people use without attaching any very distinct meaning to it. And it would be little improvement to substitute for 'righteousness' the abstraction of moral conformity to the will of God. Suppose we try to turn the words of my text into modern English, and instead of saying, 'Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness,' say, Blessed are the men and women that long more than for anything else to be good. Does not that sound a little more near our daily lives than the well-worn and threadbare word of my text? Righteousness is neither more nor less than in spirit a will submitted to God, and in conduct the practice of whatsoever things are noble and lovely and of good report. The production of such a character, the aiming after the perfection of spirit and of conduct, is the highest aim that a man can set before him. There are plenty of other hungers of the soul that are legitimate. There are many of them that are bracing and ennobling and elevating. It is impossible not to hunger for the supply of physical necessities. It is good to long for love, for wisdom. It is better to long most to be good men and women. For what are we here for? To enjoy? To work? To know? Yes! But it is not conduct, and it is still less thought, and it is least of all enjoyment, in any of its forms, which is the purpose of life, and ought to be our aim here upon earth. We are here to learn to be; and the cultivation and production of characters that lie parallel with the will of God is the Omega of all our life in the flesh. All these other things, even the highest of them, the yearning desire 'To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,

Beyond the furthest bounds of human thought,' ought to be subordinate to this further purpose of being good men and women. All these are scaffolding; the building is a character conformed to God's will and assimilated to Christ's likeness. That commends itself as a statement of man's chief end to all reasonable and thoughtful men in their deepest and truest moments. And so, whilst we must let our desires go out on the lower levels, and seek to draw to ourselves the various gifts that are necessary for the various phases and sides of our being, here is one that a man's own conscience tells him should stand clearly supreme and dominant -- the hunger and thirst after righteousness. Still further, notice how this desire, on which our Lord pronounces His benediction, comes in a series. I know that all men have latent, and sometimes partially and fragmentarily operative in their lives and manifest on the surface, sporadic desires after goodness. The existence of these draws the line between man and devil. And there is no soul on earth which has not sometimes felt the longing to be better than it is, to its own consciousness, to-day. But the yearning which our Lord blesses comes after, and is the result of, the previous characteristics which He has described. There must be the poverty of spirit which recognises our own insufficiency and unworthiness; or, to put it into simpler words, we must know ourselves to be sinners. There must be the mourning which follows upon that revelation of ourselves; the penitence which does not wash away sin, but which makes us capable of receiving forgiveness. There must be the comfort which comes from pardon received; and there must be the yielding of ourselves to the Supreme Will, which is the true root of all meekness, in the face of antagonism from creatures and of opposition from circumstances. When thus a man's self-conceit is beaten out of him, and he knows how far he is from the possession of any real, deep righteousness of his own; and when, further, his heart has glowed with the consciousness of forgiveness; and when, further, his will has bowed itself before the Father in heaven, then there will spring in his heart a hungering and thirsting, deeper far and far more certain of fruition, than ever can be realised in another heart, a stranger to such experiences. Brethren, if we are ever to possess the righteousness which is itself blessed, it must be because we have the hunger and the thirst which are sharpened and accentuated by profound discovery of our own evil, lowly penitence before God, and glad assurance of free and full forgiveness. Then note, still further, how that which is pronounced blessed is not the realisation of a desire, but the desire itself. And that is so, not only because, as I said, all noble aspiration is good, fulfilled or unfulfilled, and aim is of more importance than achievement, and what a man strongly wishes is often the revelation of his deepest self, and the prophecy of what he will be; but Christ puts the desire for a certain quality here as in line with the possession of a number of other qualities attained, because He would hint to us that such a righteousness as shall satisfy the immortal hunger and thirst of our souls is one to be received in answer to longing, and not to be manufactured by our own efforts. It is a gift; and the condition of receiving the gift is to wish it honestly, earnestly, deeply, continually. The Psalmist had a glimpse of the same truth when he crowned his description of the man who was fit to ascend the hill of the Lord, and to stand in His holy place, with, 'he shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.'Of course, in saying that the first step towards the possession of this divinely bestowed and divinely blessed righteousness is not effort but longing, I do not forget that the retention of it, and the working of it into our characters, and out in our conduct, must be the result of our own continual diligence. But it is effort based on faith; and it is mainly, as I believe, the effort to keep open the line of communication between us and God, the great Giver, which ensures our possession of this gift of God. Dear friends, the righteousness

that avails for us is not of our making, but of God's giving, through Jesus Christ.So, before I pass to the other thoughts of my text, may I pause here for a moment? 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst' -- think of the picture that that suggests -- the ravenous desire of a starving man, the almost fierce longing of a parched throat. Is that a picture of the intensity, of the depth, of our desires to be good? Do we professing Christian men and women long to be delivered from our evils and to be clothed in righteousness, with an honesty and an earnestness and a continuity of longing which would make such words as these of my text anything else, if applied to us, than the bitterest irony? Oh, one looks out over the Christian Church, and one looks -- which is more to the purpose -- into one's own heart, and contrasts the tepid, the lazy, the occasional, and, I am afraid, the only half-sincere wishes to be better, with the unmistakable earnestness and reality of our longings to be rich, or wise, or prosperous, or famous, or happy in our domestic relationships, and the like. Alas! alas! that the whole current of the great river of so many professing Christians' desires runs towards earth and creatures, and the tiniest little trickle is taken off, like a lade for a mill, from the great stream, and directed towards higher things. It is hunger and thirst after righteousness that is blessed. You and I can tell whether our desires deserve such a name as that.II. And now, secondly, the satisfying of this divine hunger of the soul.'They shall be filled,' says our Lord. Now all these promises appended to the Beatitudes have a double reference -- to the certainty of the present, and to the perfection of the future. That there is such a double reference may be made very obvious if we notice that the first of the promises, which includes them all, and of which the others are but aspects and phases, is cast into the present tense, whilst the remainder stand in the future. 'Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven,' not shall be -- 'they shall be comforted,' they 'shall inherit the earth,' and so on. So, then, we are warranted, indeed we are obliged, to regard this great promise in the text as having two epochs of fulfilment -- one partially here upon earth, one complete hereafter. And these two differ, not in kind, but in degree.So then, with regard even to the present, 'they shall be filled.' Should not that be a gospel to the seeking spirit of man, who knows so well what it is to be crucified with the pangs of a vain desire, and to set his heart upon that which never comes into his hands? There is one region in which nothing is so impossible as that any desire should be in vain, or any wish should be unfulfilled, and it is the region into which Christ points us in these great words of my text. Turn away from earth, where fulfilled desires and unfulfilled are often equally disappointed ones. Turn away from the questionable satisfactions which come to those whose hearts go out in longing for love, wisdom, wealth, transitory felicity; and be sure of this, that the one longing which never will be disappointed, nor, when answered, will prove to have given us but ashes instead of bread, is the longing to be like God and like Christ. That desire alone is sure to be fulfilled, and, being fulfilled, is sure to be blessed.It is not true that all desires after righteousness are fulfilled. Those which spring up, as I have said, in men's hearts sporadically, and apart from the background of the experiences of my text, are not always, not often, even partially accomplished. There are in every land, no doubt, souls that thirst after righteousness, as they are able to discern it. And we are sure of this, that no such effort and longing passes unnoticed by Him 'who hears the young ravens when they cry,' and is not deaf to the prayer of men who long to be good. But the experience of the bulk of us, apart from Jesus Christ, is 'the things that I would not, these I do, and the things that I would, these I do not.' The hunger and thirst after righteousness, imperfect as they are, which are felt at intervals by all men, do not avail to break the awful continuity of their conduct as evil in the sight of God and of their own consciences. And so, just because every man knows something of the sting of this

desire after righteousness, which yet remains for the most part unfulfilled, the world is full of sadness. 'Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' comes to be the expression of the noblest amongst us. Then this great Gospel comes to us, and the Nazarene confidently fronts a world dimly conscious of its need, and sometimes miserable because it is bad, and says: 'Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.... Come to Me, and drink.' What right had He to stand thus and promise that every desire after goodness should be fulfilled in Him? He had the right, because He Himself had the power and the purpose to fulfil it. For this is the very heart of His Gospel: that He will give to every one who asks it that spirit of life which was His own, and which 'shall make us free from the law of sin and death.'Thus, dear friends, we have to be content to take the place of recipients, and to accept, not to work out for ourselves, this righteousness for which, more or less feebly, and all of us too feebly, we do sometimes long. Oh, believe me, away from Him you will never receive into your characters a goodness that will satisfy yourselves. Siberian prisoners sometimes break their chains and escape for some distance. They are generally taken back and again shut up in their captivity. If we are able, as we are in some measure, to break the bondage of evil in ourselves, we are not able to complete our emancipation by any skill, effort, or act of ours. We must be content to receive the blessing. There is no loom of earth which can weave, and no needle that man's hands can use which can stitch together, the pure garment that befits a soul. We must be content to take the robe of righteousness which Jesus Christ has wrought, and to strip off, by His help, the ancient self, splashed with the filth of the world, and spotted by the flesh: and to 'put on the new man,' which Christ, and Christ alone, bestows.As for the future fulfilment of this promise -- desire will live in heaven, desire will dilate the spirit, the dilated spirit will be capable of fuller gifts of God-likeness, and increased capacity will ensure increased reception. Thus, through eternity, in blessed alternation, we shall experience the desire that brings new gifts and the satisfying that produces new desires.Dear friends, all that I have been trying to say in this sermon is gathered up into the one word -- 'that I may be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'

Chapter 69

THE FIFTH BEATITUDE

'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.' -- MATT. v.7. THE divine simplicity of the Beatitudes covers a divine depth, both in regard to the single precepts and to the sequence of the whole. I have already pointed out that the first of the series Is to be regarded as the root and germ of all the subsequent ones. If for a moment we set it aside and consider only the fruits which are successively developed from it, we shall see that the remaining members of the sequence are arranged in pairs, of which each contains, first, a characteristic more inward and relating to the deep things of individual religion; and, second, a characteristic which has its field of action in our relations to men. For example, the 'mourners' and the 'meek' are paired. Those who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' and the 'merciful' are paired. 'The pure in heart' and 'the peacemakers' are paired. Now that sequence can scarcely be accidental. It is the application in detail of the great principle which our Lord endorsed in its Old Testament form when He said that the first great commandment, the love of God, had a companion consequent on and like unto it, the love of our neighbour. Religion without beneficence, and beneficence without religion, are equally maimed. The one is a root without fruit, and the other a fruit without a root. The selectest emotions, the lowliest faith, the loftiest aspirations, the deepest consciousness of one's own unworthiness -- these priceless elements of personal religion -- are of little worth unless there are inseparably linked with them meekness, mercifulness, and peacemaking. 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.' If any Christian people have neglected the service of man for the worship of God, they are flying in the face of Christ's teaching. If any antagonists of Christianity attack it on the ground that it fosters such neglect, they mistake the system that they criticise, and are judging it by the imperfect practice of the disciples instead of by the perfect precepts of the Master. So, then, here we have a characteristic lodged in the very heart of this series of Beatitudes which refers wholly to our demeanour to one another. My remarks now will, therefore, be of a very homely, commonplace, and practical kind. I. Note the characteristic on which our Lord here pours out His blessing -- Mercy. Now, like all the other members of this sequence, with the exception, perhaps, of the last, this quality refers to disposition much rather than to action. Conduct is included, of course; but conduct only secondarily. Jesus Christ always puts conduct second, as all wise and great teachers do. 'As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.' That is the keynote of all noble morality. And none has ever carried it out more thoroughly than has the morality of the Gospel. It is a poor translation and limitation of this great word which puts in the foreground merely merciful actions. The mercifulness of my text is, first and foremost, a certain habitual way of looking at and feeling towards men, especially to men in suffering and need, and most especially to men who have proved themselves bad and blameworthy. It is implied that a rigid retribution would lead to severer methods of judgment and of action. Therefore the first characteristic of the merciful man is that he is merciful in his judgments; not making the worst of people, no Devil's Advocate in his estimates of his fellows; but, endlessly, and, as the world calls it, foolishly and incredibly, gentle in his censures, and ever ready to take the charitable -- which is generally the truer -- construction of acts and motives. That is a very threadbare thought, brother, but the way to invest commonplace with startling power is to bring it into immediate connection with our own life

and conduct. And if you will try to walk by this threadbare commonplace for a week, I am mistaken if you do not find out that it has teeth to bite and a firm grip to lay upon you. Threadbare truth is not effete until it is obeyed, and when we try to obey it, it ceases to be commonplace. Again, I may remind you that this mercifulness, which is primarily an inward emotion, and a way, as I said, of thinking of, and of looking at, unworthy people, must necessarily, of course, find its manifestation in our outward conduct. And there will be, what I need not dilate upon, a readiness to help, to give, to forgive not only offences against society and morality, but offences against ourselves. I need not dwell longer upon this first part of my subject. I wished mainly to emphasise that to begin with action, in our understanding of mercifulness, is a mistake; and that we must clear our hearts of antipathies, and antagonisms, and cynical suspicions, if we would inherit the blessings of our text. Before I go further, I would point out the connection between this incumbent duty of mercifulness and the preceding virtue of meekness. It is hard enough to bear 'the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes,' without one spot of red in the cheek, one perturbation or flush of anger in the heart; and to do that might task us all to the utmost. But that is not all that Christ's ethics require of us. It is not sufficient to exercise the passive virtue of meekness; there must be the active one of mercifulness. And to call for that is to lay an additional weight upon our consciences, and to strain and stretch still further the obligation under which we come. We have not done what the worst men and our most malicious enemies have a right to receive from us when we say, with the cowardly insincerity of the world, 'I can forgive but I cannot forget.' That is no forgiveness, and that is no mercifulness It is not enough to stand still, unresisting. There must be a hand of helpfulness stretched out, and a gush of pity and mercifulness in the heart, if we are to do what our Master has done for us all, and what our Master requires us to do for one another. Mercifulness is the active side of the passive meekness. Further, in a word, I would note here another thing, and that is -- what a sad, stern, true view of the condition of men in the world results from noticing that the only three qualities in regard to our relation to them which Christ sets in this sevenfold tiara of diamonds are meekness in the face of hatred and injustice; mercifulness in the face of weakness and wickedness; peacemaking in the face of hostility and wrangling. What a world in which we have to live, where the crowning graces are those which presuppose such vices as do these! Ah! dear friends, 'as sheep in the midst of wolves' is true to-day. And the one conquering power is patient gentleness, which recompenses all evil with good, and is the sole means of transforming and thus overcoming it. People talk a great deal, and a good deal of it very insincerely, about their admiration for these precepts gathered together in this chapter. If they would try to live them for a fortnight, they would perhaps pause a little longer than some of them do before they said, as do people that detest the theology of the New Testament, 'The Sermon on the Mount is my religion.' Is it? It does not look very like it. At all events, if it is, it is a religion behind which practice most wofully limps.II. Let me ask you to look at what I have already in part referred to -- the place in this series which Mercifulness holds.Now, of course, I know, and nothing that I say now is to be taken for a moment as questioning or underestimating it, that, altogether apart from religion, there is interwoven into the structure of human nature that sentiment of mercifulness which our Lord here crowns with His benediction. But it is not that natural, instinctive sentiment -- which is partially unreliable, and has little power apart from the reinforcement of higher thoughts to carry itself consistently through life -- that our Lord is here speaking about; but it is a mercifulness which is more than an instinct, more than a sentiment, more than the natural answer of the human heart to the sight of compassion and distress, which is, in fact, the product of all that has preceded it in this

linked chain of characteristics and their blessings.And so I ask you to recall these. 'Poor in spirit,' 'mourning,' 'meek,' 'hungering and thirsting after righteousness' -- these are the springs that feed the flow of this river; and if it be not fed from them, but from the surface-waters of human sentiment and instinct, it will dry up long before it has availed to refresh barren places, and to cool thirsty lips. And note also the preceding promises, 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven'; 'they shall be comforted'; 'they shall inherit the earth; 'they shall be filled.' These are experiences which, again, are another collection of the head-waters of this stream.That is to say, the true, lasting, reliable, conquering mercifulness has a double source. The consciousness of our own weakness, the sadness that creeps over the heart when it makes the discovery of its own sin, the bowed submission primarily to the will of God, and secondarily to the antagonisms which, in subservience to that will, we may meet in life, and the yearning desire for a fuller righteousness and a more lustrous purity in our own lives and characters -- these are the experiences which will make a man gentle in his judgment of his brother, and full of melting charity in all his dealings with him. If I know how dark my own nature is, how prone to uncommitted evils, how little I have to thank myself for the virtues that I have practised, which are largely due to my exemption from temptation and to my opportunities, and how little I have in my own self that I can venture to bring to the stern judgment which I am tempted to apply to other people, then the words of censure will falter on my tongue, and the bitter construction of my brother's conduct and character will be muffled in silence. 'Except as to open outbreakings,' said one of the very saintliest of men, 'I want nothing of what Judas and Cain had.' If we feel this, we shall ask ourselves, 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?' and the condemnation of others will stick in our throats when we try to utter it.And, on the other hand, if I, through these paths of self-knowledge, and lowly estimate of self, and penitent confession of sin, and flexibility of will to God, and yearning, as for my highest food and good, after a righteousness which I feel I do not possess, have come into the position in which my poverty is, by His gift, made rich, and the tears are wiped away from off my face by His gracious hand, and a full possession of large blessings bestowed on my humble will, and the righteousness for which I long imparted to me, shall I not have learned how divine a thing it is to give to the unworthy, and so be impelled to communicate what I have already received? 'Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us.' They only are deeply, through and through, universally and always merciful who have received mercy. The light is reflected at the same angle as it falls, and the only way by which there can come from our faces and lives a glory that shall lighten many dark hearts, and make sunshine in many a shady place, is that these hearts shall have turned full to the very fountain itself of heavenly radiance, and so 'have received of the Lord that which also' they 'deliver' unto men.And so, brethren, there are two plain, practical exhortations from these thoughts. One is, let us Christian people learn the fruits of God's mercy, and be sure of this, that our own mercifulness in regard to men is an accurate measure of the amount of the divine mercy which we have received. The other is, let all of us learn the root of man's mercy to men. There is plenty, of a sort, of philanthropy and beneficent and benevolent work and feeling to-day, entirely apart from all perception of, and all faith in, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in so far as the individuals who exercise that beneficence are concerned. I, for my part, am narrow enough to believe that the streams of non-Christian charitableness, which run in our land and in other lands to-day, have been fed from Christ's fountain, though the supply has come underground, and bursts into light apparently unconnected with its source. If there had been no New Testament there would have been very little of the beneficence which flouts the New

Testament to-day. Historically, it is the great truths, which we conveniently summarise as being evangelical Christianity, that have been mother to the new charity that, since Christ, has been breathed over the world. I, for my part, believe that if you strike out the doctrine of universal sinfulness, if you cover over the Cross of Christ, if you do not find in it the manifestation of a God who is endlessly merciful to the most unworthy, you have destroyed the basis on which true and operative benevolence will rest. So then, dear brethren, let us all seek to get a humbler and a truer conception of what we ourselves are, and a loftier and truer faith of what God in Christ is; and then to remember that if we have these, we are bound to, and we shall, show that we have them, by making that which is the anchor of our hope the pattern of our lives. III. Lastly, notice the requital, 'They shall obtain mercy.'Now, it is a wretched weakening of that great thought to suppose that it means that if A. is merciful to B., B. will be merciful to A. That is sometimes true, and sometimes it is not. It does not so very much matter whether it is true or not; that is not what Jesus Christ means. All these Beatitudes are God's gifts, and this is God's gift too. It is His mercy which the merciful man obtains.But you say: 'Have you not just been telling us that this sense and experience of God's mercy must precede my mercy, and now you say that my mercy must precede God's?' No; I do not say that it must precede it; I do say that my mercifulness is, as it were, lodged between the segments of a golden circle, and has on one side the experience of the divine mercy which quickens mine by thankfulness and imitation; on the other side, the larger experience of the divine mercy which follows upon my walking after the example of my Lord.This is only one case of the broad general principle, 'to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath.' Salvation is no such irreversible gift as that once bestowed a man can go on anyhow and it will continue; but it is given in such a fashion as that, for its retention, and still more for its increase, there must be a certain line of feeling and of action.Our Lord does not mean to say, of course, that this one isolated member of a series carries with it the whole power of bringing down upon a man the blessings which are only due to the combination of the whole series, but that it stands as one of that linked band which shall receive the blessing from on high. And the blessing here is stated in accordance with the particular Grace in question, according to that great law of retaliation which brings life unto life and death unto death.No man who, having received the mercy of God, lives harsh, hard, self-absorbed, implacable, and uncommunicative, will keep that mercy in any vivid consciousness or to any blessed issue. The servant took his fellow-servant by the throat, and said, 'Pay me that thou owest,' and his master said, 'Deliver him to the tormentors until he pay the uttermost farthing.' You receive your salvation as a free gift; you keep it by feelings and conduct correspondent to the gift.Though benevolence which has an eye to self is no benevolence, it is perfectly legitimate, and indeed absolutely necessary, that whilst the motive for mercifulness is mercy received, the encouragement to mercifulness should be mercy still to be given. 'Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us'; and when you think of your own unworthiness, and of the great gifts which a gracious God has given, let these impel you to move amongst men as copies of God, and be sure that you deepen your spiritual life, not only by meditation and by faith, but by practical work, and by showing towards all men mercy like the mercy which God has bestowed upon you.

Chapter 70

THE SIXTH BEATITUDE

'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.' -- MATT. v.8. AT first hearing one scarcely knows whether the character described in this great saying, or the promise held out, is the more inaccessible to men. 'The pure in heart': who may they be? Is there one of us that can imagine himself possessed of a character fitting him for the vision of God, or such as to make him bear with delight that dazzling blaze? 'They shall see God,' whom 'no man hath seen at any time, nor can see.' Surely the requirement is impossible, and the promise not less so. But does Jesus Christ mock us with demands that cannot be satisfied, and dangle before us hopes that can never be realised? There have been many moralists and would-be teachers who have done that. What would be the use of saying to a man lying on a battlefield sore wounded, and with both legs shot off, 'If you will only get up and run, you will be safe'? What would be the use of telling men how blessed they would be if they were the opposite of what they are? But that is not Christ's way. These words, lofty and remote as they seem, are in truth amongst the most hopeful and radiant that ever came from even His lips. For they offer the realisation of an apparently impossible character, they promise the possession of an apparently impossible vision; and they soothe fears, and tell us that the sight from which, were it possible, we should sometimes fain shrink, is the source of our purest gladness. So there are three things, it seems to me, worth our notice in these great words -- How hearts can be made pure; how the pure heart can see God; and how the sight can be simple blessedness. I. How hearts can be made pure. Now, the key which has unlocked for us, in previous sermons, the treasures of meaning in these Beatitudes, is especially necessary here. For, as I have said, if you take this to be a mere isolated saying, it becomes a mockery and a pain. But if you connect it, as our Lord would have us connect it, with all the preceding links of this wreathed chain describing the characteristics of a devout soul, then it assumes an altogether different appearance. 'The pure in heart' are they who have exercised and received the previous qualifications and bestowments from God. That is to say, there must precede all such purity as is capable of the divine vision, the poverty of spirit which recognises its true condition, the mourning which rightly feels the gravity and awfulness of that condition, the desire for its opposite, which will never be the 'hunger and thirst' of a soul, except it is preceded by a profound sense of sin and the penitence that ensues thereupon. But when these things have gone before, and when they have been accompanied, as they surely will be, with the results that flow from them without an interval of time -- viz. enrichment with possession of the kingdom, the comforting and drying of the tears of penitence, and the possession of a righteousness bestowed because it is desired, and not won because it is worked for -- then, and only then, will the heart be purged and defecated from its evils and its self-regard, and its eyes opened and couched and strengthened to behold undazzled the eternal light of God. The word of my text, standing alone, ministers despair. Regarded where Christ set it, as one of the series of characteristics which He has been describing, it kindles the brightest and surest hope. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' No; but God can change them; and the implication of my text, regarded in its due relation to these other Beatitudes, is just that the requisite purity is not of man's working, but is God's gift. The same truth which here results from the study of the place of our text in this series is condensed into a briefer,

but substantially equivalent, form in the saying of another part of the New Testament, about 'purifying their hearts by faith.' Dear brethren, we come back to the old truth -- all a man's hope of, and effort after, reformation and self-improvement must begin with the consciousness of sin, the lament over it, the longing for divine goodness, the opening of the heart for the reception thereof; and only then can we rise to these serene heights of purity of heart. This, and this alone, is the way by which 'a clean thing' can be brought 'out of an unclean one.' and men stained and foul with evil, and bound under the chains of that which is the mother of all evil, the undue making themselves the centres of their lives, can be washed and cleansed and emancipated, and God be made the end and the aim, the motive and the goal, the power and the reward, of all their work. Righteousness is a gift to begin with, and it is a gift bestowed on condition of 'repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' We all have longings after purity, suppressed, dashed, contradicted a thousand times in our lives day by day, but there they are; and the only way by which they can be fully satisfied is when we go with our foul hands, empty as well as foul, and lift them up to God, and say, 'Give what Thou commandest, even the clean heart, and we shall be clean.' But then, do not let us forget, either, that this gift bestowed not once and for ever, but continuously if there be continuous desire, is to be utilised, appropriated, worked into our characters, and worked out in our lives, by our own efforts, as well as by our own faith. 'Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiniess of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.' 'Every man that hath this' gift bestowed, 'purifieth himself even as He is pure.' He that brings to us the gift of regeneration, by which we receive the new nature which is free from sin, calls to each of us as He presents to us the basin with the cleansing water, 'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings; ... cease to do evil, learn to do well.' 'What God hath joined together let not man put asunder,' viz. the act of faith by which we receive, the act of diligence by which we use, the purifying power. II. Note how the pure heart sees God. One is tempted to plunge into mystical depths when speaking upon such a text as this, but I wish to resist the temptation now, and to deal with it in a plain, practical fashion. Of course I need not remind you, or do more than simply remind you, that the matter in question here is no perception by sense of Him who is invisible, nor is it, either, an adequate and direct knowledge and comprehension of Him who is infinite, and whom a man can no more comprehend than he can stretch his short arms round the flaming orb of the central sun. But still, there is a relation to God possible for sinful men when they have been purified through the faith that is in Jesus Christ, which is so direct, so immediate, that it deserves the name of vision; and which, as I believe, is the ground of a firmer certitude, and of a no less clear apprehension, than is the sense from which the name is borrowed. For the illusions of sense have no place in the sight which the pure heart has of its Father, God. Only, remember that here, and in the interpretation of all such Scriptural words, we have ever to be guided and governed by the great principle which our Lord laid down, under very solemn circumstances, when He said: 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' Jesus Christ, whose name from eternity is the Word, is, from eternity to eternity, that which the name indicates -- viz. the revealing activity of the eternal God. And, as I believe, wherever there have been kindled in men's hearts, either by the contemplation of nature and providence, or by the intuitions of their own spirits, any glints or glimpses of a God, there has been the operation of 'the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' And far beyond the limits of historical Revelation within Israel, as recorded in Scripture, that Eternal Word has been unveiling, as men's dim eyes were capable of perceiving it, the light of the knowledge of the glory

of God. But for us who stand in the full blaze of that historical manifestation in the character and work of Jesus Christ our Saviour, our vision of God is neither more nor less than the apprehension and the realisation of Christ as 'God manifest in the flesh.'Whether you call it the vision of God, or whether you call it communion with God in Jesus Christ, or whether you fall back upon the other metaphor of God dwelling in us and we dwelling in God, it all comes to the same thing, the consciousness of His presence, the realisation of His character, the blessed assurance of loving relations with Him, and the communion in mind, heart, will, and conduct, with God who has come near to us all in Jesus Christ.Now, I need not remind you, I suppose, that for such a realisation and active, real communion, purity of heart is indispensable. That is no arbitrary requirement, but inherent, as we all know, in the very nature of the case. If we think of what He is, we shall feel that only the pure in heart can really pass into loving fellowship with Him. 'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' And if we reflect upon the history of our own feelings and realisation of God's presence with us, we shall see that impurity always drew a membrane over the eye of our souls, or cast a mist of invisibility over the heavens. The smallest sin hides God from us. A very, very little grain of dye stuff will darken miles of a river, and make it incapable of reflecting the blue sky and the sparkling stars. The least evil done and loved blurs and blots, if it does not eclipse, for us the doers the very Sun of Righteousness Himself. No sinful men can walk in the midst of that fiery furnace and not be consumed. 'The pure in heart' -- and only they -- 'shall see God.'Nor need I remind you, I suppose, that in this, as in all these Beatitudes, the germinal fulfilment in the present life is not to be parted off by a great gap from the perfect fulfilment in the life which is to come. And so I do not dwell so much on the differences, great and wonderful as these must necessarily be, between the manner of apprehension and communion with God which it is reserved for heaven to bestow upon us, and the manner of those which we may enjoy here; but I rather would point to the blessed thought that in essence they are one, however in degree they may be different. No doubt, changed circumstances, new capacities, the withdrawal of time and sense, the dropping away of the veil of flesh, which is the barrier between us and the unseen order of things in which 'we live and move and have our being,' will induce changes and progresses in the manner and in the degree of that vision about which it would be folly for us to speak. If there were anything here with which we could compare the state of the blessed in heaven, in so far as it differs from their state on earth, we could form some conception of these differences; but if there were anything here with which we could compare it, it would be less glorious than it is. It is well that we should have to say, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared.' So let us be thankful that 'it doth not yet appear what we shall be'; and let us never allow our ignorance of the manner to make us doubt or neglect the fact, seeing that we know 'that when He shall appear ... we shall see Him as He is.'III. Lastly, notice how this sight brings blessedness.There is nothing else that will 'satisfy the eye with seeing.' The vision of God, even in that incipient and imperfect form which is possible upon earth, is the one thing that will calm our distractions, that will supply our needs, that will lift our lives to a level of serene power and blessedness, unattainable by any other way. Such a sight will dim all the dazzling illusions of earth, as, when the sun leaps into the heavens, the stars hide their faces and faint into invisibility. It will make us lords of ourselves, masters of the world, kings over time and sense and the universe. Everything will be different when 'earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God.' That is what is possible for a Christian holding fast by Jesus Christ, and in Him having communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Brethren, I venture to

say no word about the blessedness of that future. Heaven's golden gates keep their secret well. Even the purest joys of earth, about which poets have sung for untold centuries, after all singing need to be tasted before they are conceived of; and all our imaginings about the blessedness yonder is but like what a chrysalis might dream in its tomb as to the life of the radiant winged creature which it would one day become. Let us be content to be ignorant, and believe with confidence that we shall find that the vision of God is the heaven of heavens.We shall owe that eternal vision to the eternal Revealer; for, as I believe, Scripture teaches us that it is only in Him that the glorified saints see the Father, as it is only in Him that here on earth we have the vision of God. That sight is not, like the bodily sense to which it is compared, a far-off perception of an ungrasped brightness, but it is the actual possession of what we behold. We see God when we have God. When we have God we have enough.But I dare not close without one other word. There is a vision of God possible to an impure heart, in which there is no blessedness. There comes a day in which 'they shall call upon the rocks to fall and cover them from the face of Him that sits upon the throne.' The alternative is before each of us, dear friends -- either 'every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him'; or, 'I shall behold Thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.' If we cry, 'Create a clean heart in me, O God!' He will answer, 'I will give you a new heart, and take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh, and I will pour clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean.'

Chapter 71

THE SEVENTH BEATITUDE

'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.' MATT. v.9. This is the last Beatitude descriptive of the character of the Christian. There follows one more, which describes his reception by the world. But this one sets the top stone, the shining apex, upon the whole temple-structure which the previous Beatitudes had been gradually building up. You may remember that I have pointed out in previous sermons how all these various traits of the Christian life are deduced from the root of poverty of spirit. You may also remember how I have had occasion to show that if we consider that first Beatitude, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' as the root and mother of all the rest, the remainder are so arranged as that we have alternately a grace which regards mainly the man himself and his relations to God, and one which also includes his relations to man. Now there are three of these which look out into the world, and these three are consummated by this one of my text. These are 'the meek,' which describes a man's attitude to opposition and hatred; 'the merciful,' which describes his indulgence in judgment and his pitifulness in action; and 'the peacemakers.' For Christian people are not merely to bear injuries and to recompense them with pity and with love, but they are actively to try to bring about a wholesomer and purer state of humanity, and to breathe the peace of God, which passes understanding, over all the janglings and struggles of this world. So, I think, if we give a due depth of significance to that name 'peacemaker,' we shall find that this grace worthily completes the whole linked series, and is the very jewel which clasps the whole chain of Christian and Christ-like characteristics. I. How are Christ's peacemakers made? Now there are certain people whose natural disposition has in it a fine element, which diffuses soothing and concord all around them. I dare say we all have known such -- perhaps some good woman, without any very shining gifts of intellect, who yet dwelt in such peace of heart herself that conflict and jangling were rebuked in her presence. And there are other people who love peace, and seek after it in the cowardly fashion of letting things alone; whose 'peacemaking' has no nobler source than hatred of trouble, and a wish to let sleeping dogs lie. These, instead of being peacemakers, are war-makers, for they are laying up materials for a tremendous explosion some day. But it is a very different temper that Jesus Christ has in view here, and I need only ask you to do again what we have had occasion to do in the previous sermons of this series -- to link this characteristic with those that go before it, of which it is regarded as being the bright and consummate flower and final outcome. No man can bring to others that which he does not possess. Vainly will he whose own heart is torn by contending passions, whose own life is full of animosities and unreconciled outstanding causes of alienation and divergence between him and God, between him and duty, between him and himself, ever seek to shed any deep or real peace amongst men. He may superficially solder some external quarrels, but that is not all that Jesus Christ means. His peacemakers are created by having passed through all the previous experiences which the preceding verses bring out. They have learned the poverty of their own spirits. They have wept tears, if not real and literal, yet those which are far more agonising -- tears of spirit and conscience -- when they have thought of their own demerits and foulnesses. They have bowed in humble submission to the will of God, and even to that will as expressed by the antagonisms of man. They have yearned after the

possession of a fuller and nobler righteousness than they have attained. They have learned to judge others with a gentle judgment because they know how much they themselves need it, and to extend to others a helping hand because they are aware of their own impotence and need of succour. They have been led through all these, often painful, experiences into a purity of heart which has been blessed by some measure of vision of God; and, having thus been equipped and prepared, they are fit to go out into the world and say, in the presence of all its tempests, 'Peace! be still.' Something of the miracle-working energy of the Master whom they serve will be shed upon those who serve Him. Brethren, the peacemaker who is worthy of the name must have gone through these deep spiritual experiences. I do not say that they are to come in regular stages, separable from each other. That is not the way in which a character mounts towards God. It does so not by a flight of steps, at distinctly different elevations, but rather by an ascending slope. And, although these various Christian graces which precede that of my text are separable in thought, and are linked in the fashion that our Lord sets forth in experience, they may be, and often are, contemporaneous. But whether separated from one another in time or not, whether this life-preparation, of which the previous verses give us the outline, has been realised drop by drop, or whether it has been all flooded on to the soul at once, as it quite possibly has, in some fashion or other it must precede our being the sort of peacemakers that Christ desires and blesses. There is only one more point that I would make here before I go on, and that is, that it is well to notice that the climax of Christian character, according to Jesus Christ Himself, is found in our relations to men, and not in our relation to God. Worship of heart and spirit, devout emotions of the sacredest, sweetest, most hallowed and hallowing sort, are absolutely indispensable, as I have tried to show you. But equally, if not more, important is it for us to remember that the purest communion with God, and the selectest emotional experiences of the Christian life, are meant to be the bases of active service; and that, if such service does not follow these, there is good reason for supposing that these are spurious, and worth very little. The service of man is the outcome of the love of God. He who begins with poverty of spirit is perfected when, forgetting himself, and coming down from the mountain-top, where the Shekinah cloud of the Glory and the audible voice are, he plunges into the struggles of the multitude below, and frees the devil-ridden boy from the demon that possesses him. Begin by all means with poverty of spirit, or you will never get to this -- 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' But see to it that poverty of spirit leads to the meekness, the mercifulness, the peace-bringing influence which Christ has pronounced blessed. II. What is the peace which Christ's peacemakers bring? This is a very favourite text with people that know very little of the depths of Christianity. They fancy that it appeals to common sense and men's natural consciences, apart altogether from minutenesses of doctrine or of Christian experience. They are very much mistaken. No doubt there is a surface of truth, but only a surface, in the application that is generally given to these words of our text, as if it meant nothing more than 'he is a good man that goes about and tries to make contending people give up their quarrels, and produces a healing atmosphere of tranquillity wherever he goes.' That is perfectly true, but there is a great deal more in the text than that. If we consider the Scriptural usage of this great word 'peace,' and all the ground that it covers in human experience; if we remember that it enters as an element into Christ's own name, the 'Peace-Bringer,' the 'Prince of Peace'; and if we notice, as I have already done, the place which this Beatitude occupies in the series, we shall be obliged to look for some far deeper meaning before we can understand the sweep of our Lord's intention here.I do not think that I am going one inch too far, or forcing meanings into His words which they are not intended to

bear, when I say that the first characteristic of the peace, which His disciples have been passed through their apprenticeship in order to fit them to bring, is the peace of reconciliation with God. The cause of all the other fightings in the world is that men's relation to the Father in heaven is disturbed, and that, whilst there flow out from Him only amity and love, these are met by us with antagonism often, with opposition of will often, with alienation of heart often, and with indifference and forgetfulness almost uniformly. So the first thing to be done to make men at peace with one another and with themselves is to rectify their relation to God, and bring peace there.We often hear in these days complaints of Christian Churches and Christian people because they do not fling themselves, with sufficient energy to please the censors, into movements which are intended to bring about happier relations in society. The longest way round is sometimes the shortest way home. It does not belong to all of us Christians, and I doubt whether it belongs to the Christian Church as such at all, to fling itself into the movements to which I have referred. But if a man go and carry to men the great message of a reconciled and a reconciling God manifest in Jesus Christ, and bringing peace between men and God, he will have done more to sweeten society and put an end to hostility than I think he will be likely to do by any other method. Christian men and women, whatever else you and I are here for, we are here mainly that we may preach, by lip and life, the great message that in Christ is our peace, and that God 'was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.'We are not to leave out, of course, that which is so often taken as being the sole meaning of the great word of my text. There is much that we are all bound to do to carry the tranquillising and soothing influences of Gospel principles and of Christ's example into the littlenesses of daily life. Any fool can stick a lucifer match into a haystack and make a blaze. It is easy to promote strife. There is a malicious love of it in us all; and ill-natured gossip has a great deal to do in bringing it about. But it takes something more to put the fire out than it did to light it, and there is no nobler office for Christians than to seek to damp down all these devil's flames of envy and jealousy and mutual animosity. We have to do it, first, by making very sure that we do not answer scorn with scorn, gibes with gibes, hate with hate, but 'seek to overcome evil with good.' It takes two to make a quarrel, and your most hostile antagonist cannot break the peace unless you help him. If you are resolved to keep it, kept it will be.May I say another word? I think that our text, though it goes a good deal deeper, does also very plainly tell us Christian folk what is our duty in relation to literal warfare. There is no need for me to discuss here the question as to whether actual fighting with armies and swords is ever legitimate or not. It is a curious kind of Christian duty certainly, if it ever gets to be one. And when one thinks of the militarism that is crushing Europe and driving her ignorant classes to wild schemes of revolution; and when one thinks of the hell of battlefields, of the miseries of the wounded, of mourning widows, of ruined peaceful peasants, of the devil's passions that war sets loose, some of us find it extremely hard to believe that all that is ever in accordance with the mind of Christ. But whether you agree with me in that or no, surely my text points to the duty of the Christian Church to take up a very much more decisive position in reference to the military spirit than, alas! it ever has done. Certainly it does seem to be not very obviously in accordance with Christ's teachings that men-of-war should be launched with a religious service, or that Te Deums should be sung because thousands have been killed. It certainly does seem to be something like a satire on European Christianity that one of the chief lessons we have taught the East is that we have instructed the Japanese how to use Western weapons to fight their enemies. Surely, surely, if Christian churches laid to heart as they ought these plain words of the Master, they would bring their united influence to bear against that

demon of war, and that pinchbeck, spurious glory which is connected with it. 'Blessed are the peacemakers': let us try to earn the benediction. III. Lastly, note the issue of this peacemaking.'They shall be called the sons of God.' Called? By whom? Christ does not say, but it should not be difficult to ascertain. It seems to me that to suppose that it is by men degrades this promise, instead of making it the climax of the whole series. Besides, it is not true that if a Christian man lives as I have been trying to describe, protesting against certain evils, trying to diffuse an atmosphere of peace round about him; and, above all, seeking to make known the Name of the great Peacemaker, men will generally call him a 'son of God.' The next verse but one tells us what they will call him. 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake.' They are a great deal more likely to have stones and rotten eggs flung at them than to be pelted with bouquets of scented roses of popular approval. No! no! it is not man's judgment that is meant here. It matters very little what men call us. It matters everything what God calls us. It is He who will call them 'sons of God.' So the Apostle John thought that Christ meant, for he very beautifully and touchingly quotes this passage when he says, 'Beloved! behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.'God's calling is a recognition of men for what they are. God owns the man that lives in the fashion that we have been trying to outline -- God owns him for His child; manifestly a son, because he has the Father's likeness. 'Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love.' God in Christ is the first Peacemaker, and they who go about the world proclaiming His peace and making peace, bear the image of the heavenly, and are owned by God as His sons.What does that owning mean? Well, it means a great deal which has yet to be disclosed, but it means this, too, that the whisper of the Voice which owns us for children will be heard by ourselves. The Spirit which cries, 'Abba, Father!' will open our ears to hear Him say, 'Thou art My beloved Son.' Or, to put it into plain English, there is no surer way by which we can come to the calm, happy, continual consciousness of being the children of God than by this living like Him, to spread the peace of God over all hearts.I have said in former sermons that all these promises, which are but the natural outcome of the characteristics to which they are attached, have a double reference, being fulfilled in germ here, and in maturity hereafter. Like the rest, this one has that double reference. For the consciousness, here and now, that we are the children of God is but, as it were, the morning twilight of what shall hereafter be an typesetting meridian sunshine. What depths of divine assimilation, what mysteries of calm, peaceful, filial fellowship, what riches beyond count of divine inheritance, lie in the name of son, the possession of these alone can tell. For the same Apostle, whose comment upon these words we have already quoted, goes on to say, 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.'Only we have one assurance, wide enough for all anticipation, and firm enough for solid hope: 'If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.' He must make us sons before we can be called sons of God. He must give us peace with God, with ourselves, with men, with circumstances, before we can go forth effectually to bring peace to others. If He has given us these good things, He has bound us to spread them. Let us do so. And if our peace ever is spoken in vain as regards others, it will come back to us again; and we shall be kept in perfect peace, even in the midst of strife, until we enter at last into the city of peace and serve the King of Peace for ever.

Chapter 72

THE EIGHTH BEATITUDE

'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' -- MATT. v.10. We have seen the description of the true subjects of the kingdom growing into form and completeness before our eyes in the preceding verses, which tell us what they are in their own consciousness, what they are in their longings, what they become in inward nature by God's gift of purity, how they move among men as angels of God, meek, merciful, peace-bringing. Is anything more needed for complete portraiture, any added touch to the picture? Yes -- what the world is to them, what are its wages for such work, what its perception of such characters. Their relations to it are those of peace-bringers, reconcilers; its to them are those of hostility and dislike. Blessed are the persecuted for righteousness' sake. I take these words to be as universal and permanent in their application as any which have preceded them. This characteristic is, like all the others, the result of those which go before it and presupposes their continuous operation. The benediction which is attached is not an arbitrary promise, but stands in as close a relation of consequence to the characteristic as do the others. And it is marked out as the last in the series by being a repetition of the first, to express the idea of completeness, a rounded whole; to suggest that all the others are but elements of this, and that the initial blessing given to the poor in spirit is identical with that which is the reward of the highest Christian character, the one possessing implicitly what the other has in full development. 1. The world's recompense to the peace-bringers. It may be thought that this clause, at all events, has reference to special epochs only, and especially to the first founding of Christianity. Such a reference, of course, there is. And very remarkable is it how clearly and honestly Christ always warned would-be disciples of what they would earn in this world by following Him. But He seems to take especial pains to show that He here proclaims a principle of equal generality with the others, by separating the application of it to His immediate hearers which follows in the next verse, from the universal statement in the text. Their individual experience was but to illustrate the general rule, not to exhaust it. And you remember how frequently the same thought is set forth in Scripture in the most perfectly general terms. 1. Notice that antagonism is inevitable between a true Christian and the world. Take the character as it is sketched in verses preceding. Point by point it is alien from the sympathies and habits of irreligious men. The principles are different, the practices are different. A true Christian ought to be a standing rebuke to the world, an incarnate conscience. There are but two ways of ending that antagonism: either by bringing the world up to Christian character, or letting Christian character down to the world. 2. The certain and uniform result is opposition and dislike -- persecution in its reality. Darkness hateth light.Some will, no doubt, be touched; there is that in all men which acknowledges how awful goodness is. But the loftier character is not loved by the lower which if loves.Aristides 'the Just.' Christ Himself.As to practice -- a righteous life will not make a man 'popular.' And as for 'opinions' -- earnest religious opinions of any sort are distasteful. Not the profession of them, but the reality of them -- especially those which seem in any way new or strange -- make the average man angrily intolerant of an earnest Christianity which takes its creed seriously and insists on testing conventional life by it. Indolence, self-complacency, and inborn conservatism join forces in resenting the presence of such inconvenient enthusiasts, who upset

everything and want to 'turn the world upside down.''The moping owl doth to the moon complain

Of such as, wandering near her ivy tower.

Molest her ancient, solitary reign.'The seeds of the persecuting temper are in human nature, and they germinate in the storms which Christianity brings with it.3. The phases vary according to circumstances.We have not to look for the more severe and gross kinds of persecution.The tendency of the age is to visit no man with penalties for his belief, but to allow the utmost freedom of thought.The effect of Christianity upon popular morality has been to bring men up towards the standard of Christ's righteousness.The long proclamation of Christian truth in England has the effect of making mere profession of it a perfectly safe and even proper thing.But the antagonism remains at bottom the same.Let a man earnestly accept even the creeds of established religion and live by them, and he will find that out. Let him seek to proclaim and enforce some of those truths of Christianity whose bearing upon social and economical and ecclesiastical questions is but partially understood. Let him set up and stick to a high standard of Christian morality and see what comes of it, in business, say, or in social life.'All that will live godly will suffer persecution.'4. The present forms are perhaps not less hard to bear than the old ones.They are, no doubt, very small in contrast with the lions in the arena or the fires of Smithfield. The curled lip, the civil scorn, the alienation of some whose good opinion we would fain have, or, if we stand in some public position, the poisonous slanders of the press, and the contumacious epithets, are trivial but very real tokens of dislike. We have the assassin's tongue instead of the assassin's dagger. But yet such things may call for as much heroism as braving a rack, and the spirit that shoots out the tongue may be as bad as the spirit that yelled, 'Christianos ad leones.'5. The great reason why professing Christians now know so little about persecution is because there is so little real antagonism. 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own.' The Church has leavened the world, but the world has also leavened the Church; and it seems agreed by common consent that there is to be no fanatical goodness of the early primitive pattern. Of course, then, there will be no persecution, where religion goes in silver slippers, and you find Christian men running neck and neck with others, and no man can tell which is which.Then, again, many escape by avoiding plain Christian duty, shutting themselves up in their own little coteries.(a) Let us be sure that we never flinch from our Christian character to buy anybody's good opinion.It is not for us to lower our flags to whoever fires across our bows. Do you never feel it an effort to avow your principles? Do you never feel that they are being smiled away in society? Are you not flattered by being shown that this religion of yours is the one thing that stands between you and cordial reception by these people?(b) Let us be sure that it is righteousness and Christ which are the grounds of anything of the sort we have to bear, and not our own faults of temper and character.(c) Let us be sure that we are not persecutors our selves.To be so is inherent in human nature.Men have often been both confessors and inquisitors. The spirit of censorious judgment, of fierce hate, of impatient intolerance, has often disgraced Christian men. It is for us to be only and always meek, merciful peace-bringers; and if men will not accept truth, to seek to win and woo them, not to be angry.It is very hard to be both firm and tolerant, not letting the foolish heart expand into a lazy glow of benevolence to all beliefs, and so perilling one's own, nor letting intense adherence to our own convictions darken into impotent wrath against their harshest opponents. But let us remember that as God is our great example of mercy, so Christ is our great example of patience, both under the world's unbelief and the world's persecution.II. God's Gift to the persecuted.'The kingdom of

heaven.'This last promise is the same as the first -- to express completeness, a rounded whole. All the others are but elements of this. That highest reward given to the perfectest saint is but the fuller possession of what is given in germ to the humblest and sinfullest at the very first. The poor in spirit gets it at the beginning.It is not implied by this promise that a Christian man's blessedness depends on the accident of some other person's behaviour to him, or that martyrs have a place which none others can reach. But theirs is the kingdom of heaven as a natural result of the character which brings about persecution, and as a natural result of the development of that character which persecution brings about. This promise, like all the others, has its twofold fulfilment.There is a present recompense.Persecution is the result of a character which brings Christians into the kingdom. Theirs is the kingdom -- they are subjects. To them it is given to enter.Persecution makes the present consciousness of the possession of the kingdom more vivid and joyous. It brings the enforced sense of a vocation separate from the hostile world's. As Thomas Fuller puts it somewhere, in troublous times the Church builds high, just as the men do in cities where there is little room to expand on the ground level.Persecution brightens and solidifies hope, and thus may become infinitely sweet and blessed. How often it has been given to the martyr, as it was given to Stephen, to see heaven opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, as if risen to His feet to uphold as well as to receive His servant. Paul and Silas made the prison walls ring with their praises, though their backs were livid with wales and stained with blood. And we, in our far smaller trials for Christ's sake, may have the same more conscious possession of the kingdom and brightened hope of yet fuller possession of it.There is a future recompense in the perfect kingdom, where men are rewarded according to their capacities. And if the way in which we have met the world's evil has been right, then that will have made us fit for a fuller possession.In closing we recur to the thought of all these Beatitudes as a chain and the beginning of all as being penitence and faith.Many a poor man, or many a little child, may have a higher place in heaven than some who have died at the stake for their Lord, for not our history, but our character, determines our place there, and all the fulness of the kingdom belongs to every one who with penitent heart comes to God in Christ, and then by slow degrees from that root brings forth first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.Here is Jesus' ideal of character -- poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness' sake. To be these is to be blessed. And here is Jesus' ideal of what, over and above the inherent blessedness of such a character, constitutes the true blessedness of a soul -- the possession of the kingdom of heaven, comfort from God, the inheritance of the earth of which the inheritor may not own a yard, full satisfaction of the longing after righteousness, the obtaining of mercy from God, the name of sons of God, and, last as first, the possession of the kingdom of heaven. Is Jesus' ideal yours? Do you believe that such a character is the highest that a man can attain, that in itself it is truly blessed, and will bring about results in contrast with which all baser-born joys are coarse and false? Happy will you be if you so believe, and if so believing you make the ideal which He paints your aim, and therefore secure the blessedness which He attaches to it as your exceeding great reward.

Chapter 73

SALT WITHOUT SAVOUR

'Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.' -- MATT. v.13. These words must have seemed ridiculously presumptuous when they were first spoken, and they have too often seemed mere mockery and irony in the ages since. A Galilean peasant, with a few of his rude countrymen who had gathered round him, stands up there on the mountain, and says to them, 'You, a handful, are the people who are to keep the world from rotting, and to bring it to all its best light.' Strange when we think that Christ believed that these men were able to do these grand functions because they drew their power from Himself! Stranger still to think that, notwithstanding all the miserable inconsistencies of the professing Church ever since, yet, on the whole, the experience of history has verified these words! And although some wise men may curl their lips with a sneer as they say about us Christians, 'Ye are the salt of the earth!' yet the most progressive, and the most enlightened, and the most moral portion of humanity has derived its impulse to progress, its enlightenment as to the loftiest truths, and the purest portion of its morality, from the men who received their power to impart these from Jesus Christ. And so, dear brethren, I have to say two or three things now, which I hope will be plain and earnest and searching, about the function of the Christian Church, and of each individual member of it, as set forth in these words; about the solemn possibility that the qualification for that function may go away from a man; about the grave question as to whether such a loss can ever be repaired; and about the certain end of the saltless salt. I. First, then, as to the high task of Christ's disciples as here set forth. 'Ye are the salt of the earth'! The metaphor wants very little explanation, however much enforcement it may require. It involves two things: a grave judgment as to the actual state of society, and a lofty claim as to what Christ's followers are able to do to it. A grave judgment as to the actual state of society -- it is corrupt and tending to corruption. You do not salt a living thing. You salt a dead one that it may not be a rotting one. And, Christ says by implication here, what He says plainly more than once in other places: -- 'Human society, without My influence, is a carcass that is rotting away and disintegrating; and you, faithful handful, who have partially apprehended the meaning of My mission, and have caught something of the spirit of My life, you are to be rubbed into that rotting mass to sweeten it, to arrest decomposition, to stay corruption, to give flavour to its insipidity, and to save it from falling to pieces of its own wickedness. Ye are the salt of the earth.' Now, it is not merely because we are the bearers of a truth that will do all this that we are thus spoken of, but we Christian men are to do it by the influence of conduct and character. There are two or three thoughts suggested by this metaphor. The chief one is that of our power, and therefore our obligation, to arrest the corruption round us, by our own purity. The presence of a good man hinders the devil from having elbow-room to do his work. Do you and I exercise a repressive influence (if we do not do anything better), so that evil and low-toned life is ashamed to show itself in our presence, and skulks back as do wrong-doers from the bull's-eye of a policeman's lantern? It is not a high function, but it is a very necessary one, and it is one that all Christian men and women ought to discharge -- that of rebuking and hindering the operation of corruption, even if they have not the power to breathe a better spirit into the dead mass. But the example of Christian

men is not only repressive. It ought to tempt forth all that is best and purest and highest in the people with whom they come in contact. Every man who does right helps to make public opinion in favour of doing right; and every man who lowers the standard of morality in his own life helps to lower it in the community of which he is a part. And so in a thousand ways that I have no need to dwell upon here, the men that have Christ in their hearts and something of Christ's conduct and character repeated in theirs are to be the preserving and purifying influence in the midst of this corrupt world. There are two other points that I name, and do not enlarge upon. The first of them is -- salt does its work by being brought into close contact with the substance upon which it is to work. And so we, brought into contact as we are with much evil and wickedness, by many common relations of friendship, of kindred, of business, of proximity, of citizenship, and the like, -- we are not to seek to withdraw ourselves from contact with the evil. The only way by which the salt can purify is by being rubbed into the corrupted thing. And once more, salt does its work silently, inconspicuously, gradually. 'Ye are the light of the world,' says Christ in the next verse. Light is far-reaching and brilliant, flashing that it may be seen. That is one side of Christian work, the side that most of us like best, the conspicuous kind of it. Ay! but there is a very much humbler, and, as I fancy, a very much more useful, kind of work that we have all to do. We shall never be the 'light of the world,' except on condition of being 'the salt of the earth.' You have to play the humble, inconspicuous, silent part of checking corruption by a pure example before you can aspire to play the other part of raying out light into the darkness, and so drawing men to Christ Himself. Now, brethren, why do I repeat all these common, threadbare platitudes, as I know they are? Simply in order to plant upon them this one question to the heart and conscience of you Christian men and women: -- Is there anything in your life that makes this text, in its application to you, other else than the bitterest mockery?II. The grave possibility of the salt losing its savour.There is no need for asking the question whether such loss is a physical fact or not, whether in the natural realm it is possible for any forms of matter that have saline taste to lose it by any cause. That does not at all concern us. The point is that it is possible for us, who call ourselves -- and are -- Christians, to lose our penetrating pungency, which stays corruption; to lose all that distinguishes us from the men that we are to better.Now I think that nobody can look upon the present condition of professing Christendom; or, in a narrower aspect, upon the present condition of English Christianity; or in a still narrower, nobody can look round upon this congregation; or in the narrowest view, none of us can look into our own hearts -- without feeling that this saying comes perilously near being true of us. And I beg you, dear Christian friends, while I try to dwell on this point, to ask yourselves this question -- Lord, is it I? and not to be thinking of other people whom you may suppose the cap will fit.There is, then, manifest on every side -- first of all, the obliteration of the distinction between the salt and the mass into which it is inserted, or to put it into other words, Christian men and women swallow down bodily, and practise thoroughly, the maxims of the world, as to life, as to what is pleasant and what is desirable, and as to the application of morality to business. There is not a hair of difference in that respect between hundreds and thousands of professing Christian men, and the irreligious man that has his office up the same staircase. I know, of course, that there are in every communion saintly men and women who are labouring to keep themselves unspotted from the world, but I know too that in every communion there are those, whose religion has next to no influence on their general conduct, and does not even keep them from corruption, to say nothing of making them sources of purifying influence. You cannot lay the flattering unction to your souls that the reason why there is so little difference between the Church and the world to-day is

because the world has grown so much better. I know that to a large extent the principles of Christian ethics have permeated the consciousness of a country like this, and have found their way even amongst people who make no profession at all of being Christians. Thank God for it; but that does not explain it all.If you take a red-hot ball out of a furnace and lay it down upon a frosty moor, two processes will go on -- the ball will lose heat and the surrounding atmosphere will gain it. There are two ways by which you equalise the temperature of a hotter and a colder body: the one is by the hot one getting cold, and the other is by the cold one getting hot. If you are not heating the world, the world is freezing you. Every man influences all men round him, and receives influences from them, and if there be not more exports than imports, if there be not more influences and mightier influences raying out from him than are coming into him, he is a poor creature, and at the mercy of circumstances. 'Men must either be hammers or anvil'; -- must either give blows or receive them. I am afraid that a great many of us who call ourselves Christians get a great deal more harm from the world than we ever dream of doing good to it. Remember this, 'you are the salt of the earth,' and if you do not salt the world, the world will rot you.Is there any difference between your ideal of happiness and the irreligious one? Is there any difference between your notion of what is pleasure, and the irreligious one? Is there any difference in your application of the rules of morality to daily life, any difference in your general way of looking at things from the way of the ungodly world? Yes, or No? Is the salt being infected by the carcass, or is it purifying the corruption? Answer the question, brother, as before God and your own conscience.Then there is another thing. There can be no doubt but that all round and shared by us, there are instances of the cooling of the fervour of Christian devotion. That is the reason for the small distinction in character and conduct between the world and the Church to-day. An Arctic climate will not grow tropical fruits, and if the heat have been let down, as it has been let down, you cannot expect the glories of character and the pure unworldliness of conduct that you would have had at a higher temperature. Nor is there any doubt but that the present temperature is, with some of us, a distinct loss of heat. It was not always so low. The thermometer has gone down.There are, no doubt, some among us who had once a far more vigorous Christian life than they have to-day; who were once far more aflame with the love of God than they are now. And although I know, of course, that as years go on emotion will become less vivid, and feeling may give place to principle, yet I know no reason why, as years go on, fervour should become less, or the warmth of our love to our Master should decline. There will be less spluttering and crackling when the fire burns up; there may be fewer flames; but there will be a hotter glow of ruddy, unflaming heat. That is what ought to be in our Christian experience. Nor can there be any doubt, I think, but that the partial obliteration of the distinction between the Church and the world, and the decay of the fervour of devotion which leads to it, are both to be traced to a yet deeper cause, and that is the loss or diminution of actual fellowship with Jesus Christ. It was that which made these early disciples 'salt.' It was that which made them 'light.' It is that, and that alone, which makes devotion burn fervid, and which makes characters glow with the strange saintliness that rebukes iniquity, and works for the purifying of the world. And so I would remind you that fellowship with Jesus Christ is no vague exercise of the mind but is to be cultivated by three things, which I fear me are becoming less and less habitual amongst professing Christians: -- Meditation, the study of the Bible, private prayer. If you have not these -- and you know best whether you have them or not -- no power in heaven or earth can prevent you from losing the savour that makes you salt.III. Now I come to the next point, and that is the solemn question: Is there a possibility of re-salting the saltless salt, of restoring the

lost savour?'Wherewithal shall it be salted?' says the Master. That is plain enough, but do not let us push it too far. If the Church is meant for the purifying of the world, and the Church itself needs purifying, is there any power in the world that will do it? If the army joins the rebels, is there any force that will bring back the army to submission? Our Lord is speaking about ordinary means and agencies. He is saying in effect, if the one thing that is intended to preserve the meat loses its power, is there anything lying about that will salt that? So far, then, the answer seems to be -- No.But Christ has no intention that these words should be pushed to the extreme of asserting that if salt loses its savour, if a man loses the pungency of his Christian life, he cannot win it back, by going again to the source from which he received it at first. There is no such implication in these words. There is no obstacle in the way of a penitent returning to the fountain of all power and purity, nor of the full restoration of the lost savour, if a man will only bring about a full reunion of himself with the source of the savour.Dear brethren, the message is to each of us; the same pleading words, which the Apocalyptic seer heard from Heaven, come to you and me: 'Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.' And all the savour and the sweetness that flow from fellowship with Jesus Christ will come back to us in larger measure than ever, if we will come back to the Lord. Repentance and returning will bring back the saltness to the salt, and the brilliancy to the light.IV. But one last word warns us what is the certain end of the saltless salt.As the other Evangelist puts it: 'It is neither good for the land nor for the dunghill.' You cannot put it upon the soil; there is no fertilising virtue in it. You cannot even fling it into the rubbish-heap; it will do mischief there. Pitch it out into the road; it will stop a cranny somewhere between the stones when once it is well trodden down by men's heels. That is all it is fit for. God has no use for it, man has no use for it. If it has failed in doing the only thing it was created for, it has failed altogether. Like a knife that will not cut, or a lamp that will not burn, which may have a beautiful handle, or a beautiful stem, and may be highly artistic and decorated; but the question is, Does it cut, does it burn? If not, it is a failure altogether, and in this world there is no room for failures. The poorest living thing of the lowest type will jostle the dead thing out of the way. And so, for the salt that has lost its savour, there is only one thing to be done with it -- cast it out, and tread it under foot.Yes; where are the Churches of Asia Minor, the patriarchates of Alexandria, of Antioch, of Constantinople; the whole of that early Syrian, Palestinian Christianity: where are they? Where is the Church of North Africa, the Church of Augustine? 'Trodden under foot of men!' Over the archway of a mosque in Damascus you can read the half-obliterated inscription -- 'Thy Kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting Kingdom,' and above it -- 'There is no God but God, and Mohammed is His prophet!' The salt has lost his savour, and been cast out.And does any one believe that the Churches of Christendom are eternal in their present shape? I see everywhere the signs of disintegration in the existing embodiments and organisations that set forth Christian life. And I am sure of this, that in the days that are coming to us, the storm in which we are already caught, all dead branches will be whirled out of the tree. So much the better for the tree! And a great deal that calls itself organised Christianity will have to go down because there is not vitality enough in it to stand. For you know it is low vitality that catches all the diseases that are going; and it is out of the sick sheep's eyeholes that the ravens peck the eyes. And it will be the feeble types of spiritual life, the inconsistent Christianities of our churches, that will yield the crop of apostates and heretics and renegades, and that will fall before temptation. Brethren, remember this: Unless you go back close to your Lord, you will go further away from Him. The deadness will deepen, the coldness will become icier and icier; you will lose more and more of the life, and show less and

less of the likeness, and purity, of Jesus Christ until you come to this -- I pray God that none of us come to it -- 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.' Dead!My brother, let us return unto the Lord our God, and keep nearer Him than we ever have done, and bring our hearts more under the influence of His grace, and cultivate the habit of communion with Him; and pray and trust, and leave ourselves in His hands, that His power may come into us, and that we in the beauty of our characters, and the purity of our lives, and the elevation of our spirits, may witness to all men that we have been with Christ; and may, in some measure, check the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Chapter 74

THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL

'Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' -- Matt. v.14-16. The conception of the office of Christ's disciples contained in these words is a still bolder one than that expressed by the preceding metaphor, which we considered in the last sermon. 'Ye are the salt of the earth' implied superior moral purity and power to arrest corruption. 'Ye are the light of the world' implies superior spiritual illumination, and power to scatter ignorance. That is not all the meaning of the words, but that is certainly in them. So then, our Lord here gives His solemn judgment that the world, without Him and those who have learned from Him, is in a state of darkness; and that His followers have that to impart which will bring certitude and clearness of knowledge, together with purity and joy and all the other blessed things which are 'the fruit of the light.' That high claim is illustrated by a very homely metaphor. In every humble house from which His peasant-followers came, there would be a lamp -- some earthen saucer with a little oil in it, in which a wick floated, a rude stand to put it upon, a meal-chest or a flour-bin, and a humble pallet on which to lie. These simple pieces of furniture are taken to point this solemn lesson. 'When you light your lamp you put it on the stand, do you not? You light it in order that it may give light; you do not put it under the meal-measure or the bed. So I have kindled you that you may shine, and put you where you are that you may give light.' And the same thought, with a slightly different turn in the application, lies in that other metaphor, which is enclosed in the middle of this parable about the light: 'a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.' Where they stood on the mountain, no doubt they could see some village perched upon a ridge for safety, with its white walls gleaming in the strong Syrian sunlight; a landmark for many a mile round. So says Christ: 'The City which I found, the true Jerusalem, like its prototype in the Psalm, is to be conspicuous for situation, that it may be the joy of the whole earth.' I take all this somewhat long text now because all the parts of it hold so closely together, and converge upon the one solemn exhortation with which it closes, and which I desire to lay upon your hearts and consciences, 'Let your light so shine before men.' I make no pretensions to anything like an artificial arrangement of my remarks, but simply follow the words in the order in which they lie before us. I. First, just a word about the great conception of a Christian man's office which is set forth in that metaphor, 'Ye are the light of the world.' That expression is wide, 'generic,' as they say. Then in the unfolding of this little parable our Lord goes on to explain what kind of a light it is to which He would compare His people -- the light of a lamp kindled. Now that is the first point that I wish to deal with. Christian men individually, and the Christian Church as a whole, shine by derived light. There is but One who is light in Himself. He who said, 'I am the light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness,' was comparing Himself to the sunshine, whereas when He said to us, 'Ye are the light of the world; men do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel,' He was comparing us to the kindled light of the lamp, which had a beginning and will have an end. Before, and independent of, His historical manifestation in the flesh, the Eternal Word of God, who from the beginning was the Life, was also the light of men; and all the light of reason and

of conscience, all which guides and illumines, comes from that one source, the Everlasting Word, by whom all things came to be and consist. 'He was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' And further, the historic Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the source for men of all true revelation of God and themselves, and of the relations between them; the Incarnate Ideal of humanity, the Perfect Pattern of conduct, who alone sheds beams of certainty on the darkness of life, who has left a long trail of light as He has passed into the dim regions beyond the grave. In both these senses He is the light, and we gather our radiance from Him. We shall be 'light' if we are 'in the Lord.' It is by union with Jesus Christ that we partake of His illumination. A sunbeam has no more power to shine if it be severed from the sun than a man has to give light in this dark world if He be parted from Jesus Christ. Cut the current and the electric light dies; slacken the engine and the electric arc becomes dim, quicken it and it burns bright. So the condition of my being light is my keeping unbroken my communication with Jesus Christ; and every variation in the extent to which I receive into my heart the influx of His power and of His love is correctly measured and represented by the greater or the lesser brilliancy of the light with which I reflect His radiance. Ye were some time darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.' Keep near to Him, and a firm hold of His hand, and then you will be light. And now I need not dwell for more than a moment or two upon what I have already said is included in this conception of the Christian man as being light. There are two sides to it: one is that all Christian people who have learned to know Jesus Christ and have been truly taught of Him, do possess a certitude and clearness of knowledge which make them the lights of the world. We advance no claims to any illumination as to other than moral or religious truth. We leave all the other fields uncontested. We bow humbly with confessed ignorance and with unfeigned gratitude and admiration before those who have laboured in them, as before our teachers, but if we are true to our Master, and true to the position in which He has placed us, we shall not be ashamed to say that we believe ourselves to know the truth, in so far as men can ever know it, about the all-important subject of God and man, and the bond between them. To-day there is need, I think, that Christian men and women should not be reasoned or sophisticated or cowed out of their confidence that they have the light because they do know God. It is proclaimed as the ultimate word of modern thought that we stand in the presence of a power which certainly is, but of which we can know nothing except that it is altogether different from ourselves, and that it ever tempts us to believe that we can know it, and ever repels us into despair. Our answer is Yes! we could have told you that long ago, though not altogether in your sense; you have got hold of half a truth, and here is the whole of it: -- 'No man hath seen God at any time, nor can see Him!' (a Gospel of despair, verified by the last words of modern thinkers), 'the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.'Christian men and women, 'Ye are the light of the world.' Darkness in yourselves, ignorant about many things, ungifted with lofty talent, you have possession of the deepest truth; do not be ashamed to stand up and say, even in the presence of Mars' Hill, with all its Stoics and Epicureans: -- 'Whom ye ignorantly' -- alas! not 'worship' -- 'Whom ye ignorantly speak of, Him declare we unto you.'And then there is the other side, which I only name, moral purity. Light is the emblem of purity as well as the emblem of knowledge, and if we are Christians we have within us, by virtue of our possession of an indwelling Christ, a power which teaches and enables us to practise a morality high above the theories and doings of the world. But upon this there is the less need to dwell, as it was involved in our consideration of the previous figure of the salt.II. And now the next point that I would make is this, following the words before us -- the certainty that if we are light we shall

shine.The nature and property of light is to radiate. It cannot choose but shine; and in like manner the little village perched upon a hill there, glittering and twinkling in the sunlight, cannot choose but be seen. So, says Christ, 'If you have Christian character in you, if you have Me in you, such is the nature of the Christian life that it will certainly manifest itself.' Let us dwell upon that for a moment or two. Take two thoughts: All earnest Christian conviction will demand expression; and all deep experience of the purifying power of Christ upon character will show itself in conduct.All earnest conviction will demand expression. Everything that a man believes has a tendency to convert its believer into its apostle. That is not so in regard to common every-day truths, nor in regard even to truths of science, but it is so in regard to all moral truth. For example, if a man gets a vivid and intense conviction of the evils of intemperance and the blessings of abstinence, look what a fiery vehemence of propagandism is at once set to work. And so all round the horizon of moral truth which is intended to affect conduct; it is of such a sort that a man cannot get it into brain and heart without causing him before long to say -- 'This thing has mastered me, and turned me into its slave; and I must speak according to my convictions.'That experience works most mightily in regard to Christian truth, as the highest. What shall we say, then, of the condition of Christian men and women if they have not such an instinctive need of utterance? Do you ever feel this in your heart: -- 'Thy word shut up in my bones was like a fire. I was weary of forbearing, and I could not stay'? Professing Christians, do you know anything of the longing to speak your deepest convictions, the feeling that the fire within you is burning through all envelopings, and will be out? What shall we say of the men that have it not? God forbid I should say there is no fire, but I do say that if the fountain never rises into the sunlight above the dead level of the pool, there can be very little pressure at the main; that if a man has not the longing to speak his religious convictions, those convictions must be very hesitating and very feeble; that if you never felt 'I must say to somebody I have found the Messias,' you have not found Him in any very deep sense, and that if the light that is in you can be buried under a bushel, it is not much of a light after all, and needs a great deal of feeding and trimming before it can be what it ought to be.On the other hand, all deep experience of the purifying power of Christ upon character will show itself in conduct. It is all very well for people to profess that they have received the forgiveness of sins and the inner sanctification of God's Spirit. If you have, let us see it, and let us see it in the commonest, pettiest affairs of daily life. The communication between the inmost experience and the outermost conduct is such as that if there be any real revolution deep down, it will manifest itself in the daily life. I make all allowance for the loss of power in transmission, for the loss of power in friction. I am glad to believe that you and I, and all our imperfect brethren, are a great deal better in heart than we ever manage to show ourselves to be in life. Thank God for the consolation that may come out of that thought -- but notwithstanding I press on you my point that, making all such allowance, and setting up no impossible standard of absolute identity between duty and conduct in this present life, yet, on the whole, if we are Christian people with any deep central experience of the cleansing power and influence of Christ and His grace, we shall show it in life and in conduct. Or, to put it into the graphic and plain image of my text, If we are light we shall shine. III. Again, and very briefly, this obligation of giving light is still further enforced by the thought that that was Christ's very purpose in all that He has done with us and for us.The homely figure here implies that He has not kindled the lamp to put it under the bushel, but that His purpose in lighting it was that it might give light. God has made us partakers of His grace, and has given to us to be light in the Lord, for this among other purposes, that we should impart that light to others. No creature is so small that it

has not the right to expect that its happiness and welfare shall be regarded by God as an end in His dealings with it; but no creature is so great that it has the right to expect that its happiness or well-being shall be regarded by God and itself as God's only end in His dealings with it. He gives us His grace, His pardon, His love, the quickening of His Spirit by our union with Jesus Christ; He gives us our knowledge of Him, and our likeness to Him -- what for? 'For my own salvation, for my happiness and well-being,' you say. Certainly, blessed be His name for His love and goodness! But is that all His purpose? Paul did not think so when he said, 'God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined into our hearts that we might give to others the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' And Christ did not think so when He said, 'Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but that it may give light to all that are in the house.' 'Heaven doth with us as we with torches do: not light them for themselves.' The purpose of God is that we may shine. The lamp is kindled not to illumine itself, but that it may 'give light to all that are in the house.'Consider again, that whilst all these things are true, there is yet a solemn possibility that men -- even good men -- may stifle and smother and shroud their light. You can do, and I am afraid a very large number of you do do, this; by two ways. You can bury the light of a holy character under a whole mountain of inconsistencies. If one were to be fanciful, one might say that the bushel or meal-chest meant material well-being, and the bed, indolence and love of ease. I wonder how many of us Christian men and women have buried their light under the flour-bin and the bed, so interpreted? How many of us have drowned our consecration and devotion in foul waters of worldly lusts, and have let the love of earth's goods, of wealth and pleasure and creature love, come like a poisonous atmosphere round the lamp of our Christian character, making it burn dim and blue?And we can bury the light of the Word under cowardly and sheepish and indifferent silence. I wonder how many of us have done that? Like blue-ribbon men that button their great-coats over their blue ribbons when they go into company where they are afraid to show them, there are many Christian people that are devout Christians at the Communion Table, but would be ashamed to say they were so in the miscellaneous company of a railway carriage or a table d'hote. There are professing Christians who have gone through life in their relationships to their fathers, sisters, wives, children, friends, kindred, their servants and dependants, and have never spoken a loving word for their Master. That is a sinful hiding of your light under the bushel and the bed.IV. And so the last word, into which all this converges, is the plain duty: If you are light, shine!'Let your light so shine before men,' nays the text, 'that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.' In the next chapter our Lord says: 'Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them. Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues that they may be seen of men.' What is the difference between the two sets of men and the two kinds of conduct? The motive makes the difference for one thing, and for another thing, 'Let your light so shine' does not mean 'take precautions that your goodness may come out into public,' but it means 'Shine!' You find the light, and the world will find the eyes, no fear of that! You do not need to seek 'to be seen of men,' but you do need to shine that men may see.The lighthouse keeper takes no pains that the ships tossing away out at sea may behold the beam that shines from his lamp; all that he does is to feed it and tend it. And that is all that you and I have to do -- tend the light, and do not, like cowards, cover it up. Modestly, but yet bravely, carry out your Christianity, and men will see it. Do not be as a dark lantern, burning with the slides down and illuminating nothing and nobody. Live your Christianity, and it will be beheld.And remember, candles are not lit to be looked at. Candles are lit

that something else may be seen by them. Men may see God through your words, through your conduct, who never would have beheld Him otherwise, because His beams are too bright for their dim eyes. And it is an awful thing to think that the world always -- always -- takes its conception of Christianity from the Church, and neither from the Bible nor from Christ; and that it is you and your like, you inconsistent Christians, you people that say your sins are forgiven and yet are doing the old sins day by day which you say are pardoned, you low-toned, unpraying, worldly Christian men, who have no elevation of character and no self-restraint of life and no purity of conduct above the men in your own profession and in your own circumstances all round you -- it is you that are hindering the coming of Christ's Kingdom, it is you that are the standing disgraces of the Church, and the weaknesses and diseases of Christendom. I speak strongly, not half as strongly as the facts of the case would warrant; but I lay it upon all your consciences as professing Christian people to see to it that no longer your frivolities, or doubtful commercial practices, or low, unspiritual tone of life, your self-indulgence in household arrangements, and a dozen other things that I might name -- that no longer do they mar the clearness of your testimony for your Master, and disturb with envious streaks of darkness the light that shines from His followers. How effectual such a witness may be none who have not seen its power can suppose. Example does tell. A holy life curbs evil, ashamed to show itself in that pure presence. A good man or woman reveals the ugliness of evil by showing the beauty of holiness. More converts would be made by a Christ-like Church than by many sermons. Oh! if you professing Christians knew your power and would use it, if you would come closer to Christ, and catch more of the light from His face, you might walk among men like very angels, and at your bright presence darkness would flee away, ignorance would grow wise, impurity be abashed, and sorrow comforted.Be not content, I pray you, till your own hearts are fully illumined by Christ, having no part dark -- and then live as remembering that you have been made light that you may shine. 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

Chapter 75

THE NEW FORM OF THE OLD LAW

'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.18. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.21. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.23. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24. Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.25. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.26. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.' -- MATT. v.17-26. This passage falls naturally into two parts -- the former extending from verse 17 to 20 inclusive; the latter, from verse 21 to the end. In the former, the King of the true kingdom lays down the general principles of the relation between its laws and the earlier revelation of the divine will; in the latter, He exemplifies this relation in one case, which is followed, in the remainder of the chapter, by three other illustrative examples. I. The King laying down the law of His kingdom in its relation to the older law of God. The four verses included in this section give a regular sequence of thought: verse 17 declaring our Lord's personal relation to the former revelation as fulfilling it; verse 18 basing that statement of the purpose of His coming on the essential permanence of the old law; verses 19 and 20 deducing thence the relation of His disciples to that law, and that in such a way that verse 19 corresponds to verse 18, and affirms that this permanent law is binding in its minutest details on His subjects, while verse 20 corresponds to verse 17, and requires their deepened righteousness as answering to His fulfilment of the law. The first thing that strikes one in looking at these verses is their authoritative tone. There may, even thus early in Christ's career, have been some murmurs that He was taking up a position of antagonism to Mosaism, which may account for the 'think not' which introduces the section. But however that may be, the swift transition from the Beatitudes to speak of Himself and of the meaning of His work is all of a piece with His whole manner; for certainly never did religious teacher open his mouth, who spoke so perpetually about Himself as did the meek Jesus. 'I came' declares that He is 'the coming One,' and is really a claim to have voluntarily appeared among men, as well as to be the long-expected Messiah. With absolute decisiveness He states the purpose of His coming. He knows the meaning of His own work, which so few of us do, and it is safe to take His own account of what He intends, as it so seldom is. His opening declaration is singularly composed of blended humility and majesty. Its humility lies in His

placing Himself, as it were, in line with previous messengers, and representing Himself as carrying on the sequence of divine revelation. It would not have been humble for anybody but Him to say that, but it was so for Him. Its majesty lies in His claim to 'fulfil' all former utterances from God. His fulfilment of the law properly so called is twofold: first, in His own proper person and life, He completes obedience to it, realises its ideal; second, in His exposition of it, both by lip and life, He deepens and intensifies its meaning, changing it from a letter which regulates the actions, to a spirit which moves the inward man. So these first words point to the peculiarity of His coming as being His own act, and make two daring assertions, as to His character, which He claims to be sinless, and as to His teaching, which he claims to be an advance upon all the former divine revelation. As to the former, He speaks here as He did to John, 'thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' No trace of consciousness of sin or defect appears in any words or acts of His. The calmest conviction that He was perfectly righteous is always manifest. How comes it that we are not repelled by such a tone? We do not usually admire self-complacent religious teachers. Why has nobody ever given Christ the lie, or pointed to His unconsciousness of faults as itself the gravest fault? Strange inaugural discourse for a humble sage and saint to assert his own immaculate perfection, stranger still that a listening world has said, 'Amen!' Note, too, the royal style here. In this part of the 'Sermon' our Lord twice uses the phrase, 'I say unto you,' which He once introduces with His characteristic 'verily.' Once He employs it to give solemnity to the asseveration which stretches forward to the end of this solid-seeming world, and once He introduces by it the stringent demand for His followers' loftier righteousness. His unsupported word is given us as our surest light in the dark future, His bare command as the most imperative authority. This style goes kingly; it calls for absolute credence and unhesitating submission. When He speaks, even if we have nothing but His word, it is ours neither 'to make reply' nor 'to reason why,' but simply to believe, and swiftly to do. Rabbis might split hairs and quote other rabbis by the hour; philosophers may argue and base their teachings on elaborate demonstrations; moralists may seek to sway the conscience through reason; legislators to appeal to fear and hope. He speaks, and it is done; He commands, and it stands fast. There is nothing else in the world the least like the superb and mysterious authority with which He fronts the world, and, as Fountain of knowledge and Source of obligation, summons us all to submit and believe, by that 'Verily, I say unto you.' Verse 18. Next we have to notice the exuberant testimony to the permanence of the law. Not the smallest of its letters, not even the little marks which distinguished some of them, or the flourishes at the top of some of them, should pass, -- as we might say, not even the stroke across a written 't,' which shows that it is not 'l.' The law shall last as long as the world. It shall last till it be accomplished. And what then? The righteousness which it requires can never be so realised that we shall not need to realise it any more, and in the new heavens righteousness dwelleth. But in a very real sense law shall cease when fulfilled. There is no law to him who can say, 'Thy law is within my heart.' When law has become both 'law and impulse,' it has ceased to be law, in so far as it no longer stands over against the doer as an external constraint. Verse 19. On this permanence of the law Christ builds its imperative authority in His kingdom. Obviously, the 'kingdom of heaven' in verse 19 means the earthly form of that kingdom. The King republishes, as it were, the old code, and adopts it as the basis of His law. He thus assumes the absolute right of determining precedence and dignity in that kingdom. The sovereign is the 'fountain of honour,' whose word ennobles. Observe the merciful accuracy of the language. The breach of the commandments either in theory or in practice does not exclude from the kingdom, for it is, while

realised on earth, a kingdom of sinful men aiming after holiness; but the smallest deflection from the law of right, in theory or in practice, does lower a man's standing therein, inasmuch as it makes him less capable of that conformity to the King, and consequent nearness to Him, which determines greatness and smallness there. Dignity in the kingdom depends on Christ-likeness, and Christ-likeness depends on fulfilling, as He did, all righteousness. Small flaws are most dangerous because least noticeable. More Christian men lose their chance of promotion in the kingdom by a multitude of little sins than by single great ones. Verse 20. As the King has Himself by His perfect obedience fulfilled the law, His subjects likewise must, in their obedience, transcend the righteousness of those who best knew and most punctiliously kept it. The scribes and Pharisees are not here regarded as hypocrites, but taken as types of the highest conformity with the law which the old dispensation afforded. The new kingdom demands a higher, namely a more spiritual and inward righteousness, one corresponding to the profounder meaning which the King gives to the old commandment. And this loftier fulfilment is not merely the condition of dignity in, but of entrance at all into, the kingdom. Inward holiness is the essence of the character of all its subjects. How that holiness is to be ours is not here told, except in so far as it is hinted by the fact that it is regarded as the issue of the King's fulfilling the law. These last words would have been terrible and excluding if they had stood alone. When they follow 'I am come to fulfil,' they are a veiled gospel, implying that by His fulfilment the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us. II. We have an illustrative example in the case of the old commandment against murder. This part of the passage falls into three divisions -- each occupying two verses. First we have the deepening and expansion of the commandment. This part begins with the royal style again. 'What was said to them of old' is left in its full authority. 'But I say unto you' represents Jesus as possessing co-ordinate authority with that law, of which the speaker is unnamed, perhaps because the same Word of God which now spoke in Him had spoken it. We need but refer here to the Jewish courts and Sanhedrim, and to that valley of Hinnom, where the offal of Jerusalem and the corpses of criminals were burned, nor need we discuss the precise force of 'Raca' and 'thou fool.' The main points to be observed are, the distinct extension of the conception of 'killing' to embrace malevolent anger, whether it find vent or is kept close in the heart; the clear recognition that, whilst the emotion which is the source of the overt act is of the same nature as the act, and that therefore he who 'hateth his brother is a murderer,' there are degrees in criminality, according as the anger remains unexpressed, or finds utterance in more or less bitter and contemptuous language; that consequently there are degrees in the severity of the punishment which is administered by no earthly tribunal; and that, finally, this stern sentence has hidden in it the possibility of forgiveness, inasmuch as the consequence of the sin is liability to punishment, but not necessarily suffering of it. The old law had no such mitigation of its sentence. Verses 23, 24. The second part of this illustrative example intensifies the command by putting obedience to it before acts of external worship. The language is vividly picturesque. We see a worshipper standing at the very altar while the priest is offering his sacrifice. In that sacred moment, while he is confessing his sins, a flash across his memory shows him a brother offended, -- rightly or wrongly it matters not. The solemn sacrifice is to pause while he seeks the offended one, and, whatever the other man's reception of his advances may be, he cleanses his own bosom of its perilous stuff; then he may come back and go on with the interrupted worship. Nothing could put in a clearer light the prime importance of the command than this setting aside of sacred religious acts for its sake. 'Obedience is better than sacrifice.' And the little word 'therefore,' at the beginning of verse 23, points to the terrible penalties

as the reason for this urgency. If such destruction may light on the angry man, nothing should come between him and the conquest of his anger. Such self-conquest, which will often seem like degradation, is more acceptable service to the King, and truer worship, than all words or ceremonial acts. Deep truths as to the relations between worship, strictly so called, and life, lie in these words, which may well be taken to heart by those whose altar is Calvary, and their gift the thank-offering of themselves. Verses 25, 26. The third part is a further exhortation to the same swiftness in casting out anger from the heart, thrown into a parabolic form. When you quarrel with a man, says Christ in effect, prudence enjoins to make it up as soon as possible, before he sets the law in motion. If once he, as plaintiff, has brought you before the judge, the law will go on mechanically through the stages of trial, condemnation, surrender to the prison authorities, and confinement till the last farthing has been paid. So, if you are conscious that you have an adversary, -- and any man that you hate is your adversary, for he will appear against you at that solemn judgment to come, -- agree with him, put away the anger out of your heart at once. In the special case in hand, the 'adversary' is the man with whom we are angry. In the general application of the precept to the whole series of offences against the law, the adversary may be regarded as the law itself. In either interpretation, the stages of appearing before the judge and so on up till the shutting up in prison are the stages of the judgment before the tribunal, not of earth, but of the kingdom of heaven. They point to the same dread realities as are presented in the previous verses under the imagery of the Jewish courts and the foul fires of the valley of Hinnom. Christ closes the grave parable with His solemn 'Verily I say unto thee' -- as looking on the future judgment, and telling us what His eyes saw. The words have no bearing on the question of the duration of the imprisonment, for He does not tell us whether the last farthing could ever be paid or not; but they do teach this lesson, that, if once we fall under the punishments of the kingdom, there is no end to them until the last tittle of the consequences of our breach of its law has been paid. To delay obedience, and still more to delay abandoning disobedience, is madness, in view of the storm that may at any moment burst on the heads of the rebels.Thus He deepens and fulfils one precept of the old law by extending the sweep of its prohibition from acts to thoughts, by setting obedience to it above sacrifice and worship, and by picturing in solemn tones of parabolic warning the consequences of having the disobeyed precept as our unreconciled adversary. In this one case we have a specimen of His mode of dealing with the whole law, every jot of which He expanded in His teaching, and perfectly observed in His life.A gospel is hidden even in these warnings, for it is distinctly taught that the offended law may cease to be our adversary, and that we may be reconciled with it, ere yet it has accused us to the judge. It was not yet time to proclaim that the King 'fulfilled' the law, not only by life, but by death, and that therefore all His believing subjects 'are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law,' as well as endowed with the righteousness by which they fulfil that law in deeper reality, and fairer completeness, than did those 'of old time,' who loved it most.

Chapter 76

'SWEAR NOT AT ALL'

'Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: 34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: 35. Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.37. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.' -- MATT. v.33-37. In His treatment of the sixth and seventh commandments, Jesus deepened them by bringing the inner man of feeling and desire under their control. In His treatment of the old commandments as to oaths, He expands them by extending the prohibitions from one kind of oath to all kinds. The movement in the former case is downwards and inwards; in the latter it is outwards, the compass sweeping a wider circle. Perjury, a false oath, was all that had been forbidden. He forbids all. We may note that the forms of colloquial swearing, which our Lord specifies, are not to be taken as an exhaustive enumeration of what is forbidden. They are in the nature of a parenthesis, and the sentence runs on continuously without them -- 'Swear not at all ... but let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay.' The reason appended is equally universal, for it suggests the deep thought that 'whatsoever is more than these' that is to say, any form of speech that seeks to strengthen a simple, grave asseveration by such oaths as He has just quoted, 'cometh of evil' inasmuch as it springs from, and reveals, the melancholy fact that his bare word is not felt binding by a man, and is not accepted as conclusive by others. If lies were not so common, oaths would be needless. And oaths increase the evil from which they come, by confirming the notion that there is no sin in a lie unless it is sworn to. The oaths specified are all colloquial, which were and are continually and offensively mingled with common speech in the East. Nowhere are there such habitual liars, and nowhere are there so many oaths. Every traveller there knows that, and sees how true is Christ's filiation of the custom of swearing from the custom of falsehood. But these poisonous weeds of speech not only tended to degrade plain veracity in the popular mind, but were themselves parents of immoral evasions, for it was the teaching of some Rabbis, at all events, that an oath 'by heaven' or 'by earth' or 'by Jerusalem' or 'by my head' did not bind. That further relaxation of the obligation of truthfulness was grounded on the words quoted in verse 33, for, said the immoral quibblers, 'it is "thine oaths to the Lord" that thou "shalt perform," and for these others you may do as you like' Therefore our Lord insists that every oath, even these mutilated, colloquial ones which avoid His name, is in essence an appeal to God, and has no sense unless it is. To swear such a truncated oath, then, has the still further condemnation that it is certainly an irreverence, and probably a quibble, and meant to be broken. It must be fully admitted that there is little in common between such pieces of senseless profanity as these oaths, or the modern equivalents which pollute so many lips to-day, and the oath administered in a court of justice, and it may further be allowed weight that Jesus does not specifically prohibit the oath 'by the Lord,' but it is difficult to see how the principles on which He condemns are to be kept from touching even judicial oaths. For they, too, are administered on the ground of the false idea that they add to the obligation of veracity, and give a guarantee of truthfulness which a simple affirmation does not give. Nor can any one, who knows the perfunctory

formality and indifference with which such oaths are administered and taken, and what a farce 'kissing the book' has become, doubt that even judicial oaths tend to weaken the popular conception of the sin of a lie and the reliance to be placed upon the simple 'Yea, yea; Nay, nay.'

NON-RESISTANCE

'Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.' -- MATT. v.38-42. The old law directed judges to inflict penalties precisely equivalent to offences -- 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth' (Exod. xxi.24), but that direction was not for the guidance of individuals. It was suited for the stage of civilisation in which it was given, and probably was then a restriction, rather than a sanction, of the wild law of retaliation. Jesus sweeps it away entirely, and goes much further than even its abrogation. For He forbids not only retaliation but even resistance. It is unfortunate that in this, as in so many instances, controversy as to the range of Christ's words has so largely hustled obedience to them out of the field, that the first thought suggested to a modern reader by the command 'Resist not evil' (or, an evil man) is apt to be, Is the Quaker doctrine of uniform non-resistance right or wrong, instead of, Do I obey this precept? If we first try to understand its meaning, we shall be in a position to consider whether it has limits, springing from its own deepest significance, or not. What, then, is it not to resist? Our Lord gives three concrete illustrations of what He enjoins, the first of which refers to insults such as contumelious blows on the cheek, which are perhaps the hardest not to meet with a flash of anger and a returning stroke; the second of which refers to assaults on property, such as an attempt at legal robbery of a man's undergarment; the third of which refers to forced labour, such as impressing a peasant to carry military or official baggage or documents -- a form of oppression only too well known under Roman rule in Christ's days. In regard to all three cases, He bids His disciples submit to the indignity, yield the coat, and go the mile. But such yielding without resistance is not to be all. The other cheek is to be given to the smiter; the more costly and ample outer garment is to be yielded up; the load is to be carried for two miles. The disciple is to meet evil with a manifestation, not of anger, hatred, or intent to inflict retribution, but of readiness to submit to more. It is a hard lesson, but clearly here, as always, the chief stress is to be laid, not on the outward action, but on the disposition, and on the action mainly as the outcome and exhibition of that. If the cheek is turned, or the cloak yielded, or the second mile trudged with a lowering brow, and hate or anger boiling in the heart, the commandment is broken. If the inner man rises in hot indignation against the evil and its doer, he is resisting evil more harmfully to himself than is many a man who makes his adversary's cheeks tingle before his own have ceased to be reddened. We have to get down into the depths of the soul, before we understand the meaning of non-resistance. It would have been better if the eager controversy about the breadth of this commandment had oftener become a study of its depth, and if, instead of asking, 'Are we ever warranted in resisting?' men had asked, 'What in its full meaning is non-resistance?' The truest answer is that it is a form of Love, -- love in the face of insults, wrongs, and domineering tyranny, such as are illustrated in Christ's examples. This article of Christ's New Law comes last but one in the series of instances in which His transfiguring touch is laid on the Old Law, and the last of the series is that to which He has been steadily advancing from

the first -- namely, the great Commandment of Love. This precept stands immediately before that, and prepares for it. It is, as suffused with the light of the sun that is all but risen, 'Resist not evil,' for 'Love beareth all things.' It is but a shallow stream that is worried into foam and made angry and noisy by the stones in its bed; a deep river flows smooth and silent above them. Nothing will enable us to meet 'evil' with a patient yielding love which does not bring the faintest tinge of anger even into the cheek reddened by a rude hand, but the 'love of God shed abroad in the heart,' and when that love fills a man, 'out of him will flow a river of living water,' which will bury evil below its clear, gentle abundance, and, perchance, wash it of its foulness. The 'quality of' this non-resistance 'is twice blessed,' 'it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.' For the disciple who submits in love, there is the gain of freedom from the perturbations of passion, and of steadfast abiding in the peace of a great charity, the deliverance from the temptation of descending to the level of the wrong-doer, and of losing hold of God and all high visions. The tempest-ruffled sea mirrors no stars by night, nor is blued by day. If we are to have real communion with God, we must not flush with indignation at evil, nor pant with desire to shoot the arrow back to him that aimed it at us. And in regard to the evil-doer, the most effectual resistance is, in many cases, not to resist. There is something hid away somewhere in most men's hearts which makes them ashamed of smiting the offered left cheek, and then ashamed of having smitten the right one. 'It is a shame to hit him, since he does not defend himself,' comes into many a ruffian's mind. The safest way to travel in savage countries is to show oneself quite unarmed. He that meets evil with evil is 'overcome of evil'; he that meets it with patient love is likely in most cases to 'overcome evil with good.' And even if he fails, he has, at all events, used the only weapon that has any chance of beating down the evil, and it is better to be defeated when fighting hate with love than to be victorious when fighting it with itself, or demanding an eye for an eye. But, if we take the right view of this precept, its limitations are in itself. Since it is love confronting, and seeking to transform evil into its own likeness, it may sometimes be obliged by its own self not to yield. If turning the other cheek would but make the assaulter more angry, or if yielding the cloak would but make the legal robber more greedy, or if going the second mile would but make the press-gang more severe and exacting, resistance becomes a form of love and a duty for the sake of the wrong-doer. It may also become a duty for the sake of others, who are also objects of love, such as helpless persons who otherwise would be exposed to evil, or society as a whole. But while clearly that limit is prescribed by the very nature of the precept, the resistance which it permits must have love to the culprit or to others as its motive, and not be tainted by the least suspicion of passion or vengeance. Would that professing Christians would try more to purge their own hearts, and bring this solemn precept into their daily lives, instead of discussing whether there are cases in which it does not apply! There are great tracts in the lives of all of us to which it should apply and is not applied; and we had better seek to bring these under its dominion first, and then it will be time enough to debate as to whether any circumstances are outside its dominion or not.

Chapter 78

THE LAW OF LOVE

'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.44. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.46. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others! do not even the publicans so? 48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' -- MATT. v.43-48. The last of the five instances of our Lord's extending and deepening and spiritualising the old law is also the climax of them. We may either call it the highest or the deepest, according to our point of view. His transfiguring touch invests all the commandments with which He has been dealing with new inwardness, sweep, and spirituality, and finally He proclaims the supreme, all-including commandment of universal love. 'It hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour' -- that comes from Lev. xix.18; but where does 'and hate thine enemy' come from? Not from Scripture, but in the passage in Leviticus 'neighbour' is co-extensive with 'children of thy people,' and the hatred and contempt of all men outside Israel which grew upon the Jews found a foothold there. 'Who is my neighbour?' was apparently a well-discussed question in the schools of the Rabbis, and, whether any of these teachers ever committed themselves to plainly formulating the principle or not, practically the duty of love was restricted to a narrow circle, and the rest of the wide world left out in the cold. But not only was the circumference of love's circle drawn in, but to hate an enemy was elevated almost into a duty. It is the worst form of retaliation. 'An eye for an eye' is bad enough, but hate for hate plunges men far deeper in the devil's mire. To flash back from the mirror of the heart the hostile looks which are flung at us, is our natural impulse; but why should we always leave it to the other man to pitch the keynote of our relations with him? Why should we echo only his tones? Cannot we leave his discord to die into silence and reply to it by something more musical? Two thunder-clouds may cast lightnings at each other, but they waste themselves in the process. Better to shine meekly and victoriously on as the moon does on piled masses of darkness till it silvers them with its quiet light. So Jesus bids us do. We are to suppress the natural inclination to pay back in the enemy's own coin, to 'give him as good as he gave us,' to 'show proper spirit,' and all the other fine phrases with which the world whitewashes hatred and revenge. We are not only to allow no stirring of malice in our feelings, but we are to let kindly emotions bear fruit in words blessing the cursers, and in deeds of goodness, and, highest of all, in prayers for those whose hate is bitterest, being founded on religion, and who are carrying it into action in persecution. We cannot hate a man if we pray for him; we cannot pray for him if we hate him. Our weakness often feels it so hard not to hate our enemies, that our only way to get strength to keep this highest, hardest commandment is to begin by trying to pray for the foe, and then we gradually feel the infernal fires dying down in our temper, and come to be able to meet his evil with good, and his curses with blessings. It is a difficult lesson that Jesus sets us. It is a blessed possibility that Jesus opens for us, that our kindly emotions towards men need not be at the mercy of theirs to us. It is a fair ideal that He paints, which, if Christians deliberately and

continuously took it for their aim to realise, would revolutionise society, and make the fellowship of man with man a continual joy. Think of what any community, great or small, would be, if enmity were met by love only and always. Its fire would die for want of fuel. If the hater found no answering hate increasing his hate, he would often come to answer love with love. There is an old legend spread through many lands, which tells how a princess who had been changed by enchantment into a loathly serpent, was set free by being thrice kissed by a knight, who thereby won a fair bride with whom he lived in love and joy. The only way to change the serpent of hate into the fair form of a friend is to kiss it out of its enchantment. No doubt, partial anticipations of this precept may be found, buried under much ethical rubbish, elsewhere than in the Sermon on the Mount, and more plainly in Old Testament teaching, and in Rabbinical sayings; but Christ's 'originality' as a moral teacher lies not so much in the absolute novelty of His commandments, as in the perspective in which He sets them, and in the motives on which He bases them, and most of all in His being more than a teacher, namely, the Giver of power to fulfil what He enjoins. Christian ethics not merely recognises the duty of love to men, but sets it as the foundation of all other duties. It is root and trunk, all others are but the branches into which it ramifies. Christian ethics not merely recognises the duty, but takes a man by the hand, leads him up to his Father God, and says: There, that is your pattern, and a child who loves his Father will try to copy his ways and be made like Him by his love. So Morality passes into Religion, and through the transition receives power beyond its own. The perfection of worship is imitation, and when men 'call Him Father' whom they adore, imitation becomes the natural action of a child who loves. A dew-drop and a planet are both spheres, moulded by the same law of gravitation. The tiny round of our little drops of love may be not all unlike the colossal completeness of that Love, which owns the sun as 'His sun,' and rays down light and distils rain over the broad world. God loves all men apart altogether from any regard to character, therefore He gives to all men all the good gifts that they can receive apart from character, and if evil men do not get His best gifts, it is not because He withholds, but because they cannot take. There are human love-gifts which cannot be bestowed on enemies or evil persons. It is not possible, nor fit, that a Christian should feel to such as he does to those who share his faith and sympathies; but it is possible, and therefore incumbent, that he should not only negatively clear his heart of malice and hatred, but that he should positively exercise such active beneficence as they will receive. That is God's way, and it should be His children's. The thought of the divine pattern naturally brings up the contrast between it and that which goes by the name of love among men. Just because Christians are to take God as their example of love, they must transcend human examples. Here again Jesus strikes the note with which He began His teaching of His disciples' 'righteousness'; but very significantly He does not now point to Pharisees, but to publicans, as those who were to be surpassed. The former, no doubt, were models of 'righteousness' after a rigid, whitewashed-sepulchre sort, but the latter had bigger hearts, and, bad as they were and were reputed to be, they loved better than the others. Jesus is glad to see and point to even imperfect sparks of goodness in a justly condemned class. No doubt, publicans in their own homes, with wife and children round them, let their hearts out, and could be tender and gentle, however gruff and harsh in public. When Jesus says 'even the publicans,' He is not speaking in contempt, but in recognition of the love that did find some soil to grow on, even in that rocky ground. But is not the bringing in of the 'reward' as a motive a woful downcome? and is love that loves for the sake of reward, love at all? The criticism and questions forget that the true motive has just been set forth, and that the thought of 'reward' comes in, only as secondary

encouragement to a duty which is based upon another ground. To love because we shall gain something, either in this world or in the next, is not love but long-sighted selfishness; but to be helped in our endeavours to widen our love so as to take in all men, by the vision of the reward, is not selfishness but a legitimate strengthening of our weakness. Especially is that so, in view of the fact that 'the reward' contemplated is nothing else than the growth of likeness to the Father in heaven, and the increase of filial consciousness, and the clearer, deeper cry, 'Abba, Father.' If longing for, and having regard to, that 'recompense of reward' is selfishness, and if the teaching which permits it is immoral, may God send the world more of such selfishness and of teachers of it! But the reference to the shrunken love-streams that flow among men passes again swiftly to the former thought of likeness to God as the great pattern. Like a bird glancing downwards for a moment to earth, and then up again and away into the blue, our Lord's words re-soar, and settle at last by the throne of God. The command, 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,' may be intended to refer only to the immediately preceding section, but one is inclined to regard it rather as the summing up of the whole of the preceding series of commandments from verse 20 onwards. The sum of religion is to imitate the God whom we worship. The ideal which draws us to aim at its realisation must be absolutely perfect, however imperfect may be all our attempts to reproduce it. We sometimes hear it said that to set up perfection as our goal is to smite effort dead and to enthrone despair. But to set up an incomplete ideal is the surest way to take the heart out of effort after it. It is the Christian's prerogative to have ever gleaming before him an unattained aim, to which he is progressively approximating, and which, unreached, beckons, feeds hope of endless approach, and guarantees immortality.

Chapter 79

TRUMPETS AND STREET CORNERS

'Take heed that ye do nob your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.2. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.3. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; 4. That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee openly.5. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.' -- MATT. vi.1-5. Our Lord follows His exposition of the deepened sense which the old law assumes in His kingdom, by a warning against the most subtle foes of true righteousness. He first gives the warning in general terms in verse 1, and then flashes its light into three dark corners, and shows how hankering after men's praise corrupts the beneficence which is our duty to our neighbour, the devotion which is our duty to God, and the abstinence which is our duty to ourselves. We deal now with the two former. We have first the general warning, given out like the text of a sermon, or the musical phrase which underlies the various harmonies of some concerto. The first word implies that the evil is a subtle and seducing one. 'Take heed' as of something which may steal into and mar the noblest lives. The serpent lies coiled under the leaves, and may sting and poison the unwary hand. The generality of the warning, and the logical propriety of the whole section, require the adoption of the reading of the Revised Version, namely, 'righteousness.' The thing to be taken heed of is not the doing it 'before men,' which will often be obligatory, often necessary, and never in itself wrong, but the doing it 'to be seen of them.' Not the number of spectators, but the furtive glance of our eyes to see if they are looking at us, makes the sin. We are to let our good works shine, that men may glorify our Father. Pious souls are to shine, and yet to be hid, -- a paradox which can be easily solved by the obedient. If our motive is to make God's glory more visible, we shall not be seeking to be ourselves admired. The harp-string's swift vibrations, as it gives out its note, make it unseen. The reason for the warning goes on two principles: one that righteousness is to be rewarded, over and above its own inherent blessedness; another, that the prospect of the reward is a legitimate stimulus, over and above the prime reason for righteousness, namely, that it is righteous. The New Testament morality is not good enough for some very superfine people, who are pleased to call it selfish because it lets a martyr brace himself in the fire by the vision of the crown athwart the smoke. Somehow or other, however, that selfish morality gets itself put in practice, and turns out more unselfish people than its assailants manage to produce. Perhaps the motive which they attack may be part of the reason. The mingling of regard for man's approbation with apparently righteous acts absolutely disqualifies them for receiving God's reward, for it changes their whole character, and they are no longer what they seem. Charity given from that motive is not charity, nor prayer offered from it devotion. I. The general warning is applied to three cases, of which we have to deal with two. Our Lord speaks first of ostentatious almsgiving. Note that we are not to take 'blowing the trumpets' as actual fact. Nobody would do that in a synagogue. The meaning of all attempts, however

concealed, to draw attention to one's beneficence, is just what the ear-splitting blast would be; and the incongruity of startling the worshippers with the harsh notes is like the incongruity of doing good and trying to attract notice. I think Christ's ear catches the screech of the brazen abomination in a good many of the ways of raising and giving money, which find favour in the Church to-day. This is an advertising age, and flowers that used to blush unseen are forced now under glass for exhibition. No one needs to blow his own trumpet nowadays. We have improved on the ruder methods of the Pharisees, and newspapers and collectors will blow lustily and loud for us, and defend the noise on the ground that a good example stimulates others. Perhaps so, though it may be a question what it stimulates to, and whether B's gift, drawn from him in imitation or emulation of A's, is any liker Christ's idea of gifts than was A's, given that B might hear of it. To a very large extent, the money getting and giving arrangements of the modern Church are neither more nor less than the attempt to draw Christ's chariot with the devil's traces. Christ condemned ostentation. His followers too often try to make use of it. 'They have their reward.' Observe that have means have received in full, and note the emphasis of that their. It is all the reward that they will ever get, and all that they are capable of. The pure and lasting crown, which is a fuller possession of God Himself, has no charms for them, and could not be given. And what a poor thing it is which they seek -- the praise of men, a breath, as unsubstantial and short-lived as the blast of the trumpet which they blew before their selfish benevolence. Their charity was no charity, for what they did was not to give, but to buy. Their gift was a speculation. They invested in charity, and looked for a profit of praise. How can they get God's reward? True benevolence will even hide the giving right hand from the idle left, and, as far as may be, will dismiss the deed from the doer's consciousness. Such alms, given wholly out of pity and desire to be like the all-giving Father, can be rewarded, and will be, with that richer acquaintance with Him and more complete victory over self, which is the heaven of heaven and the foretaste of it now. In its coarsest forms, this ostentation is out and out hypocrisy, which consciously assumes a virtue which it has not. But far more common and dangerous is the subtle, unconscious mingling of it with real charity -- the eye wandering from the poor, whom the hand is helping, to the bystanders -- and it is this mingling which we have therefore to take most heed to avoid. One drop of this sour stuff will curdle whole gallons of the milk of human kindness. The hypocrisy which hoodwinks ourselves is more common and perilous than that which blinds others. II. We need not dwell at length on the second application of the general warning -- to prayer; as the words are almost, and the thoughts entirely, identical with those of the former verses. If there be any action of the spirit which requires the complete exclusion of thoughts of men, it is prayer, which is the communion of the soul alone with God. It is as impossible to pray, and at the same time to think of men, as to look up and down at once. If we think of prayer, as formalists in all times have done, as so many words, then it will not seem incongruous to choose the places where men are thickest for 'saying our prayers,' and we shall do it with all the more spirit if we have spectators. That accounts for a great deal of the 'devotion' in Mohammedan and Roman Catholic countries which travellers with no love for Protestant Christianity are so fond of praising. But if we think of prayer as Christ did, as being the yearning of the soul to God, we shall feel that the inmost chamber and the closed door are its fitting accompaniments. Of course, our Lord is not forbidding united prayer; for each of the assembled worshippers may be holding communion with God, which is none the less solitary though shared by others, and none the less united though in it each is alone with God. III. Our Lord passes for a time from the more immediate subject of ostentation to add other teaching about prayer, which still

farther unfolds its true conception. Another corruption arising from the error of thinking that prayer is an outward act, is 'vain repetition,' characteristic of all heathen religion, and resting upon a profound disbelief in the loving willingness of God to help. Of course, earnest, reiterated prayer is not vain repetition. Jesus is not here condemning His own agony in Gethsemane when He thrice 'said the same words.' The persistence in prayer, which is the child of faith, is no relation to the parrot-like repetition which is the child of disbelief, nor does the condemnation of the one touch the other. The frenzied priests who yelled, 'O Baal, hear us!' all the long day; the Buddhists who repeat the sacred invocation till they are stupefied; the poor devotee who thinks merit is proportioned to the number of Paternosters and Aves, are all instances of this gross mechanical conception of prayer. Are there no similar superstitions nearer home? Are there no ministers or congregations that we ever heard of, who have a regulation length for their prayers, and would scarcely think they had prayed at all if their devotions were as short as most of the prayers in the Bible? Are we in no danger of believing what Christ here tells us is pure heathenism -- that many words may move God? The only real remedy against such degradation of the very idea of prayer lies in the deeper conceptions of God and of it which Christ here gives. He knows our needs before we ask. Then what is prayer for? Not to inform Him, nor to move Him, unwilling, to have mercy, as if, like some proud prince, He required a certain amount of recognition of His greatness as the price of His favours, but to fit our own hearts by conscious need and true desire and dependence, to receive the gifts which He is ever willing to give, but we are not always fit to receive. As St. Augustine has it, the empty vessel is by prayer carried to the full fountain.

Chapter 80

SOLITARY PRAYER

'Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret,' -- MATT. vi.6. An old heathen who had come to a certain extent under the influence of Christ, called prayer 'the flight of the solitary to the Solitary.' There is a deep truth in that, though not all the truth. Prayer is not only the most intensely individual act that a man can perform, but it is also the highest social act. Christ came not to carry solitary souls by a solitary pathway to heaven, but to set the solitary in families and to rear up a church. Of that church the highest function is united worship. No one is likely to fall into the mistake of supposing that this passage before us condemns praying in the synagogues, or even, if need were, at the street corners. It does not, of course, interdict social public prayer, though it enjoins solitary secret communion with the solitary, secret God. I. What is the practice here enjoined? Since 'that they may be seen of men' constitutes the evil, we may fairly say that Christ is not here prescribing the place where, but the spirit in which, we ought to pray; that what He condemns is not the fact of praying where we can be seen, but of picking out the place in order that we may be seen; that, in a word, the contrast here is between ostentation and sincerity. A man that has sidelong looks at the passers-by in his devotions has not much devotion. But then, as a material help to this, we need solitude and secrecy; they are not indispensable, but almost so. And in that solitude what is to be our occupation? One word answers the question -- Communion. We are to be alone that we may more fully and thrillingly feel that we are with God. That communion will have an intellectual element in which we try to rise to perception of the high truths as to God, or in meditation gaze on Him, and a petitionary element in which we ask for the communication of His grace according to our needs. II. What is the special worth of such a habit? 1. The truths that we profess to believe are in their nature such as can only be vividly realised by such an exercise. They are all matters of faith, not of sense. God is a spirit, and is felt near by none but still and waiting spirits. Our religion has to do with the Unseen, the Solemn, the Profound, the Remote. These are not to be fully felt hastily. They are like mountains that grow on us as we gaze, like a fair scene that we must be alone in, rightly to feel. They must be allowed to saturate the soul. The eye must be slowly accustomed to the light. 2. The pressure of the world can only be resisted by such an exercise. Our business as Christians is to keep ourselves free from it. 3. The tone and balance of our own minds can only be preserved and restored thus. Solitude is the mother-country of the strong. 'I was left alone, and I saw this great vision.' We get hot and fevered, interested and absorbed, and we need solitude as a counterpoise.4. What is the connection of this with other kinds of worship and with our life's work? It has a function of its own.These cannot be substituted for it -- public worship, reading Christian books, bring a different class of feelings altogether into play.They are not to be excluded by it. They find their true foundation in it. A tree's branches stretch to the same circumference as its roots.5. What is the special need of this precept for this age?It is neglected in our modern life. The evils of our modern Christianity, the low tone of religion, the small grasp of Christian truth, the irreligious cast of religious work.The thought of being alone with God will be a joy -- or a terror.

Chapter 81

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

'After this manner therefore pray ye.' -- MATT. vi.9. 'After this manner' may or may not imply that Christ meant this prayer to be a form, but He certainly meant it for a model. And they who drink in its spirit, and pray, seeking God's glory before their own satisfaction, and, while trustfully asking from His hand their daily bread, rise quickly to implore the supply of their spiritual hunger, do pray after this manner,' whether they use these words or no. All begins with the recognition of the Fatherhood of God. The clear and fixed contemplation of God is the beginning of all true prayer, and that contemplation does not fasten on His remote and partially intelligible attributes, nor strive to climb to behold Him as in Himself, but grasps Him as related to us. The Fatherhood of God implies His communication of life, His tenderness, and our kindred. This is the prayer of the children of the kingdom, and can only be truly offered by those who, by faith in the Son, have received the adoption of sons. It gathers all such into a family, so delivering their prayer from selfish absorption in their own joys or needs. As our Father 'in Heaven,' He is lifted clear above earth's limitations, changes, and imperfections. So childlike familiarity is sublimed into reverence, our hearts are drawn upward, and freed from the oppressive and narrowing attachment to earth and sense. The perfect sevenfold petitions of the prayer fall into two halves, corresponding roughly to the first and second tables of the decalogue. The first half consists of three petitions, which refer to God and His kingdom. They are three, in accordance with the symbolism of numbers which, in the Old Testament, always regards three as the sacred number of completeness and of divinity. The second half consists of four petitions, which refer to ourselves. They are four -- the number which symbolises the creature. The lessons taught by the order in which these two halves occur do not need to be dwelt upon. God first and man second, His glory before our wants -- that is the true order. For how few of us is it the spontaneous order! Do we first rise to God, and only secondly descend to ourselves? Note, too, the sequence in each of these halves. In the first we may say that we begin from above and come down, or from within and come outwards. In the second, the process is the opposite. We begin on the lowest level with our external needs, and go upwards and inwards to removal of sin, exemption from temptation, and complete deliverance from evil. The first half gives us the beginning, middle, and end of God's purposes for the world. The recognition of His name is the basis of His kingdom, and His kingdom is the sphere in which alone His will is done. The second half, in like manner, gives us the beginning, middle, and end of His dealings with the individual, the common mercies of daily bread, forgiveness, guidance, protection in conflict, and final deliverance. The 'name' of God is His revealed character. He hallows it when He so acts as to make His holiness manifest. We hallow it when we regard it as the holy thing which it is. That petition is first, because the knowledge of God as He is self-revealed is the deepest want of men, and the spread of that knowledge and reverence is the way by which His kingdom comes. God's kingdom is His rule over men's hearts. Christ began His ministry by proclaiming its near approach, and in effect brought it to earth. But it spreads slowly in the individual heart, and in the world. Therefore, this second petition is ever in place, until the consummation. God's rule is established through the hallowing of His name; for it is a rule which works on men through their understandings, and seeks no ignorant submission. The sum of this

first half is, 'Thy will be done, as in Heaven, so on earth.' Obedience to that will is the end of God's self-revelation. It makes all the difference whether we begin with the thought of the name or of the will. In the latter case, religion will be slavish and submission sullen. There is no more horrible and paralysing conception of God than that of mere sovereign will. But if we think of Him as desiring that we should know His name, and as gathering all its syllables into the one perfect 'Word of God'; then we are sure that His will must be intelligible and good. Obedience becomes delight, and the surrender of our wills to His the glad expression of love. He who begins with 'Thy will be done' is a slave, and never really does the will at all; he who begins with 'Our Father, hallowed be Thy name,' is a son, and his will, gladly yielding, is free in surrender, strong in self-abnegation, and restful in putting the reins into God's hands. The two halves make a whole. The second, which deals with our needs, starts with the cry for bread, and climbs up slowly through the ills of life, from bodily hunger to trespasses and human unkindness and personal weakness, and a world of temptation, and the double evil of sin and of sorrow, and so regains at last the starting-point of the first half, Heaven and God. The probable meaning of the difficult word rendered 'daily' seems to be 'sufficient for our need.' The lessons of the petition are that God's children have a claim for the supply of their wants, since He is bound, as a faithful Creator, not to send mouths without sending meat to fill them, but that our desires should be limited to our actual necessities, and our cravings, as well as our efforts for the bread that perishes, made into prayers. Such a prayer rightly used would put an end to much wicked luxury among Christians, and to many questionable ways of getting wealth. 'Bless my cheating, my sharp practice, my half lies!' If we dare not pray this prayer over what we do in 'earning our living,' we had better ask ourselves whether we are not rather earning our death. Sin is debt Incurred to God. So Christ taught in the previous chapter by His parable of agreeing with the adversary; and in the other parables of the two debtors (Luke vii.41) and of the unmerciful servant (Matt. xviii.23). As universal as the need for bread is the need for pardon. It is the first want of the spiritual nature, but it is a constantly recurring want, as this petition teaches us. Forgiveness is the cancelling of a debt; but we must not forget that it is a Father's forgiveness, and therefore does not merely, or even chiefly, imply the removal of penalty, but much rather the unimpeded flow of the Father's love, and consequently the removal of the miserable consciousness of separation from Him. The appended comparison 'as we have forgiven' does not mean that our forgiveness is the reason for God's forgiveness of us. The ground of our pardon is Christ's work, the condition of it our faith; but, as we saw in considering the Beatitudes, the condition on which the children of the kingdom can retain the blessing of the divine pardon is their imitation of it. The next petition is the expression of conscious weakness. The forgiven man, though in his deepest soul hating sin, is still surrounded with sparks which may fire the combustibles in his heart. If we ask not to be led into temptation, because we want a smooth and easy road, we are wrong. If we do so from self-distrust and fear lest we fall, then it is allowable. But perhaps we may draw a distinction between being tempted and being led into temptation. The former may mean the presentation of an inducement to do evil which we cannot hope to escape, and which it is not well that we should escape. The latter may mean the further step of embracing or being entangled in it by consenting to it. We do not need to dread the entrance into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, for if the Lord be with us we shall pass through it. Our prayer may mean, lead us, not into, but through, the trial. It is the plaint of conscious weakness, the recognition of God as ordering our path, the cry of a heart which desires holiness most of all, and which trusts in God's upholding hand in the hour of trial. 'Deliver us from evil' is a petition which, in its width, fits

the close of the prayer better than does the translation of the Revised Version. There seems an echo of the words in Paul's noble confidence while the headsman's axe was so near, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work.' Entire exemption from evil of every sort, whether sin or sorrow, is the true end of our prayers, as it is the crown of God's purpose. Nothing less can satisfy our yearnings; nothing less can fulfil the divine desire for us. Nothing less should be the goal of our faith and hope. To the height of meek assurance, and the reaching out of our souls in desire which is the pledge of its own fulfilment, Christ would have us attain on the wings of prayer. They can have no narrower bonds to the horizon of their hopes, nor any lesser blessing for the satisfaction of their longings, whose prayer begins with 'Our Father which art in heaven'; for where the Father is, the child must wish to be, and some day will be, to go out no more.

Chapter 82

'OUR FATHER'

'Our Father which art in heaven.' -- Matt. vi.9. The words of Christ, like the works of God, are inexhaustible. Their depth is concealed beneath an apparent simplicity which the child and the savage can understand. But as we gaze upon them and try to fathom all their meaning, they open as the skies above us do when we look steadily into their blue chambers, or as the sea at our feet does when we bend over to pierce its clear obscure. The poorest and weakest learns from them the lesson of divine love and a mighty helper; the reverent, loving contemplation of the profoundest souls, and the experience of all the ages discern ever new depths in them and feel that much remains unlearned. 'They did all eat and were filled, men, women, and children -- and they took up of fragments that were left five baskets full.' This is especially true about the Lord's Prayer. We teach it to our children, and its divine simplicity becomes their lisping tongues and little folded hands. But the more we ponder it, and try to make it the model of our prayers, the more wonderful does its fulness of meaning appear, the more hard does it become to pray 'after this manner.' There is everything in it: the loftiest revelation of God in His relations to us and in His purposes with the world; the setting forth of all our relations to Him, to His purposes, and to one another; the grandest vision of the future for mankind; the care for the smallest wants of each day. As a theology, it smites into fragments all false, unworthy human thoughts of God. As an exposition of religion, the man who has drunk in its spirit has ceased from self-will and sin. As a foundation of social morals it lays deep the only basis for true human brotherhood, and he who lives in its atmosphere will live in charity and helpfulness with all mankind. As a guide for personal life, it gives us authoritatively the order and relative worth of all human desires, and with these the order and subordination of our pursuits and life's aims. As a prayer it is all comprehensive and intended to be so, holding within the perfect seven of its petitions, all for which we should come to God, and resting them all on His divine name, and closing them all with a chorus of thanksgiving. As a prophecy it opens the loftiest vision, beyond which none is possible, of the final transformation of this world into the kingdom in which God's will shall be perfectly done, and of the final deliverance from, all evil of the struggling, sinning, sorrowing souls of His children. I desire to try in a series of sermons to set forth what little I can see of the depth and comprehensiveness of this model of all prayer, and of its ever fresh applicability to the wants and difficulties of our days as of all days. But before dealing with that great invocation of the divine name on which all rests, a word or two must be said touching the introductory clause. 'After this manner pray ye.' The question which is usually made prominent in thinking of these words is really a very subordinate one. Did Christ intend to establish a form, or only to give an example? Churchmen say, a form; Dissenters generally say, an example. But it would be better for both Churchmen and Dissenters to try to realise for themselves what 'this manner' is. Unquestionably, whether our Lord is giving us a form or not, His chief object was not to prescribe words. To pray is not to repeat petitions, and His commandment has for its chief meaning a much deeper one than that He was giving us either a form which we are to incorporate verbally with our prayers, or an outline according to which our spoken supplications are to be shaped. Whether in addition to this we are to regard the very words as to be used by us, will be determined by each man and church according as he regards the use of set forms in prayer

as being the true and noblest manner of prayer. Such use is certainly not inconsistent with the utmost spirituality, but the habitual use of forms, especially their exclusive use, seems to many of us to be dangerous, regard being had to the tendency of human nature to rest in them. And it is not without significance that this very prayer of our Lord's, which was given as the corrective of vain repetitions and idle, heathenish chattering of forms of prayer, has itself come to be the saddest instance in all Christendom of these very faults, while the beads slip through the fingers of the mechanical repeater of muttered Paternosters. Instead of wrangling about this subordinate question, let us try to pray after this manner. We shall find it hard, but blessed. Be sure that every prayer not after this manner is after a wrong manner. This prayer helps to reverse our foolish desire to make earth foremost. The true end of prayer is to get our wills harmonised with His, not to bend His to ours. Surely if self-denial and submission be the very heart of Christianity, that should be most expressed in prayer which is the very sanctuary of religion. The prayers that are to be offered after this manner will not be passionate, petulant pleadings or prescriptions to God to do this or that, but in them God and His glory will be first, I second, and through Him and as He wills. Ah, brethren! this is an awful requirement of Christ's. Who dare take such holy words into his lips? It is a hard matter to pray as Christ taught us. The prayer seems to move in a height of unapproachable elevation, and the air there is too thin and pure for our gross lungs. For be it remembered, we are not praying after this manner unless our lives in some sort repeat and confirm our prayers. Do our hearts seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? Are our energies given to this, as their noblest aim, to hallow God's name; or does the very blood in our hearts throb hot, passionate desires for worldly things, and God's name and kingdom and will seem dreamy and far-off objects which kindle no desire in our souls and rule no effort of our lives, like suns far away which shed little light upon the earth and sway not its rolling tides, that are obedient to the nearer but borrowed light of the changeful moon? If so, no matter whether we use this form or not, we are not praying after this manner. Look, now, at this first clause, which is the basis of all. I. The divine Name which is the ground and object of all our prayers. It is not merely a formula of address, like the superscription on a letter, but the reality of His character as revealed before us. There is inseparable from all prayer the effort to conceive worthily of Him to whom we speak; to raise our souls to that height. How much of our prayer, even while truest, fails here! We may be distinctly conscious of our wants; our wishes may be right, and our confidence may be firm that God will give us what we ask; yet how often there is no vivid thought of Him filling the mind! How often our prayers are offered to a mere name! How seldom through the cloud-wrack beneath His feet do we see His face!This absorbed contemplation is the necessary preliminary of all real prayer, and there is a truth in the thought that such losing of self in gazing on God is the highest form of prayer. We should feel as some peasant come to court who stands on the threshold of the presence-chamber, and forgetting his grievances and his embassy, gazes entranced on the splendour and benignity of his sovereign.Look, then, at this Name: what it expresses. It is not new. The Jews dimly had it, and even Greek and other paganisms knew of a 'father of Gods and men.' The name of Father carries with it primarily the idea of the Source of life ('we also are His offspring'), and also, secondarily, that of loving care.How wonderful, how beautiful, that that earthly relation should find its deepest reality in God! God be thanked that, 'like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.'But the true Christian idea of God's fatherhood is more than all this. This is a prayer for disciples, for those who alone can really pray. All men are God's children because all draw their life from Him, were made in His image, and are objects of

His love. But there is a fatherhood and a sonship which are not universal, and for which another birth is necessary. Its conditions are plainly laid down by the Evangelist: 'To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God,' and by the Apostle, 'Ye are the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.'We are made sons through Jesus. We are made sons by faith.And now, how should this Fatherhood affect our prayers? We shall come with hope and familiar confidence, for 'your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of.' Does a father love to have his children about him? Does a child shrink from telling its wishes to a father? Also we must bend our wills to His -- to a Father.Contrast that conception with the ideas of God which we are all tempted to cherish, the slavish one which dwells upon the gulf between God and man, with the cold deity of 'natural religion,' with the Epicurean notion of Him which divorces Him from all living interest in His creation.Contrast it with the ghastly image which our consciences and our fears frame, the heathen notion of an avenger and cruel. We do not need to seek to avert His anger. This mighty word shatters all cowering terror and abject prostration.And it is a vow as well as an Invocation, binding us to supreme love to Him, to obedience to Him, to moral conformity with Him. Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. The noblest prayer is 'Abba, Father.'II. The loftiness and perfectness of that divine Name.'In heaven.' Not fact, but symbol, to express His exaltation above the earth, and so suggesting all ideas of remoteness from creatures, from earth's limitations and conditions, changes and imperfection, and showing the gulf between man and God.1. The thought that He is in heaven deepens our reverence, love casting out fear, but making us more lowly. It leads to familiar yet awe-stricken approach.2. It exalts the preciousness of the Fatherhood, as being free from all weakness and all change. It reveals a better Father than we can know here; one not narrow of view, infirm of purpose, weak in tenderness, bounded in power. As the heavens stretch calm and serene above us, far from all our trouble and noise, unvexed, pitying, and dropping rain and dew on earth, so is He.3. It draws our hearts and hopes to our Father's home.4. It delivers us from worship of the visible and from worship by means of the visible. So the Name guards against placing stress on externals and secondary forms, places, times of worship.III. The Community of Brotherhood of the Worshippers.Our Father.1. All true enjoyment of blessings depends on our being willing to share them. To keep for ourselves is to lose. We enter by faith into a great community.2. The effect of this on our prayers: to destroy their selfishness. We bow to Him of whom the whole family is named.3. Effect on our lives.Dare we rise from our knees to plan and plot for ourselves? How we are tempted to forget our brotherhood in personal animosities, vanity, and self-interest, competing with others! Our differences of ideas arising from differences of race, training, occupation, country, fling us apart. Our differences of wealth and position alienate us. Our differences of conception of Christianity often separate and embitter us. But do these not crumble when we say 'Our Father'?Think of the generations who have gone to the grave saying this prayer. What a prophecy of the heaven, where all shall be gathered and each feel his sense of Fatherhood increased by his brethren! And this is the only possible basis for true fraternity among men.Opinion? Men are not thinking machines.Interest? Men are not ruled by calculations, and such union is the destruction of true unity.Common aims? -- shallow.Nation or race? -- artificial and not capable of universality.There is no brotherhood but that which rests on God's Fatherhood, Christ's Sonship. For the world Christ has come, therefore we are no more 'strangers and foreigners.'Therefore, listening to His voice, and trusting in Him who has made us heirs together with Him, let us lift up our voices, 'Our Father,' and therein proclaim that God who loves every soul of man, who knows

each man's wants, who bends over him in pitying tenderness, who can neither die nor change, and who will gather into His eternal home all His prodigal children and keep them blessed by His side for evermore.

Chapter 83

'HALLOWED BE THY NAME'

'Hallowed be Thy name.' -- Matt. vi.9. Name is character so far as revealed. I. What is meaning of Petition? Hallowed means to make holy; or to show as holy; or to regard as holy. The second of these is God's hallowing of His Name. The third is men's. The prayer asks that God would so act as to show the holiness of His character, and that men, one and all, may see the holiness of His character. i.e. Hallowed by divine self-revelation. Hallowed by human recognition. Hallowed by human adoration and appropriate sentiments. Hallowed by human action. II. On what it rests: On the Fatherhood of God. On the confidence that God wills that His Name should be known. In other words, the petition rests on the assurance of God's fatherly love, which cannot but will that His children should know their Father as He is.On the fact that men need the knowledge of the Name.On the conviction that men cannot attain it for themselves.That Christ is the great means of His hallowing His Name.His finished work does not render this prayer unnecessary.'I have declared Thy name, and will declare it.'That this is to be issue of all. A grand prophecy.III. Why put first.Singular, that so remote a petition should stand at beginning. We should begin not with ourselves, but with God; not with temporal wants, not even with our own spiritual ones.We begin not with men, but with God.It is God's glory even more than men's knowledge of Him that the petition contemplates. And though the two things coincide, which of them is foremost in our minds makes an infinite difference.Then in regard to God, we first ask not that His law may be kept, but that His nature may be known.The place of this petition in the prayer is explained by considerations which suggest very important thoughts for ourselves and all men.That true knowledge of God is the deepest and fundamental necessity for all men.That the knowledge will affect their whole scheme of thought and life.That the most important of all questions is, How does a man think of God?That the Inward comes before the Outward.That knowledge is the guide of emotions and of practical life, as set forth here in the order of petitions.This sequence of petitions corrects many errors into which we are apt to fall.(a) That religion is chiefly to give us forgiveness.(b) That accurate knowledge of God and His will matters comparatively little if we have devout emotions and experiences.(c) That plans for the reformation of men should begin with the exterior, leaving theological subtleties to themselves.But this is not a theological subtlety.'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,' is a maxim for social reformation as well as for individual life.IV. To what practical life this prayer binds us.Following in our estimates, aims, and practice the sequence which it prescribes. Desiring for world most of all that it may hallow the Name.Seeking for ourselves to hallow it.Seeking for ourselves that we may be the means of others doing so.The ever-present remembrance, that the name of God is blasphemed or hallowed, that God is glorified or disgraced, by us.That to be like His name is true way to commend it. Do you know this name?

'THY KINGDOM COME'

'Thy kingdom come. -- MATT. vi.10. 'The Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad'; 'The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble,' was the burden of Jewish psalmist and prophet from the first to the last. They have no doubt of His present dominion. Neither man's forgetfulness and man's rebellion, nor all the dark crosses and woes of the world, can disturb their conviction that He is then and for ever the sole Lord. The kingdom is come, then. Yet John the Baptist broke the slumbers of that degenerate people with the trumpet-call, 'Repent, for the kingdom is at hand.' It is not come, then -- but coming. And the Master said, 'If I by the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.' It is come, then, in Him. This prayer throws it forward again into the future, and far down on the stream of prophecy; we hear borne up to us through the darkness the shouts that shall hail a future day when here on earth the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. It is a kingdom, then, that has ever been, and yet has stages of progress, a kingdom that was established in Jesus; a kingdom that has a past, a present, and a future on earth. It is after this world that the words are said, 'Come, ye blessed, enter into the kingdom.' It is a kingdom, then, manifested on earth, and yet a kingdom into which death, who keeps the keys of all secrets, admits us. Once more -- the kingdom of God is within you. 'The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy.' But there is beyond earth to be a manifestation of the kingdom in a more perfect form. It is 'the kingdom of heaven,' not only because the King is 'Our Father which art in heaven,' but because we cannot completely come into it, or it into us, till we pass out of earth by death, and enter through that gate into the city. He has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. It is a dominion, then, over heart and soul, having its realm within, standing not so much in outward institutions as in inner experiences; and yet a kingdom which, though like leaven hid, shall like leaven be seen in its effects; though like a seed buried deep, shall like a seed blossom into a mighty tree; though it cometh not with observation, yet is like to the lightning that flashes with a kind of omnipresence in its rapid course from end to end, everywhere at once; which though it be within, yet clearly is meant to rule over all outward acts, and one day to have all kings bowing down before it. These are the varieties with which the one thought of the kingdom of God, or of heaven, is presented in Scripture. It is eternal yet revealed in time, ever here but ever coming, ever coming but never come on earth, but entered when we go yonder, ruling us man by man, inward, spiritual, unseen, and yet moulding nations and institutions, outward and visible, compelling sight and filling all the earth. But these varieties are not contradictions, still less are they the effects of a vague and imperfect notion which means anything or everything according to the fancy of the writer. The conception is clear and well defined. The kingdom of God is an organised community which is subject to the will of the personal God. The elements of subordination and society are both there. On the one hand there is the Ruler, on the other there is the mass of subjects. The whole of the varieties in the use of the term can be all reconciled in the one simple central notion, but we cannot afford to lose sight of any of them if we would understand what is meant by this prayer. Let us take these thoughts which I have suggested, as expressing the Scriptural meaning of this phrase, and by their help try to ascertain what this prayer suggests. I. God reigns, yet we pray for the coming of His kingdom.

That is to acknowledge that the world has departed from Him. It is at once to separate ourselves from those who see in it no signs of departure and rebellion. It is to confess that, Lord as He is whether men believe it or no, whether men will it or no, yet that the relation of common subordination as to a supreme Lord which we hold with all creatures is not all that we are fit for, not all that we should be. That dominion which the psalmist saw making the sea and the fulness thereof rejoice, which is at once the control and the upholding, the sustaining and the commanding, of all orders of being, is not the whole of the dominion which can be exercised over man. The rule, which we share with the trees of the field and the tribes of life, is not all; and the unwilling control which the thought of an overruling Providence demands that we shall believe that God exercises over all the workings of men -- that is not enough. And the terrible bending of men into unconscious instruments, by which He that sitteth in the heavens laughs at princes' and rulers' counsel, speaking to the tyrant as the rod of His anger, using men as the axe with which He hews, and the staff in His hand, and then casting away the tool into the fire -- that is not the kingdom that men are made to be. Something more, even the loving, willing submission of heart and life to Him is possible, is needed, unless, indeed, it is true that a man hath no pre-eminence over a beast. Enough for them that He feedeth them when they cry; enough for them that led they know not how, and fed by they know not whom, they live they know not why, do they know not what, and die they know not when. But 'be ye not as the horse or the mule which have no understanding'; it is our prerogative to be led by His eye speaking to the heart, not by His bridle appealing to the sense; to do Him loyal service, to understand His purposes, to sympathise with them, and sympathising to execute. This our prayer gives us the clear distinction, then, between mere blind obedience and the true goal of man. The kingdom is other and better than the creature-wide dominion. And then, this prayer reposes on the confession that that higher, better form of obedience is not yet attained. In a word, it can only be prayed aright by a man who feels that the world has gone away from God and His commandments. We separate ourselves by it from all who think that this present state is the natural condition of men, the order into which they were born, the kind of world which God intended; and we assert, in sight of all the evils and sore sorrows that fill the world, that this is not God's intention. People tell us that the doctrine of a fall, an earth which has departed from God, a race which has rebelled, is a gloomy and dark one, covering the face of life with sackcloth. But it seems to me that instead of being so, it is the only conviction that can make a man bear to see the world as it is. Brethren, which of these two is the gloomy -- the creed that says, Look at all these men dying -- in dumb ignorance, living in brutal sin; look at blood, rapine, lies, battlefields, broken hearts, hopes that never set to fruit but died in the bud, the stream of sad groans, and sadder curses, and wild mirth, saddest of all. Look at it all, coming to pass on this fair earth amid the pomp of sunsets and the calm beauty of autumn, and beneath the cold stars, in a world where the noblest creature is the saddest, and accept for explanation that it is the necessary road for the perfecting of the creature; that it is all for the best, that it is exactly what God meant the world to be; -- or the creed which sees the same things and says: 'This is not what God intended: an enemy hath done this'? Sin hath entered into the world, and death by sin. The Christian doctrine does not make the facts, but only the Christian doctrine can explain them. It seems to me that if I believed that life as I see it in the world, and as I feel it in myself, is life as God meant it to be, I should either go mad or be a wise man, not a fool, if I were to look up at the unpitying stars that could sing for joy over such a creation, and say, There is no God. It is a refuge from such possible horrors, not an aggravation of them, which this prayer teaches us when it

teaches us to pray for a kingdom yet to come, from which men have departed, and in departing have worked for themselves all this woe and ruin.II. The kingdom for the coming of which we pray is established already.Christ has established it. His name is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is Prince of all the kings of the earth. He is crowned with glory and honour. By Him, that is to say, it becomes possible for men to serve God with the energies of their will, and by Him it becomes possible for men to take the pardon which God gives in Him. He founds the kingdom, and He exercises the dominion. On an eternal relation and on an historical fact that dominion of His is grounded, -- on an eternal relation inasmuch as He, the everlasting Word of God, has from the beginning been the Lord and King of the world; on an historical fact inasmuch as that eternal Word has been manifested on earth, and tasted death for every man. Christ founds the kingdom, for He by His Incarnation and Sacrifice sets forth the weightiest motives for service; He opens the path to return; He brings God's forgiveness to men, and so shall rule over them for ever -- a King and Priest upon His throne: the Prince of all the kings of the earth, both because He has from everlasting been the anointed King, and because in time He has been, and will for ever be, the faithful and true witness, and the first begotten from the dead. The foundation is thus laid, the dominion established, the kingdom is come; but we are to pray for its perfecting as the one hope of the world.Then let us remember that we are thus guarded from the error that is always rife, of looking for some new thing as the one deliverance for earth. It is sad to mark how undying that tendency is. Age after age, men have had the heartache of seeing hopes blasted, and fair schemes for the regeneration of the world knocked to pieces about the ears of their projectors, and yet they hope on. Every period, as every man, has its times of credulity, its firm conviction that it has found the one thing needful, and the shout of Eureka goes ever up. Alas, alas! time after time the old experience is repeated, and the gratulations die down into gloomy silence. Yet men hope on. What a strange testimony at once of the futility of all the past attempts, and of the indestructible conviction that men have of the certainty that the world will be better and brighter some day, that undying expectation is! It is sorrowful and yet ennobling to think of the persistency of the expectation, and the disappointment of it.God forbid that I should say a word to seem to disparage it! Not so. I say the expectations are of God, and if men give them false shapes, and scarcely understand them when they utter them, that does not in any degree make the expectation less noble or less true. But what I wish to urge is this, that the Christian attitude towards all such hopes should not be unsympathising. Rather we are bound to say 'yes, it is so, and we know how.' We are bound to proclaim that it is not any new thing that we expect, but only the working out of the old. God be thanked that it is not! The evils are not new, they have been from the beginning; and God has surely not been so cruel to the world as to leave it till now in the dark. Our hopes are not set on any new, untried remedy. This bridge across the Infinite for us is not a frail plank on which no one has yet walked, and which may crack and break when the timid foot of the first passenger is on the centre, but it is a tried structure upon which ages have walked.Then if I have any hearers who are fancying that the gospel is worn out, any who are glowing with the anticipation of great new things, who scarcely know how, but believe that somehow, the ills that have in all ages cursed humanity are to be exorcised by some new methods of social organisation or the like -- I pray them to ponder this prayer and to receive its lesson. Do not say, you are but adding one more to the Babel of opinions which confound us. Not so. We are not arguing for an opinion, we are proclaiming a fact. We are not ventilating a nostrum, we are preaching a divine revelation, a divine revealer. We are not setting forth our notion of the evil, and our idea of what

may be a remedy. We are telling men God's word about both. We are preaching an old, old truth: not man's opinion, but God's act; not man's device, but Christ's power. We proclaim that the kingdom of God is nigh you, and while a Babel, as you say, of private opinions, of passionate complaints, of despairing cries afflicts the silence, one serene voice rises, 'Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden,' and after that sole voice rings out the twofold choral anthem -- of praise, 'Rejoice, O earth, for thy King is come'; and of prayer, 'Thy kingdom come.' III. We pray for the coming of a kingdom which is inward and spiritual.I do not mean to weary you with any proofs that this is so. The whole language of Christ, the whole tenor of Scripture, the common sense of the case, the testimony of our own souls as to what we want most, confirm this. But it is enough to note the admitted fact; to enforce the thought that thus the kingdom assumes a purely individual character, and that thus its power over individuals is the pledge of its power over masses, and is its way of exercising universal sway. 'We have all of us one human heart, and therefore what the kingdom can do and has done for me or for any oilier man, it can do for all.Let me remind you of two or three consequences that flow from this thought.1. Lessons for politicians, for all men, as to the true way to cure the evils of the world: Not by external arrangements; not by better laws; not by education; not by progress in arts; not by trade, etc.You must go deeper than these 'pills to cure an earthquake' -- it is the soul, the individual will that is diseased; and the one cure for the world's evil is that it should be right with God; and that loyal, hearty obedience by Christ should be in it.2. Lessons for Christian men as to hasty externalising of the kingdom:Theocracies, State Churches, and the like.3. We pray for a kingdom that will be external. If spirit, then body; if individuals, then communities.It is to be all-comprehensive governing: -- institutions, arts, sciences. All spheres of human life are capable of sanctification and will receive it. A prophet had a vision of a day when the very bells of the horses should bear the same inscription of 'holiness to the Lord' as was engraved on the High Priest's mitre, and when every pot and pan in the kitchens of Jerusalem should be sacred as the vessels of the Temple.The fault of Christians in losing sight of this -- how all the aspects are reconciled -- and how this must be the completion -- the point to which all tends; how clearly maimed the gospel would be if such were not the goal.So much, then, the prayer assumes: -- the certainty that the world is wrong; the certainty that the kingdom is the only thing to set it right; the certainty that it can set it all right; the certainty that it will.4. We pray for a kingdom to come which cannot be fully realised on this side the grave. Large as are the capabilities of this scene, they are not large enough for the full display of all the blessedness that lies in that kingdom. And so it is not all a mistake when men say, 'Ah, this world can never do for us'; it is not all an unhealthy dream that says, 'I am weary of this; let me die.'Think of the chorus of voices that present this prayer -- the unconscious cries that have gone up; the voices of sorrow and want. The cry hath entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth; the creature groaneth and travaileth; all men unconsciously pray this prayer when they weep and when they hope. Christian men pray it when they mourn their rebellious wilfulness and when they feel the weight of all this anarchic world, or when their work in bringing it back to its King seems almost vain, the souls underneath the altar pray it when they cry, 'How long, O Lord, how long?'And ah, dear friends -- there should come a sadder, humbler cry from us, each feeling his own sinful heart. To me the glory of that coming, and the life from the dead which it shall be to the world, will be as nothing unless I know the King and trust Him. Let us each re-echo the cry of that dying thief, which He cannot refuse to answer, 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.'

Chapter 85

'THY WILL BE DONE'

'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.' -- MATT. vi.10. It makes all the difference whether the thought of the name, or that of the will, of God be the prominent one. If men begin with the will, then their religion will be slavish, a dull, sullen resignation, or a painful, weary round of unwelcome duties and reluctant abstainings. The will of an unknown God will be in their thoughts a dark and tyrannous necessity, a mysterious, inscrutable force, which rules by virtue of being stronger, and demands only obedience. There is no more horrible conception of God than that which makes Him merely or mainly sovereign will. But when we think first of God as desiring that His name should be known, and to that end mirroring Himself in all the great and beautiful, the ordered whole of creation, and energising through all the complexities of human affairs, and gathering the scattered syllables of His name into one full and articulate utterance in the Word of God, then our thoughts of His will become reverent and loving; we are sure that the will of the self-revealing God must be intelligible, we are sure that the will of the loving God must be good. Then our obedience becomes different, and instead of being slavish is filial; instead of being reluctant submission to a mightier force, is glad conformity to the fountain of love and goodness; instead of being sullen resignation, is trustful reliance; instead of being painful execution of unwelcome duties, is spontaneous expression in acts which are easy of the indwelling love. He who begins with 'Thy will be done' is a slave, and never really does the will at all; he who begins with 'Our Father, hallowed,' is a son, and obeys from the heart. This, then, is one reason for the order in which the clauses of the prayer follow each other, perhaps the chief reason. Let us consider -- I. Obedience is here set forth as the end of all divine revelation. II. As the issue in man of all religious thought and emotion. III. As the sum of all Christ's and our desires for men. IV. As the bond which unites all creation into one. I. Obedience to the will of God is the end of all divine revelation. God's name is made known before His will is proclaimed. That order suggests as to God's will -- 1. That it is not mere naked omnipotent authority.2. That it is not inscrutable.3. That its scope and direction are to be determined by His name. All these thoughts are included in this, that it is the will of a loving, good God, the will of a Father.How that destroys all harsh, awful ideas such as those of a stony fate, or a cold necessity, or an omnipotent tyrant, or an inscrutable sovereign.How Christianity has been affected by these ideas -- extreme Calvinism, for instance; but it is more profitable to think how the tendency to them lies in us all.II. Obedience is the issue of all religion.The knowledge of the name, and the hallowing of it must go first. Note -- 1. How inward the nature of obedience is. This sequence of petitions shifts the centre from without to within, from actions to dispositions.2. How nothing is obedience that is not cheerful and loving. Not constrained, not sullen, not task-work.3. How naturally dominant over all life the principles of God's truth are. Let them be known, and all the rest will follow. They have power to control all acts, great and small.4. How impossible practical righteousness is without religion. The Name is the true basis of morality. We hear a great deal about life rather than creed; the Gospel is both. The one foundation of theoretical and practical morals is the will of God.5. How maimed and spurious is religion without practical obedience.Religion in the form of thought and of emotion is intended to influence life.The ultimate result of God's revelation of Himself and of God's kingdom among men is the conformity of our life

and actions with the Will of God. That is the test of our religion. Character and conduct are all important. Here is a lesson for us all as to what the final issue of religious profession ought to be. Knowledge of God, true reverent thoughts of Him, submission in spirit to His kingdom -- all these have for their final sphere the full sanctification of the nature and the free, spontaneous obedience of the life. We are all tempted to separate between our consciousness and emotions of a religious nature, and our daily life. Many a man is a good Christian in his heart, with real religious feeling, but when you get him into the field of the world he is full of sins. There must always be a disproportion in this world between convictions, resolutions, and actions; we imperfectly live out our principles; the force of gravity pulls down the arrow, and however true the bow and careful the aim and strong the hand, its course will be a curve, not a straight line.Our machinery does not work in vacuo, and the force of friction and atmosphere opposes it and brings it to a standstill. This must be; but the discrepancy may be indefinitely lessened, and this prayer is a prophecy and kindles a hope.III. Obedience is the sum of all Christ's desires for the world.This is the last loftiest petition, beyond that there is nothing, for if our wills are conformed to God's, then we are perfect and blessed.1. The loftiest dignity of man is to obey. We have will: God has will. Ours is evidently meant to submit, His to rule. He only is what he ought to be whose whole soul bows to the divine command.2. The will submitted to God is free, strong, restful. He does not desire that it should be crushed or absorbed, but freely acting in obedience. That will is truly free which is delivered from bondage, and the burden of sin and evil. Submission to God strengthens the will. Sin overbears it, as we all know. Obedience braces and nerves it. Submission to God makes it restful. It is the conflict of self-will which troubles us. Peace is to will as God does; so He flows through us, and He is 'the living will that shall endure.'3. The results of obedience will be perfect blessedness.God's will is only for our good. His will for men and nations observed would change the face of the world.Then this prayer includes everything that ardent lovers of their kind would desire.How Christianity reforms from within, giving new life and letting that work on laws and institutions. Here is a lesson for all social reformers and for Christian men to see to it that they, for the world, try to spread the knowledge of His name, and for themselves, seek to be harmonised with His will.But this petition sets forth an apparently unattainable example as our pattern of obedience. 'As in heaven,' refers perhaps to the visible universe, which has always left on thoughtful minds the impression of beauty and order, and is the great revelation in nature of the omnipotent will of God. There clouds float on in peacefulness obeying Him, there stars burn and planets roll on their mighty revolutions. 'These all continue this day, according to Thine ordinance.'But that is by no means the exhaustive idea of this clause. We should not desire, were it possible, that men should be lowered to the level of the stars, doing a will which they know not, and swayed by a force which they have no eyes to discern. The obedience, the only true obedience, is that of spiritual beings who know God and can turn themselves to contemplate the will which rules their currents, as the sea looks up to the moon that sways its tides. So the reference is obviously to higher orders of beings, either higher by creation as angels, or higher because they have died, and are glorious saints before the Throne. This petition, then, is a revelation as well. For the doing of God's will there must be spiritual beings, like ourselves. If our doing it like them is the highest last desire which He who came to do that will can form for us, and is the ultimate goal which, if reached, the world's history would be crowned, then these spiritual beings must do it perfectly. Their obedience must be complete. There can be no interruption to it from sin, no effort in it because of weakness, no resistance because of temptation, no flaw because of ignorance, no pause because of

weariness, no pain because of rebellious will. Their obedience must be free, constant, spontaneous, happy. It must cover all their lives. Their whole being must be a sacrifice and service to the God whom they behold, and their life must be a life of activity. It is not the knowledge that floods the perfect spirits in heaven that is proposed for our example, nor their blessedness, but their service. So the thoughts of those who regard that heavenly existence only as idleness are corrected, and we are taught that, while we know little as to that future life, the conformity to the will of God, which in its present partial attainment is the secret of the purest blessedness, in its perfection will be the heaven of heaven.Then again, there is here the grand idea that the whole creation will be bound into a unity by obedience to one will. We and they now form one whole, because now we serve the one Lord. And there comes a time when there shall be one Lord and His name one; when the omnipresent energy of His will in the physical universe shall be but a faint shadow of the universal dominion of His loving will in all His creatures. Then indeed it will be true, 'Thou doest according to Thy will in the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of earth.'What glorious harmonies will sound then, when all co-operate with God and with one another, and one purpose, and one will, and one love fills the whole creation!The petition has a bearing of this upon the dreams of moralists and reformers. They were true, they shall be more than fulfilled. Earth will be no longer separated from heaven, but united with it, and from one extremity of creation to another will be no creature which does not obey and rejoice.

Chapter 86

THE CRY FOR BREAD

'Give us this day our daily bread.' -- MATT. vi.11. What a contrast there is between the two consecutive petitions, Thy will be done, and Give us this day! The one is so comprehensive, the other so narrow; the one loses self in the wide prospect of an obedient world, the other is engrossed with personal wants; the one rises to such a lofty, ideal height, the other is dragged down to the lowest animal wants. And yet this apparent bathos is apparent only, and the fact that so narrow and earthly a petition has its place in the pattern of all prayer is full of instruction. No less instructive is the place which it has. A single word about that place may constitute a fitting introduction to our remarks now. We have already seen how the former petitions constitute together a great whole. That first part of the prayer expresses the desires which should ever be foremost in a good man's soul -- those which have to do with God, and point to the advancement of His glory. It begins, as I said, with the inward, and advances to the outward, as must ever be the law of progress in the sanctifying of human souls and life. It begins with heaven and brings heaven down to earth, that earth may become like heaven, and both 'according well may make one music.' Then, in the second part of the prayer we come to individual wants. These have their legitimate place in our approaches to God. Prayer is not merely communion with God, not merely reverent contemplation of His fatherly and holy name, though that should always be first and chiefest in it. It is not merely the expression of absorbed contemplation, but of a nature that desires and is dependent. Nor is it only the utterance of world-wide desires, and the expression of a being that has conquered self. The perfection of man is not to have no desires, or to be petrified or absorbed into a state without a will and without a wish, still less to be elevated into a condition of absolute possession of all he seeks, without a want. And the perfection of prayer is not that it should be the utterance of that impossible emotion, 'disinterested love' to God, but that it should be the recognition of our dependence on God, the expression of our many wants, and the frank telling Him, with wills submitted, or rather conformed, to His, what we need. To pray is to adore; to pray is also to ask. We have to say Our Father, and we have also to say, Give us, being sure that if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, much more does He know how to give good things to them that ask Him. So much for the general considerations applicable to the whole of this second part. As to the connection of its several petitions with each other, it may be noticed that it is the exact opposite of the former part. That began with the highest and came downwards; this begins with the lowest and goes upwards. That began with the inward and worked outwards; this begins with the outward and passes inwards. That set forth the heavenly order in its gradual self-revelation, working the transformation of earth; this sets forth the earthly order in its gradual appropriation of Heaven's gifts. The former declares, that foremost in importance and in God's order are the spiritual blessings which come from knowledge of His name; the latter, beginning with the prayer for bread, and thence advancing to deeper necessities, reminds us, that in the order of time the least important is still the condition of all the rest. The loftiest pinnacles looking out to the morning sky must have their foundations rooted in common earth. 'That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual.' This order, then, is in symmetrical opposition to that of the previous part. There is a rhythmical correspondence in

inverted movement, like the expansion and contraction of the heart, or the rise and fall of a fountain. It is worth noticing how these two opposed halves make one whole; and as the former begins with contemplation of the fatherly greatness in the heavens, so the latter part, starting with the cry for bread, climbs slowly up through all the ills of life, and passing from want to trespass, human unkindness and hatred, and again to personal weakness and a tempting world, and the evil of sin and the evil of sorrow, reaches once more after cries and tears the point from which all began, and rises to heaven and God. The doxology comes circling round to the invocation, and the prayer, which has winged its weary way through all weltering floods of human sorrow and want, comes back like Noah's dove, with peace born of its flight, to its home in God, and ends where it began. They whose prayer and whose lives start with 'Our Father which art in Heaven,' will end with the confidence and the praise, 'Thine is the kingdom and the honour.' Now looking at this petition in itself, I note -- I. The prayer for Bread. This contains first an important lesson as to what may be legitimately the subject of our prayers. The Lord by this juxtaposition condemns the overstrained and fantastic spiritualism which tramples down earthly wants and condemns desires rooted in our physical nature as sin. It is a wonderful testimony from Jesus of the worth of common gifts, that the desire for them should here stand beside that great one for the doing of God's will. There is nothing here of the false asceticism which undervalues the life which now is, nothing of the morbid tone of feeling which despises and condemns as sinful the due appreciation of and desire for the blessings of this life. To give predominance to material wants and earthly good is heathen and unchristian, therefore the petition for these follows the others. But to despise them and pretend to be indifferent to them is heathen and unchristian too; therefore the prayer for them finds its place among the others. So the right understanding of this prayer is a barrier against the opposite evils of a false sensuousness which forgets the spirit that is in the flesh, and of a false spirituality which forgets the flesh that is around the spirit. He who made us desire truth in the inward parts, made us also to desire our daily bread, and we observe His order when we do both, and seek the Kingdom of God, not exclusively, but first. And not only is this petition the vindication of a healthy naturalism, but it also shows us that we may rightly make prayers of our desires for earthly things. We sometimes hear it said that we have only a right to ask God for such gifts as holiness and conformity to His will. This has a truth, a great truth, in it. But it may be overstrained. We are to subdue our wishes, we are to be more anxious for our soul's health than for our bodily wants. We are to present our desires concerning all things in this life, with an implied 'if it be Thy will,' but while all that is true, we are also to ask Him for these lower blessings. Our prayers should include all which we desire, all which we need. Our desires should be such as we can turn into prayers. If we dare not ask God for a thing, do not let us seek for it. But whatever we do want, let us go to Him for it, and be sure that He does not wish lip homage and fine-sounding petitions for things for which we do not really care, but that He does desire that we should be frank with Him, making a prayer of every wish, and seeing that we have neither wishes which we dare not make prayers, nor prayers which are not really wishes. Let our supplications cover all the ground of our daily wants, and be true to our own souls. If any man lack anything, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men life and breath and all things.Then still further -- the prayer is the recognition of God as the Giver of daily bread.'Thou openest Thine hand,' says the old psalm, 'and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' There is no part of the divine dealings of which the Bible speaks more frequently and more lovingly than His supply of all creatures' wants. It is a grand thought, 'Who feedeth the young ravens when they cry, who maketh the grass to grow on the mountains. The eyes of all wait

upon Thee.' There is a magnificent verse in the 104th Psalm, which regards even the roar of the lion prowling for its prey in midnight forests as a cry to God -- 'The young lions seek their meat from God.' As Luther says somewhere in his rough prose -- 'Even to feed the sparrows God spends more than the revenues of the French king would buy.' And that universal bounty applies truly to those whose lot is 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.' For us it is true. God feeds us. 'Thou givest meat to them that fear Thee, Thou wilt ever be mindful of Thy covenant.' In giving us our daily bread, His hand is hid under second causes, but these should not mask the truth from us.God is the life of nature. His will is the power whose orderly working we call nature's laws. Force is the sign manual of God. There would be no harvest, no growth, unless to each seed God gave a body as it hath pleased Him. The existence of bread is the effect of His work. 'He hath not left Himself without witness in that He giveth rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' as Paul said to the rough farmer folk of Lycaonia.The distribution of the bread is of God.By second causes, our work and other means.Be it so. Here is a steam engine, in one room away at one end of your mill; here is a spindle whirring five hundred yards off. What then? Who thinks that that bit of belting moves the drum round which it turns, or that the cog-wheel that carries the motion originates it? The motion here has force at the other end, the effect here has its cause in God.The nourishment by bread is of God.'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'The reason why any natural substance has properties is by reason of present will of God; they reside not in itself, but in Him.All this we say that we believe when we pray this prayer.How much it conflicts with our modern habit of putting God as far away from daily life as we can!The prayer is the consecration of our work for bread.The indirect way by which it is answered is a great blessing, and it pledges us to labour.Orare est laborare. Not, as it is sometimes quoted, as if toil was to do instead of prayer, but that active life may be consecrated to God, and all our efforts which terminate in gaining bread for ourselves and for those we love may become prayer, and be offered to God.How can we pray for God to give us our daily bread, and then go to seek it by means which we dare not avow or defend in our prayers? Bless my cheating, bless my sharp practice, bless my half-heartedness. It is no part of my business to apply principles to details of conduct, but it is my business to say -- take this prayer for a test, and if you dare not pray it over what you do in earning your living, ask yourself whether you are not rather earning your death.Then the prayer is a pledge of thankful recognition of God in our blessings.Ah! dear friends, are we not all guilty in this? How utterly heathenish is our oblivion of God in our daily life! How far we have come from that temper which recognises Him in all joys, and begins every new day with Him! Daily mercies demand daily songs of praise. His love wakens us morning by morning. It follows us all the day long with its fatherly benefits. It reveals itself anew every time He spreads our table, every time He gives us teaching or joy. And our thanksgiving and consciousness of His presence should be as constant as are His gifts. 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning.' 'They walk all the day long in the light of Thy countenance.' 'I will both lay me down in peace and sleep.' 'They ate their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.' II. The union with our brethren in our prayer.'Give us.' The struggle for existence is represented by many as the very law of human life. The fight for bread is the great antagonist of brotherly regard for our fellows. Trade is said to be warfare; and then others starting from that conception that one man's gains are some other man's losses, proclaim with undoubted truth on these premises 'property is robbery.' But surely this clause of our prayer teaches us a more excellent way. We are not to be like stiff-necked men who fight with one another for the drop of brackish water caught in

the corner of a sail, but we are to be as children bowing down together before a great Father, all sitting at His table where nothing wants, and where even the pet dogs below it eat of the crumbs.The main thing is to note how our Lord teaches us here to identify ourselves with others, to make common cause with them in our petition for bread. He who rightly enters into the meaning of this prayer, and feels the unity which it supposes, can scarcely regard his possessions as given to himself alone, or to be held without regard to other people. We are all one in need; high and low, rich and poor, we all hang on God for the same supplies. We are all one in reception of His gifts. Is it becoming in one who is a member of such a whole, to clasp his portion in both his hands and carry it off to a corner where he gnaws it by himself? That is how wolves feast, with one foot on their bone and a watchful eye all round for thieves, not how men, brethren, should feast.I am not here to deal with economical questions, or to apply principles to details, but surely one may say that this petition contemplates as possible a better state of things than 'each for himself,' whether God is for us all or no, and that it does teach that at all events a man is part of a whole which has a claim on his possessions. 'Neither said any man that aught which he possessed was his own.'The Christian doctrine of property does not seem to be communism. You have your property. It is your own. You have the power, and as far as law is concerned, the right, to do with it none but selfish acts. You have it, but you are not an owner -- only a steward. You have it, but you hold it not for your own sake, but as a trustee. You have it as a member of a family, a great community. You have it that you may dispense to others, you have it that you may help to multiply the bonds of affection to benefactors and of love to the great Giver.And this liberality is founded, according to this petition, in our common relation to God. We do not want charity -- we want justice. The needy cannot enforce their claims, but their cry enters into the ears of the Lord, and what is withheld from them is 'kept back by fraud.' The Bible always puts benevolence and liberality on the ground of their being a debt. 'Withhold not good from him to whom it is due.'So how, beside this prayer, does it look to see two men who have united in it, the one being Dives clothed and faring sumptuously, and the other Lazarus with scraps for his food and dogs for his doctors? There is many a contrast like that to-day. All I have to say is -- that such contrasts are not meant as the product of Christianity and civilisation and commerce for eighteen hundred years, and that one chief way of ending them is that we shall learn to feel and live the true communism which traces all a man's possessions to God, and feels that he has received them as a member of a community for the blessing of all, even as Christ taught when He bid us say, 'Give us our daily bread.'III. The prayer for bread for to-day.This carries with it precious truths as to the manner of the divine gifts and the limit of our cares and anxieties.God gives not all at once, but continuously, and in portions sufficient for the day.As with the manna fresh gathered every morning, so all our gifts from Him are given according to the present exigencies.Note the beauty and blessedness of this method of supplying our wants. It gives to each moment its own special character, it gives to each the glory of having in it a fresh gift of God. It binds all together in one long line of brightness made up of an infinite number of points, each a separate act of divine love, each a glittering sign of His presence. It brings God very near to all life. It draws us closer to Him, by giving us at each moment opportunity and need for feeling our dependence upon Him, by bringing us once again to His throne that our wants may be supplied. And as each moment, so each day, comes with its new duties and its new wants. Yesterday's food nourishes us not to-day. To-day's strength must come from this day's God and His new supplies. And thus the monotony of life is somewhat broken, and there come to us all the fresh vigour and the new hope of each returning day, and the merciful wall

of the night's slumber is built up between us and yesterday with its tasks and its weariness. And fresh elastic hopes, along with renewed dependence on God, should waken us morning by morning, as we look into the unknown hours and say, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Then, again, let us learn not to try to abrogate this wise ordinance by onward-looking anxieties. We have to exercise forethought, and not to possess it is to be a poor creature, below the ant and the bee. No man is in a favourable position for intellectual or moral growth who has not some certainty in his life, and a reasonable prospect of such perpetuity as is compatible with this changeful state. But that is a very different thing from the careful, anxious forebodings in which we are all so prone to indulge. These are profitless and harmful, robbing us of strength and contributing nothing to our wisdom or to our security. They are contrary to this law of the divine dealings that we shall get our rations as we need them, no sooner; that the path will be opened when we come to it, not till then. God knows the line of march, and will issue our route each morning. God looks after the commissariat and saves us the trouble of carrying it.Let us try not to be 'over-inquisitive to cast the fashion of uncertain evils,' nor magnify trouble in the fog of our own thoughts, but limit our cares to to-day, and let to-morrow alone, for our God will be in it as He has been in the past. He will never take us where He will not go with us. Each day will have its own brightness, as each place its own rainbow. If we are led into dry lands, there will be a fountain opened in the desert, and He will feed us by His ravens ere we shall want. Bread shall be given and water made sure. To-morrow shall be as this day. Then let the veil still hang, nor try to lift it with the hand of forecasting thought, nor be over-careful to make the future sure by earthly means, but let present blessings be parents of bright hopes. Remember Him who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. In Him the past is unwept for and the future sure. Accept the merciful limitations on His gifts, and let them be the limitations which you set to your own desires while you pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.'IV. The prayer for bread suited to our needs.'Daily bread' clearly cannot be the right rendering, for after 'this day' that would be weak repetition.The word is difficult, for it only occurs here and there in Luke.It may be rendered 'for the coming (day),' but that can scarcely be supposed to be our Lord's meaning, when His precept to take no thought for the morrow is remembered. A more satisfactory rendering is, 'sufficient for our subsistence,' the bread which we need to sustain us.Such a petition points to desires limited by our necessities. What we should wish, and what we have a right to ask from God, is what we need -- no more and no less.This does not reduce us all to one level, but leaves Him to settle what we do want. How different this prayer in the mouth of a king and of a pauper! But it does rebuke immoderate and unbridled desires. God does not limit us to mere naked necessaries -- He giveth liberally, and means life to be beautiful and adorned. That which is over and above bread is to a large extent that which makes life graceful and refined, and I have no wish to preach a crusade against it; but I have just as little hesitation in declaring what it is not left to pulpit moralists to say, that the falsely luxurious style of living among us looks very strange by the side of this petition. So much luxury which does not mean refinement; so much ostentatious expenditure which does not represent increased culture or pleasure or anything but a resolve to be on a level with somebody else; so much which is so ludicrously unlike the poor little shrimp of a man or woman that sits in the centre of it all!'Plain living and high thinking are no more.''My riches consist not in the abundance of my possessions, but in the fewness of my wants.''The less a man needs, the nearer is he to the gods.'So, what a lesson for us all in this age, where everyone of us is tempted to adopt a scale of what is necessary very far beyond the truth.Young and old -- dare, if need be, to be poor. 'Having food and raiment, let us therewith be

content.'We cannot all become rich, but let us learn to bring down our desires to, and bound them by, our true wants.Christ has taught us here to put this petition after these loftier ones, and He has taught us to pass quickly by it to the more noble and higher needs of the soul. Do we treat it thus, making it a secondary element in our wishes? If so, then our days will be blessed, each filled with fresh gifts from God, and each leading us to Him who is the true Bread that came down from Heaven.

Chapter 87

'FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS'

'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.' -- MATT. vi.12. The sequence of the petitions in the second half of the Lord's Prayer suggests that every man who needs to pray for daily bread needs also to pray for daily forgiveness. The supplication for the supply of our bodily needs precedes the others, because it deals with a need which is fundamental indeed, but of less importance than those which prompt the subsequent petitions. God made us to need bread, we have made ourselves to need pardon. The answer to the later petition is as certain as that to the earlier. He who gives meat will not withhold forgiveness. Give and forgive refer to our deepest wants, but how many who feel the one are all unconscious of the other! I. The consciousness of sin, of which this petition is the expression. 'Debt' and 'duty' are one word. 'Owe' and 'ought' are one word. Duty is what is due. Ought is what we owe -- to some one or other. We are under obligations all round, which conscience tells us that we have not fulfilled. The unfulfilled obligation or duty becomes a debt. We divide our obligations into duties to God, our neighbours, and ourselves; but the division is superficial, for whatever we owe to ourselves or to men, we owe also to God, and the non-fulfilment of our obligations to Him is sin. 'No man liveth to himself, ... we live unto God.' Our consciences accuse us of undone duties to ourselves, the indulgence of evil tempers, a slack hand over ourselves, a careless husbandry which leaves furrows full of weeds, failure to bend the bow to the uttermost, to keep the mirror bright. It accuses us of undone duties to our neighbours, unkindness, neglect of opportunities of service, and many another ugly fault. Duties undone are debts not only to ourselves or to our fellows, but to God. The great Over-lord reckons offences against His vassals as crimes against Himself. That graver aspect of our faults as being sins may seem a gloomy thought, but it is really one full of blessing, for it lodges the true power of remission of our burdensome debts in the hands of the one true creditor, whom the prayer has taught us to call 'Our Father.' That consciousness of sin should be as universal as the sense of bodily hunger; but, alas! it is too often dormant. It is especially needful to try to awake it in this generation, when the natural tendency of the heart to ignore it is strengthened by talk of heredity and environment, and by the disposition to think of sin with pity rather than reprobation. Men are apt to regard a consciousness of sin as morbid. They will acknowledge failure or imperfection, but there is little realisation of sin, and therefore little sense of the need for a deliverer. If men are ever to be brought to a saving grip of Jesus Christ, they must have learned a far more heart-piercing consciousness of their sin than this morally relaxed age possesses. II. The cry to which that consciousness gives voice. We often ask for forgiveness; have we any definite notion of what we are asking for? When we forgive one another, he who forgives puts away alienation of heart, every cloud of suspicion from his mind, and his feeling and his conduct are as if there had never been a jar or an offence, or are more tender and loving because of the offence that is now forgiven. He who is forgiven has, on his part, a deeper shame for the offence, which looks far darker now, when it is blotted out, than it did before forgiveness. Both are eager to show love, not in order to erase the past, but because the past is erased. When a father forgives his child, does that merely or chiefly mean that he spares the rod; or does it not much rather mean that he lets his love flow out to the little culprit, undammed back by the child's fault? And when God

forgives He does so, not so much as a judge but rather as the Father. It is the father's heart that the child craves when it cries for pardon. The remission of punishment is an element, but by no means the chief element, in man's forgiveness, and that is still more true as to God's. There are present, and for the most part outward, consequences of a forgiven man's sin which are not averted by forgiveness, and which it is for his good that he should not escape. But when the assurance of God's unhindered love rests on a pardoned soul, those consequences of its sins which it has to reap cease to be penal and become educative, cease to be the expressions only of God's hatred of evil, and become expressions of His love to the forgiven evil-doer. 'I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men ... but My mercy shall not depart from him.' III. The startling addition to the cry. 'As we forgive.' Is, then, our poor forgiveness the measure or condition of God's? At first sight that addition seems to impose a limit on His pardon which might well plunge us into despair. But reflection on the words brings to light more comforting, though solemnly warning, thoughts. We learn that our human forgiveness is the faint reflection of the light of His. We have a right to infer His gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness from the existence of such gracious qualities in ourselves. God is all that is good in men. 'Whatsoever things are reverend, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are lovely -- all these are in Him, and all as they are seen in men are from Him. 'He that formed the eye, shall not He see?' We forgive, and will not He?In a very real sense our forgiving is the condition of our being forgiven. We are accustomed to hear that faith and repentance are conditions of receiving the divine forgiveness. But the very same disposition which, when directed to God, produces faith and repentance, when directed to men, produces a forgiving temper. A deep sense of my own unworthiness, and of having no ground of right to stand on, will surely lead me to be lenient and placable to others. We cannot cut our lives into halves, and be inwardly filled with contrition, and outwardly full of assertion of our rights. We cannot plead with God to do for us what we will not do for others. Our prayer for forgiveness must, if it is real, influence our whole behaviour; and if it is not real, it will not be answered.The possession of God's forgiveness will make us forgiving. 'Forgiving one another, even as also God in Christ hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children.'Our continuous possession and conscious enjoyment of God's forgiveness will be contingent on our forgivingness. He who took his fellow-servant by the throat and half choked him in his determination to exact the last farthing of his debt was, by the act, cancelling his own discharge and piling up a mountain of debt, against himself. Our consciousness of forgiveness will be most clear and satisfying when we are forgiving those who trespass against us. We shall pardon most spontaneously and fully when our hearts are warm with the beams of God's pardon.

Chapter 88

'LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION'

'And lead us not into temptation.' -- MATT. vi.13. The petition of the previous clause has to do with the past, this with the future; the one is the confession of sin, the other the supplication which comes from the consciousness of weakness. The best man needs both. Forgiveness does not break the bonds of evil by which we are held. But forgiveness increases our consciousness of weakness, and in the new desire which comes from it to walk in holiness, we are first rightly aware of the strength and frequency of inducements to sin. A man may by mere natural conscience know something of what temptation is, but only he understands its strength who resists it. The sense of forgiveness and the new desires and love thereby developed, lead to the falling of the mask from the deceitful forms that gleam around us. He who is forgiven has his eyesight purged, and can see that these are not what they seem, but demons that lure us to our destruction. It is true that the sign of the Cross compels the foul thing to appear in its own true form. 'Then started up in his own shape the fiend.' The love which comes from forgiveness and the new sympathies which it engenders are the Ithuriel's spear. What a wonderful change passes upon the siren tempters when we believe that Christ has pardoned us, and have learned to love Him! Then the fishtail is seen below the sunlit waters. Forgiveness is one of the chief means of teaching us our sin. The removal of all dread of personal consequences, which it effects, leaves us free to contemplate with calmed hearts the moral character of our actions. The revelation of God's love which is made in forgiveness quickens our consciences as well as purges them, and our standard of purity is raised. The effort to live rightly, which is the sure result of God's love believed, first teaches us thoroughly how wrong we are. We know the strength of the current when we try to pull against it. Looking to God as our Father, our blackness shows blacker against the radiant purity of His white light. Forgiveness does not at once and wholly annihilate the tendency to transgress. True, the belief that God has forgiven supplies the strongest motives for holiness, and the new life which comes to every man who so believes will by degrees conquer all the lingering garrisons of the Philistines which hold scattered strong-posts in the land. But though this be so, still the purifying process is a slow and gradual one, and evil may be forced out of the heart while yet it is in the blood. The central will may be cleansed while yet habits continue to be strong, and the power of resistance, new-born as it is, may be weak in act though omnipotent in nature. All sin leaves some tendency to recurrence. The path which one avalanche has hollowed lies ready for another. It is true, on the one side, that no purity is so bright and no obedience so steadfast as that of the man who has been cleansed and reclaimed from rebellion. But it is also true that, on the road to that ultimate purity, a pardoned man has to struggle daily with the bitter relics of his old self, to wage war against evils the force of which he never knew till he tried to resist them, against sins which were all sleek, and velvety, and purring, as long as he fondled and stroked them, but which flash out sharp claws when he would fling them from their dens in his heart. Forgiveness does not at once conquer sin, and forgiveness leads to deeper consciousness of sin. Hence the order of petitions here. Following on the prayer for pardon, comes that for shelter from and in temptation which arises from deep consciousness of our own weakness and liability to fall. Temptation has two parts in it -- the circumstances which lead to sin, the desire which is addressed by them. There must be

tinder as well as spark, if there is to be flame. Fire falling on water or upon bare rock will kindle nothing. God sends the one, we make the other. The Prayer: -- I. Expresses our recognition of God as ordering all circumstances. There is the general faith that His Providence orders our lot, and the specific that God orders and brings about temptations. To tempt is to present inducements to sin, but a secondary significance is to do so maliciously, and with desire that we should fall. It is in this secondary sense that James denies that God tempts any man. We tempt ourselves, or evil tempts us. But God does tempt in so far as He presents outward circumstances which become occasions of falling or of standing, as we take them. He sends temptations, He sends trials, and the two only differ in name, and in what is implied in the word, of the disposition of the sender. Christ was led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted. If God does not in malice tempt, still He does in mercy try. God sends trials; we make them temptations. II. Implies that our chiefest wish is holiness, our greatest dread sin. This is the only negative petition.What would be our deprecatory prayers? Lead us not into sorrow, loss, poverty, disease, death?How we fill our prayers with womanish shriekings and fears!This petition can come only from a man whose will is resigned and fixed on God. One thing he fears, and that is to sin.The one thing to be desired is not outward well-being, but inward character.Think of our lives: what do we dread most?III. Expresses our self-distrust.It is from consciousness of our weakness that we pray thus. The language at first sight seems to breathe only a wish to be exempt from temptation. If that were its meaning, it were contrary to Christ's teaching and to the whole tenor of Scripture. But such a wish is included in it, and corresponds to one tone of mind, and to what ought always to be our feeling. We rightly shrink from temptation because we know our own weakness. That is the only allowable ground; if we do it from indolence, or dread of trouble, we are wrong. If flesh shrinks from pain, we are 'carnal and walk as men.' If we desire simply to have a smooth path, then we have yet to learn what our Master meant when He said, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation.' His servants should 'count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations.'But if we rightly understand our own weakness, we shall dread to meet the enemy, because we know how often circumstances make all the difference between saint and sinner.IV. Expresses our reliance on God if temptation comes.I take to be 'tempted' as being presentation of inducement to sin. I take to 'enter into temptation' as the further step of consenting to it.Perhaps there may be hovering in the words of the petition a half-conscious allusion to a captive being led into a prison.What we should chiefly desire is that God would lead us not into, but through and out of, temptation. To pray simply for exemption from trial is -- 1. To ask what is impossible.All scenes of life, all stages, both sexes, all relations, all professions, are and ever will be full of inducements to sin.Whether any given circumstance will tempt you or not depends on what you are. If there is nothing adhesive on you, it will not stick.2. To ask what would not be for our good.Effect of conquered temptation on the Christian life.Effect on character. The old belief that the strength of a slain enemy passed into his slayer is true in regard to a Christian's overcome temptations.Effect on grasp of truth.Effect on consciousness of relation to God.Effect on Future.So then we ought to desire not so much exemption from temptation, as strength in it.And He will always be at our side to grant us this.We should seek not freedom from furnace, but His presence in it; not to be guided away from the dark valley, but through it. His prayer is our model; His life is our pattern, who was tempted 'though He were the Son'; His strength is our hope. He is 'able to succour them that are tempted.'We identify ourselves in such a prayer with all who have sinned, and knowing that we are men of like passions, and that we may fall like them, we cry 'lead us not.'He who offers this prayer from such motives will best

and most willingly meet temptation when it comes. The soldier who goes into the field with careful circumspection, knowing the enemy's strength and his own weakness, is the most likely to conquer. It is the presumptuous men, confident in their own strength, who are sure to get beaten.

Chapter 89

'DELIVER US FROM EVIL'

'But deliver us from evil.' -- MATT. vi.13. The two halves of this prayer are like a calm sky with stars shining silently in its steadfast blue, and a troubled earth beneath, where storms sweep, and changes come, and tears are ever being shed. The one is so tranquil, the other so full of woe and want. What a dark picture of human conditions lies beneath the petitions of this second half! Hunger and sin and temptation, and wider still, that tragic word which includes them all -- evil. Forgiveness and defence and deliverance -- what sorrows these presuppose! Each step of these latter supplications seems to carry us deeper into the shadow and the darkness, each to present a darker aspect of what human life really is; and now that we have reached the last, we have an all-comprehensive cry which holds within its meaning every ill that flesh is heir to. But seeing that we have to do with a prayer, we have also to do with a prophecy. We know that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us, and therefore the sadder the want which is expressed, the fuller of hope is the prayer. This petition gives a dark picture of human wants, but whatsoever thing we pray about or against, we thereby profess to believe to be contrary to God's will, and to be certain of removal by Him; and when our Lord commanded us to say 'Our Father, ... deliver us from evil,' He gave us the lively hope that all which is included in that terribly wide word should be swept away, and that He would break every yoke and let His oppressed go free. The whole sum of human sorrow is gathered into one petition, that we may all feel that every item of it is capable of attenuation and extinction; and so our prayer, in the very clause which seems to sound the lowest depth, really rises to the loftiest height, and the words which sound likest a wail over all the misery that is done under the sun, have in them the notes of triumph. 'The sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest thought.' The most jubilant and confident prayer is that which feels most keenly the burden of evil, and 'falling with its weight of sins 'upon the great world's altar-stairs,' cries to God for deliverance. Consider, then: -- I. The width of this petition. What is evil? Well, we leave God to decide what it is, but also we have no reason that I can see for limiting the impressive width of the word. It is a profound insight into the nature of evil which, in our own language and in other tongues, uses one word to express both what we call sin, and what we call sorrow. And I know not why we should suppose that our Lord does not include both of these here. There is what we call physical evil, pain, sorrow, meaning thereby whatever wars against our well-being and happiness. There is what we call moral evil, sin, meaning thereby whatever wars against our purity. Both are evil. Men's consciences tell them so of the one. Men's sensibilities tell them so of the other. You cannot sophisticate a man into believing that he is not suffering when his flesh is racked or his heart wounded. It is evil to be in pain. It is evil to carry a heavy heart. It is evil to be stripped of what we have long been accustomed to lean upon. It is evil to be crushed down by loss and want. It is evil to stand by the black hole that swallows the coffin that holds the light of our eyes. It is evil to have the arrows of calumny or hate sticking in our quivering spirits. It is evil to be battered with the shocks of change and doom in the world, to have to toil at ungrateful tasks beyond our strength. The life which turns the child's rounded features into the thin face lined and wrinkled, and the child's elastic run into the slow, heavy tread, is after all a life which in its outward aspects is a life of evil. And many a man who has had little sympathy with what seem to him the

hazy platitudes of the rest of the prayer, learns to pray this clause, and is always ready to pray it. For we may be sure of this, that they who make the world their all are they who feel its evils most keenly. From how many lips unused to prayer are cries every hour going up in this sorrowful world which really mean, 'deliver us from evil'! But it is not only these external evils which the prayer includes. It means every kind of sin, all dominion of what is contrary to God's will. And the petition is 'deliver,' pull us out, drag us from. It is a cry for the entire emancipation or utter extinction of evil in its effect upon us. So this petition in its clear recognition of evil sets forth man's condition distinctly, and is opposed to that false stoicism which tries to argue men out of their senses, and convince them that the fire which burns them is only a painted fire. Christianity has nothing in common with that insensibility to suffering which it is sometimes supposed to teach. Christ wept, and bade the daughters of Jerusalem weep also.Christianity has deep words to say about evil and pain as being salutary and for our good, and about submission to God's will as being better than wild wishes to be delivered now and at once from all pain and sorrow. But it begins with full admission that evil is evil, and all its teachings presuppose that. Job was tormented by the well-meaning platitudes of his friends, who lifted up their hands in holy horror that he did not lie on his dunghill, as if it had been a bed of roses; and Job, who felt all the sorrow of his losses and ground out many a wrong saying between his teeth, was justified because he had held by the truth that his senses taught him, that pain was bitter and bad, and by the other which his faith taught him, that God must be good. He could not reconcile them. We can in part; but our Lord has taught us in this prayer that it is not to be done by denying or sophisticating facts. Then let us use this prayer in all its breadth, and feel that it covers all which makes our hearts heavy, and all which makes our consciences sore.'From all evil and mischief -- plague, pestilence, and famine, as well as envy, hatred, and hypocrisy -- from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil, -- Good Lord, deliver us.' 'In all time of our tribulation; in all time of our wealth, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, -- Good Lord, deliver us.'II. The unity and source of the evil.The singular number suggests that all evil, multiform as it seems, is at bottom one. It is a great weltering coil, but wilderness and tangle as it appears, there is a tap root from which it all comes, like a close-clinging mass of ivy which is choking the life out of an elm-tree. If that root were grubbed up, all would fall. It is like some huge sea monster 'floating many a rood,' but there is only one life in it. The hydra has a hundred heads, but one heart. And the place in the prayer in which this clause comes suggests what that is -- sin.That place implies that all human sorrows and sufferings are consequences of human evil. And that is true inasmuch as many of them are distinctly and naturally its results. Disease is often the result of dissipation, poverty of indolence, friendlessness of selfishness. How many of the miseries of our great cities, how many of the miseries of nations, result from criminal neglect and injustice! 'Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.' Ah! if all men were saying from the heart, 'Thy will be done,' how many of their griefs would be at an end! And it is true that sorrows are the consequences of sin inasmuch as suffering has been introduced by God into the world because of sin. He has been forced by our rebellion to use judgments, and that to bring us back.And it is true that sorrows are the consequences of sin inasmuch as the sting is taken out of them when our sins are forgiven and we love God. Then they so change their characters as scarcely to deserve to be called by their old name, and the paradox, 'sorrowful yet always rejoicing,' becomes a sober fact of experience.III. The divine opposition to evil.This prayer implies that all evil is contrary to His will. The one kind is so, absolutely and always. The other is a method to which He has had recourse, but not that which, if things had gone

right, He would have adopted.So this prayer breathes confidence that God will overcome both kinds.How much there is to make us believe that evil is eternal.How apt we are to fall into despair, to lose heart for ourselves and our fellows; to say that it has always been so, and it always will be so.For all social reformers here is encouragement.For ourselves, when we seem to do so little in setting ourselves right, here is confidence.But it must be God who conquers the world's evil.Our most potent weapon in the struggle with our own and the world's evil is the earnest offering of this petition.Think of the failure of godless schemes; how often we have been on the verge of political and other millenniums.Only the God, who cures sin, can cure the world's ills.We are not to substitute praying for working. God may answer our prayer by setting us to work.Remember that you pledge yourselves to work for your fellows by that Us, and to try to reduce, were it by ever so little, the sum of human misery.IV. The manner of God's deliverance from evil. God delivers us by Christ, that is the sum of all.He delivers us from sin by His answers to the previous petitions.He delivers us from suffering by teaching us how to bear it, and by showing us the meaning of it. The evil in evil is taken away. There shines a brightness round about the devouring fire (Ezek. i.4). 'All things work together for good.' Finally, He delivers by taking us to Himself.This prayer goes beyond present experience. It is the yearning for full redemption. It is the last which is answered. But there lies in it a not indistinct prophecy of that great and blessed time when we shall be like Him, and delivered from all evil.For ourselves and for the world it carries the assurance that neither sorrow nor sin shall be permitted to deform for ever the face of this fair creation; but that the day comes when God's name being everywhere hallowed, and His will done on earth, and His kingdom set up, and all our wants supplied, and all our sins forgiven, and all temptations taken out of the way, evil of every kind shall be scourged out of God's universe, and 'the ransomed of the Lord shall return with joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'Then shall this mighty prayer be answered, the prayer of God's children in all ages, the prayer which He offers before the Throne who on earth prayed, 'Not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil'; the prayer which the white-robed souls offer when they cry, 'How long, O Lord, how long?' the prayer which, all unconsciously, the sobs, and cries, and sorrows of six thousand years have been offering; the prayer which is every hour being answered in hourly mercies, and multitudes of forgivenesses and gracious guiding; the prayer which has been steadily tending towards its fulfilment, through all the ages during which God's name has been growing in men's love, and His will more and more obeyed, and His kingdom more and more fully come; the prayer which will be at last completely realised when all His children shall stand before His Throne happy and good, and the noise of earth's evil shall sound only in the ear of memory, like the murmur of some far-off sea heard from the sacred mountain, or the remembrance of the tempest when all the winds are still.If our prayer is, 'Deliver us from evil,' our life's experience will be that 'He delivered us from so great a death and will deliver,' our dying word will be thanksgiving to 'the angel who delivered us from all evil,' and our death will bring the full deliverance for which while here we pray, and admit us into that region of unmingled good and blessing and purity, whose distant brightness we, tossing on the unquiet sea, behold from afar and long to possess. 'After this manner pray ye,' and to you the promise will be blessedly fulfilled, 'Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him. I will set him on high, because he hath known My name' (Ps. xci.14).

Chapter 90

'THINE IS THE KINGDOM'

'Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.' MATT. vi.13. There is no reason to suppose that this doxology was spoken by Christ. It does not occur in any of the oldest and most authoritative manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel. It does not seem to have been known to the earliest Christian writers. Long association has for us intertwined the words inextricably with our Lord's Prayer, and it is a wound to reverential feeling to strike out what so many generations have used in their common supplications. No doubt this doxology is appropriate as a conclusion, and serves to give an aspect of completeness. It sounds cold and cheerless to end our prayer with 'evil.' But the question is not one of feeling or of our notions of fitness, but purely one of criticism, and the only evidence which has any right to be heard in settling the text of the New Testament is dead against this clause. If we regard that evidence, we are obliged to say that the doxology has no business here. How it stands here is a question which may be answered satisfactorily. When the Lord's Prayer came to be used in public worship, it was natural to append to it a doxology, just as in chanting the psalms it became the habit to repeat at the end of each the Gloria. This doxology, originally written on the margin of the gospel, would gradually creep into the text, and once there, was naturally retained. It does not follow that, because Christ did not speak it, we ought not to use it. It should not be in the Bible, but it may well be in our prayers. If we think that our Lord gave us a pattern rather than a form, we are quite justified in extending that pattern by any additions which harmonise with its spirit. If we think He gave us a form to be repeated verbatim, then we ought not to add to it this doxology. At first sight it seems as if the prayer without it were incomplete. It contains loving desires, lowly dependence, humble penitence, earnest wishes for cleansing, but there appears none of that rapturous praise which is also an element in all true devotion. And this may have been one reason for the addition of the doxology. But I think that that absence of praise and joy is only apparent; the first clause of the prayer expresses the highest form of both. The doxology, if you will think of it, adds nothing to the contemplation of the divine character which the prayer has already taught us. It is only a repetition at the close of what we had at the beginning, and its conception, lofty and grand as it is, falls beneath that of 'Our Father.' We might almost say that the doxology is incongruous with the prayer as presenting a less blessed, spiritual, distinctively Christian thought of God. That would be going too far, but I cannot but feel a certain change in tone, a dropping from the loftiest elevation down to the celebration of the lower aspects of the divine. 'Kingdom, power, and glory' are grand, but they do not reach the height of ascription of praise which sounds in the very first words of the prayer. Properly speaking, too, this doxology is not a part of the prayer. It expresses two things: the devout contemplation of God which the whole course of the petitions has excited in the soul -- and in that aspect it is the Church's echo to the Lord's Prayer; and the confidence with which we pray -- and in that aspect it is rather the utterance of meditative reflection asking of itself its reasons for hope and stirring itself up to lay hold on God. Notice, then -- I. The meaning of the doxology. Kingdom, power, and glory correspond to kingdom, will, and hallowing in the first part. The order is not the same, but it is still substantially identical. 'Thine the kingdom.' All earthly things, the whole fates of men here, are ruled by Him. The prayer asked that it might be so; here we declare that it is so already, not, of

course, in the deepest sense, but that even now and here He rules with authority. 'Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,' and this conviction is inseparable from our Christianity. How hard it is to believe it at all times, from what we see around us! The temptation is to think that the kingdom is men's, or belongs to blind fate, or chance, and our own evil hearts ever suggest that the kingdom is our own. Satan said, 'All is mine, and I will give it Thee.' The affairs of the world seem so far from God, we are so tempted to believe that He is remote from it, that nations and their rulers and the field of politics are void of Him. We see craft and force and villainy ruling, we see kingdoms far from any perception that society is for man and from God. We see Dei gratia on our coins, and 'by the grace of the Devil' for real motto. We see long tracks of godless crime and mean intrigue, and here and there a divine gleam falling from some heroic deed of sacrifice. We see king and priest playing into each other's hands, and the people destroyed, whatever be the feud. But we are to believe that the world is the kingdom of God; to learn whence comes all human rule, and to be sure that even here and now 'Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.' 'Thine the Power.' Not merely has He authority over, but He works indeed through all -- the whole world and all creatures are the field of the ever present energy of God. That is a simple truth, deep but clear, that all power comes from Him. He is the cause of all changes, physical and all other. Force is the garment of the present God, and among men all power is from Him. His will is the creative word. 'Thine the Glory.' God's glory is the praise which comes from the accomplishment of His purpose and will. This is the end of all Creation and Manifestation. The thought of Scripture is that all things are for the greater glory of God. It may be a most cold-blooded and cruel doctrine, or it may be a most blessed one. All depends on what is our conception of the character of the God whose self-revelation is His glory.An almighty Devil is the God of many people. But we have learned to say 'Our Father,' and hence this thought is blessed. Unless we had so learned, the thought that His end was His glory would make Him a selfish tyrant. But since we know Him to be our Father, we know that His Glory is the revelation of His Love, His Fatherhood; that when we say that He does all things for His own glory, we say that He does all things that men may know His character as it is, and 'to know Him is life eternal.''Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory': whatsoever we may have lost and suffered in the past; whatsoever fiery baptism and strife of arms or of principles we may yet have to go through; whatsoever shocks of loss and sorrow may strike upon our own hearts; whatsoever untraversed seas our nation or our race may have to embark upon, One abides, the same One remains ours and is ever with us. We may have to face storm and cloud, and 'neither sun nor stars may appear'; we may have to fling out the best anchors we can find, if haply they may hold on anything, and may wearily 'wish for the day.' But 'the Lord sitteth upon the flood,' and in the thickest of the night, when we lift our wearied eyes, we shall see Him coming to us across the storm, and the surges smoothing themselves to rest for His pavement, and the waves subside into their caves at His voice.'Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory.' Then the world and we shall be guided right and kept safe, and whatsoever is true and good shall rule, and the weak cause shall be the conquering, and all false fame shall fade like morning mist, and every honest desire and effort for man's blessedness shall have eternal honour. God is King; God is mighty; God's name shall have glory; then for us there is Hope invincible in spite of all evil. Courage to stand by His truth and His will, endless patience and endless charity, are our fitting robes, the livery of our King. Because He is our Father, He will deliver us and our brethren from all evil, and by His all-powerful Love will found His universal kingdom and get the glory due unto His name, the glory of loving and being loved by all His children.II. The force of the doxology in its place here.It

reminds us that the ground of our confidence is in God's own character. We do not need to make ourselves worthy to receive. We cannot move Him, but He is self-moved, and so we do not need to be afraid. Nor is our prayer to be an attempt to bend His will.Our confidence digs deep down to build on the rock of the ever-living God, whose 'is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.' We flee to Him for a refuge against ourselves. We bring nothing. We look to His own character, which will always be the same, and to His past, which is the type and prophecy for all His future. He is His own reason, His own motive, His own end.When we ground our prayers on Him, then we touch ground, and in whatever weltering sea of trouble we may be buffeted, we have found the bottom and can stand firm.But the 'Amen' which closes the doxology is not the empty form which it has now become. It means not only, So may it be! but also, So will it be! It is not only the last breathing of desire, but also the expression of assured expectancy and confidence; not merely be it so, but confident expression of assurance that it will be so.How much of our prayer flies off into empty air because there is no expectation in it! How much which has no certainty of being answered in it! How much which is followed by no marking of the future to discern the answer! We should stand praying like some Grecian statue of an archer, with hand extended and lips parted and eye following the arrow of our prayer on its flight till it touches the mark. We have a right to be confident that we shall be heard. We should apply the Amen to all the petitions of the prayer. So it becomes a prophecy, and the Christian man is to live in the calm expectation that all the petitions will be accomplished. For the world they will be, for us they may be. It is for each of us to decide for ourselves whether they will be answered in and for us.The place of the doxology here suggests that all prayer should lead to thankful contemplation of God's character.We have seen how the prayer begins with contemplation, and then passes into supplication. Thus all prayer should end as it began. It has a circular motion, and starting from the highest heavens and coming down to earth, is thither drawn again and rests at the throne of God, whence it set out, like the strong Spirits before His throne who veil their faces while they gaze upon the glory, and then fly forth to help human sorrows and satisfy human hearts, and then on unwearied pinions winging their way to their first station, meekly sink their wings of flight, and veil their faces again with their wings. The rivers that flow through broad lands, bringing blessing and doing humble service in drinking-cup and domestic vessel, came in soft rain from heaven, and though their bright waves are browned with soil and made opaque with many a stain, yet their work done, they rest in the great ocean, and thence are drawn up once more to the clouds of heaven. So with our prayers; they ought to start from the contemplation of our God, and they ought to return thither again. And as this is the last word of our prayers, so may we not say that it represents the perpetual form of fellowship with God? Prayers for bread, and pardon, and help, and deliverance, are for the wilderness. Prayers for the hallowing of His name, and the coming of His kingdom, and the doing of His will, are out of date when they are fulfilled; but for ever this voice shall rise before His throne, and that last new song, which shall ring with might as of thunder and sweetness as of many harps from the thousand times ten thousand, shall be but the expansion and the deepening of the praise of earth. Then 'every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea, shall be heard saying, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."'So we finish these meditations. I have felt all along how poorly my words served me to say even what I saw, and how poorly my vision saw into the clear depths of the divine prayer. But I hope that they may have helped you half as much as they have myself, to feel more strongly how all-comprehensive it is. I said at the beginning, and

I repeat with more emphasis now, that there is everything in this prayer -- God's relations to man, man's to God and his fellows, the foundation stones of Christian theology, of Christian morals, of Christian society, of Christian politics. There is help for the smallest wants and light for daily duties; there is strength for the hour of death and the day of judgment. There is the revelation of the timeless depths of our Father's heart; there is the prophecy of the furthest future for ourselves and our brethren. No man can exhaust it. Every age may find in its simple syllables lessons for their new perplexities and duties. It will not be outgrown in heaven. But, thank God, we do not need to exhaust its meaning in order to use it aright. Jesus interprets our prayers, and many a dumb yearning, and many a broken sob, and many a passionate fragment of a cry, and many an ignorant desire that may appear to us very unlike His pattern for all ages, will be accepted by Him. He inspires, presents and answers every prayer offered through Him to the Father in heaven. He counts the poorest prayer to be 'after this manner,' if it comes from a heart seeking the Father, owning its sin, longing dimly for deliverance and purity, and hoping through its tears in the great and loving tenderness of the Father in heaven who has sent His Son, that through Him we might cry Abba, Father.

Chapter 91

FASTING

'Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.17. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18. That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.' -- MATT. vi.16-18. Fasting has gone out of fashion now, but in Christ's time it went along with almsgiving and prayers, as a recognised expression of a religious life. The step from expression to ostentation is a short one, and the triple repetition here of almost the same words in regard to each of the three corruptions of religion, witnesses to our Lord's estimate of their commonness. We are exposed to them just as the Pharisees of His day were. If there is less fasting now than then, Christians still need to take care that they do not get up a certain 'sad countenance' for the sake of being seen of men, and because such is understood to be the proper thing for a religious man. They have to take care, too, not to parade the feelings, of which fasting used to be the expression, as, for instance, a sense of their own sinfulness, and sorrow for the nation's or the world's sins and sorrows. There are deep and sorrowful emotions in every real Christian heart, but the less the world is called in to see them, the purer and more blessed and purifying they will be. The man who has a sidelong eye to spectators in expressing his Christian (or any other) emotion, is very near being a hypocrite. Expressing emotion with reference to bystanders, is separated by a very thin line from feigning emotion. The sidelong glance will soon become a fixed gaze, seeing nothing else, and the purpose of fasting will slip out of sight. The man who only wishes to attract attention easily succeeds in that shabby aim, and has his reward, but misses all the true results, which are only capable of being realised when he who fasts is thinking of nothing but his own sin and his forgiving God.

Chapter 92

TWO KINDS OF TREASURE

'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.' -- MATT. vi.19-20. The connection with the previous part is twofold. The warning against hypocritical fastings and formalism leads to the warning against worldly-mindedness and avarice. For what worldly-mindedness is greater than that which prostitutes even religious acts to worldly advantage, and is laying up treasure of men's good opinion on earth even while it shams to be praying to God? And there is a close connection which the history of every age has illustrated between formal religious profession and the love of money, which is the vice of the Church. Again, the promise of rewarding openly naturally leads on to the positive exhortation to make that reward our great object. The connection with what follows is remarkable. The injunction and prohibition of the text refer to two species of the same genus, one the vice of avarice, the other the vice of anxiety. I. The Two Treasures. These are -- on earth, all things which a man can possess; -- in heaven, primarily God Himself, the reward which has been spoken of in previous verses, viz. God's love and approbation, a holy character, and all those spiritual and personal graces, beauties, perfections and joys which come to the good man from above. This command and prohibition require of Christ's disciples -- 1. A rectification of their judgment as to what is the true good of man. (a) Sense and flesh tend to make us think the visible and material the best. (b) Our peculiar position here in a great commercial centre powerfully reinforces this tendency. (c) The prevailing current of this age is all in the same direction. The growth of luxury, the increase of wealth, and set of thought, threaten us with a period when not only religious thought will fail, but when all faith, enthusiasm, all poetry and philosophy, the very conception of God and duty, all idealism, all that is unseen, will be scouted among men. Naturalism does not fulfil its own boast of dealing with facts; there are more facts than can be seen. So the first thing is to settle it in our minds, in opposition to our own selves and to prevailing tendencies, that truth is better than money, that pure affections and moderate desires and a heart set on God are richer wealth than all external possessions. 2. Desire that follows the corrected judgment. It is one thing to know all this, another to wrench our wishes loose from earth.3. A practical life that obeys the impulse of the desire. Christ's command and prohibition here do not refer only to a certain course of action, but to a certain motive and purpose in action, and to actions drawn from these. If we obey Christ we shall lead lives obviously different from those which are based upon an estimate which we are to reject; but the main thing is to live and work with an eye to the eternal, not the temporal, results of our doings. We are to administer our lives as God does His providence, using the temporal only as means to an end, the eternal. We are to live to be God-like, to love God, and be loved by Him.There is here the idea of which we are somewhat too much afraid, that our life on earth adds to the rewards of blessedness in heaven. The idea of reward is emphatically and often inculcated in Scripture, however much a mistaken jealousy for 'the doctrines of Grace' may be chary of it. We need only recall such words as 'They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy'; or, 'Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation'; or, 'Thou shalt have treasure in heaven.' If people would only think of heaven less carnally, and would regard it as the perfection of holiness, there would be no difficulty in the

notion of reward. Men get there what they have made themselves fit for here. 'Their works do follow them.'II. The foes of the earthly, which are powerless against the heavenly.The imagery implies a comparatively simple state of society and primitive treasures. Moths gnaw rich garments. Rust, or more properly corruption, would get into a man's barns and vineyards, hay-crops and fruits. Thieves would steal the hoard that he had laid by, for want of better investment. Or to generalise, corruption, the natural process of wearing away, natural enemies proper to each kind of possession, human agency which takes away all external possessions -- these multifarious agents co-operate to render impossible the permanent possession of any 'treasure on earth.'On the other hand, what a man has laid up in heaven, and what he is partially here, have no tendency to grow old. Men never weary of God, never find Him failing, never exhaust truth, never drink the love of God to the dregs, never find purity palling upon the taste, 'Age cannot wither, nor custom stale, "their" infinite variety.''Treasure in heaven' has no enemies which destroy it. Every earthly possession has its own foes, every earthly joy has its own destructive opposite; but nothing touches this treasure in heaven.It has nothing to fear from men. Nobody can take it out of a man's soul but himself. The inmost circle of our life is inviolable. It is incorruptible and undefiled and fadeth not away, for it all comes from the eternal God and our eternal union to Him. He is our portion for ever.III. The madness of fastening the heart down to earth.The heart must be in heaven in order to find its true home. It is unnatural, contrary to the constitution of the 'heart' that it should be fettered to earth.If it is, it will be restless and unsatisfied.If it is, it will be at the mercy of all these enemies.If it is, what will happen when the man is no longer on earth? 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

Chapter 93

HEARTS AND TREASURES

'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' -- MATT. vi.21. 'Your treasure' is probably not the same as your neighbour's. It is yours, whether you possess it or not, because you love it. For what our Lord means here by 'treasure' is not merely money, or material good, but whatever each man thinks best, that which he most eagerly strives to attain, that which he most dreads to lose, that which, if he has, he thinks he will be blessed, that which, if he has it not, he knows he is discontented. Now, if that is the meaning of 'treasure,' then this great saying of nay text is, as a matter of course, true. For what in each case makes the treasure is precisely the going out of the heart to grapple it, and it is just because the heart is there that a thing is the treasure. Now, I need not do more than remind you, I suppose, that in Scripture 'heart' means a great deal more than it does in our modern usage, for we employ it as an expression for the affections, whereas the Bible takes it as including the whole inner man. For instance, we read, 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he'; and of 'the thoughts and intents of the heart.' So then the affections, as with us, but also thoughts, purposes, volitions, are all included in the word; and as one passage of Scripture says, 'Out of it are the issues of life.' It is the central reservoir, the central personality, the indivisible unit of the thinking, willing, feeling, loving person which I call 'myself.' So what Christ says is that where a man's treasure lies, not merely his affections will twine round it, but his whole self will be, as it were, implicated and intertwisted with it, so as that what befalls it will befall him. Now, further, notice that this saying, so obviously true, is introduced by a 'for,' and that it is the broad basis on which rest the obligation and the wisdom of the double counsel which has preceded, on the one hand, the warning against choosing perishable and uncertain good for our treasure, and mixing ourselves up with that, and on the other the loving counsel to choose for ourselves the wealth which is perpetual, unprecarious, and certain. So I think we may look at these words from a threefold point of view, and see in them a mirror that will show us ourselves, a dissuasive and a persuasive. Let us take these three aspects. I. Here, then, is a mirror that a man may hold up before himself, and find out something about himself by it. For, like other general statements of the same sort, you can turn this saying round about, and take it the other way, and not only say, as the text says, 'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' but, 'where your heart is, there is your treasure.' A man's real god is the thing that he counts best, and for which he works most earnestly, and which, as I said, he most longs to have, and trembles to think he will lose. That is his god, and his treasure, whatever his professions may be. Where your heart is, there is your treasure. Now, of course, for the larger part of the lives of all of us, there are certain lines laid down by our circumstances, our trades, our various duties, on which the train of our thoughts and efforts must run. But the question is, When I am set free from the constraint of my daily avocations and pressing duties, and am at liberty to go as I like, where do I go? When the weight is taken off the sapling in the nursery garden, which has been hung on it to turn it into a weeping-tree, its elastic stem springs to the erect position. Where do I spring to when the weights are taken off? The mother bird will hover over her nest. Where her treasure is, there is her maternal instinct. The needle follows the drawing of the pole-star; the sunflower turns to the sun. 'Being let go, they went to their own company.' Where do you go? The reins laid upon the horse's

neck, it will trot straight home to its stable; 'the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib,' and our instincts are not less sure than theirs. You go 'home' when you are left to yourselves; where do you go? We call ourselves Christians. If our treasure is in Christ, our hearts will turn to Him. And what does that mean? 'Hearts,' as I said, mean thoughts. Now, can you and I say, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul'? Does there come stealing into my mind often and often the blessed contemplation of my wealth in Jesus Christ? The river of thought brings down, in its continual flow, much mire and sand. Does it bring any gold? Do I think about Christ, and find it to be my refreshment to do so? An old mystic said, 'If I can tell how often I have thought of God to-day, I have not thought of Him often enough.' 'Where your treasure is, there will your thoughts be also.' The heart means love. Where do my affections turn when I am set free? The heart means the will. Is my will all saturated with, and so made pliant by, the will and commandment of Jesus Christ? If He is my treasure, then thoughts, affection, obedience will all turn to Him, and the current of my being, whatever may be the surface-ripple -- ay, or the surface-storm -- will be ever sliding surely, though it may be silently, towards Himself. Ah! brethren, if we would be honest with ourselves and look into this mirror, we should have cause to be ashamed, some of us, of our very profession of being Christians, and all of us to feel that we have far too much heaped up for ourselves other treasures and forgotten our true wealth, and we should all have to pray, 'Unite my heart to fear Thy name.' The Assyrians had a superstition that a demon, if he saw his own reflection in a mirror, would fly. I think if some of us professing Christians saw ourselves, as the looking-glass of my text might give us to see ourselves, we should shudderingly depart from that self, and seek to have a better self formed within us. 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' II. Now let me ask you to look at this saying, in the connection in which our Lord adduced it, as being a dissuasive.He applies it to both branches of His previous advice. He had just said, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.' These are very primitive methods of depriving men of their treasures, arguing a comparatively simple state of society. The moth is that which destroys wealth in garments, which was a great part of ancient Eastern wealth. Rust rather means corrosion, or corruption, and applies to the other great kind of primitive wealth, in food and the stores of the harvest. And the thieves who dig through the mud wall of the house, and carry away the owners' little hoard of gold and silver, point also to a primitive condition of society. But whatever may be the special force of these different words, they suggest to us this, that all that is here has its own particular and special enemy which wars against its permanence. There are bacteria of all sorts, every vegetable has its own kind. Every growth has to fear the gnawing of some foe. And so every treasure that I can gather into my heart, excepting one, is threatened by some kind of danger.No man can have lived as long in a great commercial community, as some of us have done, without knowing that there are a great many besides professional and so-called thieves in it, that take away the gold and silver. How many instances I can look back upon, of lords of the exchange and magnates of trade, who carved their names, as they thought, in imperishable marble on the doors of their warehouses, and then became bankrupt and fugitive, and were lost sight of. We all know the uncertainty of riches.And are the other kinds of treasure that we cleave to more reliable? Have they not their moths and their rusts? Is it pleasure? Well, I say nothing about the diseases that fill the bones of many a young man who flings himself into dissipation; but I remind you of just this one thing, that all that pleasure tends to become flat, stale, and unprofitable. That which the poet said of his own class, that it 'begins in

gladness, and thereof cometh in the end despondency and madness,' is true of every delight of sense, ay! and of more than sense, of taste and of intellect. As the Book of Proverbs has it, 'the end of that mirth is heaviness.'Brethren, the moth and the rust claim as their prey all treasures except one. Is it love-pure, blessed, soul-filling, soul-resting as it is? Yes, and on a hundred walls in any city there hangs, and in a thousand hearts there hangs, that great picture where the feeble form of Love is trying to repel from entrance into the rose-covered portal of the home the inevitable and mighty shrouded form of Death. Is it culture? 'Whether there be tongues they shall cease; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away.' The last illuminator and teacher, which is Death, antiquates and brushes aside, as of no use in the new conditions, most of the knowledge which men, wisely in a measure, but foolishly if exclusively, have sought to acquire for themselves here below.And when the moth and the rust come, and the separating, bony fingers of the skeleton Death filch away at last your treasure, what about you who are wrapped up with it, implicated in it; so grown into it, and it into you, that to wrench you from it opens your veins, and you bleed to death? There is a pathetic inscription in one of the rural churches of this country, in which two parents record the death of their only child, and add, 'All our hopes were in this frail bark, and the shipwreck is total.' I have heard of a man that might have been saved from a foundering ship, but he lashed his money-bags round him, and he sank along with them. 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' pierced by all the wounds, gnawed by all the moths, rotted by all the corruption that affects it, and when the thief, the last great thief of all, comes, you will only have to say, 'They have taken away my gods, and what have I more?' And the answer out of the waste places of an echoing universe will be, 'Nothing! Nothing!'III. Now, lastly, let me show you the persuasive in my text.'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' therefore, says Christ, 'lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.' If my treasure is in heaven it is secure. And oh! brethren, we need for our blessedness, we need for our rest, we need for our peace and joy, to know that the thing which we count best shall never be taken away from us, and we cannot have that certainty in regard to any treasure except the treasure that is in God. All outward things which we say we possess are incompletely possessed, because they remain outside us. However intertwined with them, we are separate from them, and we are just so much intertwined with them that the separation from them is agony, even if it is not death. What we need is to be so incorporated with, and infused into, what is our treasure, that we are quite sure that as long as we last it will last, and that nothing can rend it from us. 'I bear all my goods with me,' said the old heathen. We should be able to say more than that. I carry all my good in me, because my good is God, who is in the heavens, and though in the heavens, dwells in the hearts that love Him. Then in all changes, 'life, or death, or things present or things to come, height or depth, or any other creature,' we can afford to smile on, and say: 'You cannot take my wealth from me, for I am in God, and God is in me.' Further, if our hearts are in heaven, then heaven will be in our hearts, and here we shall know the joy and the peace that come from 'sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,' even whilst on earth. There is no blessedness, no stable repose, no victorious independence of the buffets and blows of life, except this, that my heart is lifted above them all, and, I was going to say, is inhaled and sucked into the life of Jesus Christ. Then if my heart is where my treasure is, and He is my treasure,' my life is hid with Christ in God.' If my heart is in heaven, heaven is in my heart.Further, my text is a promise as well as a statement of a present fact. Where your treasure now is there will your whole self one day be. A man who has by God's

grace, through faith and love and the wise use of things temporal, chosen God his chief good, and possessed in some degree the good which he has chosen, even Jesus Christ in his heart, that man bears in himself the pledge and the foretaste of eternal life. So the old psalmist found out, who lived in a time when that future world was shrouded in far thicker clouds of darkness than it is to us, for when he had risen to the height of saying, 'My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever,' he immediately sprang to this assurance -- an assurance of faith before it was a fact certified by Revelation -- 'Thou wilt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' The possession of Christ for our treasure, which possession always follows on our estimating Him as such, and desiring to have Him, that possession bears in its bosom the germ of the assurance that, whatever befalls my physical life, I shall not be less immortal than my treasure, and that where my heart to-day, by aspiration and desire and faith and love, has built its nest, thither I shall follow in His own time. They that have laid up treasure in heaven will at last be brought to the enjoyment of the treasure that they have laid up, and to the possession of 'the inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.'

Chapter 94

ANXIOUS CARE

'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.25. Therefore I say unto you. Take no thought for your life.' -- Matt. vi.24-25. Foresight and foreboding are two very different things. It is not that the one is the exaggeration of the other, but the one is opposed to the other. The more a man looks forward in the exercise of foresight, the less he does so in the exercise of foreboding. And the more he is tortured by anxious thoughts about a possible future, the less clear vision has he of a likely future, and the less power to influence it. When Christ here, therefore, enjoins the abstinence from thought for our life and for the future, it is not for the sake of getting away from the pressure of a very unpleasant command that we say, He does not mean to prevent the exercise of wise and provident foresight and preparation for what is to come. When this English version of ours was made, the phrase 'taking thought' meant solicitous anxiety, and that is the true rendering and proper meaning of the original. The idea is, therefore, that here there is forbidden for a Christian, not the careful preparation for what is likely to come, not the foresight of the storm and taking in sail while yet there is time, but the constant occupation and distraction of the heart with gazing forward, and fearing and being weakened thereby; or to come back to words already used, foresight is commanded, and, therefore, foreboding is forbidden. My object now is to endeavour to gather together by their link of connection, the whole of those precepts which follow my text to the close of the chapter; and to try to set before you, in the order in which they stand, and in their organic connection with each other, the reasons which Christ gives for the absence of anxious care from our minds. I mass them all into three. If you notice, the whole section, to the end of the chapter, is divided into three parts, by the threefold repetition of the injunction, 'Take no thought.' 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.' The reason for the command as given in this first section follows: -- Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?' The expansion of that thought runs on to the close of the thirtieth verse. Then there follows another division or section of the whole, marked by the repetition of the command, 'Take no thought,' -- saying, 'What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?' The reason given for the command in this second section is -- '(for after all these things do the Gentiles seek): for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God.' And then follows a third section, marked by the third repetition of the command, 'Take no thought -- for the morrow.' The reason given for the command in this third section is -- 'for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.' Now if we try to generalise the lessons that lie in these three great divisions of the section, we get, I think, first, -- anxious thought is contrary to all the lessons of nature, which show it to be unnecessary. That is the first, the longest section. Then, secondly, anxious thought is contrary to all the lessons of revelation or religion, which show it to be heathenish. And lastly, anxious thought is contrary to the whole scheme of Providence, which shows it to be futile. You do not need to be anxious. It is wicked to be anxious. It is of no use to be anxious. These are the three points, -- anxious care is contrary to the lessons of Nature; contrary to the great principles of the Gospel; and contrary to the scheme of Providence. Let us try now simply to follow the course of thought in our Lord's illustration of these three principles. I. The first is the consideration of the

teaching of Nature. 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?' And then comes the illustration of the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field. The whole of these verses fall into these general thoughts: You are obliged to trust God for your body, for its structure, for its form, for its habitudes, and for the length of your being; you are obliged to trust Him for the foundation -- trust Him for the superstructure. You are obliged to trust Him, whether you will or not, for the greater -- trust Him gladly for the less. You cannot help being dependent. After all your anxiety, it is only directed to the providing of the things that are needful for the life; the life itself, though it is a natural thing, comes direct from God's hand; and all that you can do, with all your carking cares, and laborious days, and sleepless nights, is but to adorn a little more beautifully or a little less beautifully, the allotted span -- but to feed a little more delicately or a little less delicately, the body which God has given you. What is the use of being careful for food and raiment, when down below these necessities there lies the awful question -- for the answer to which you have to hang helpless, in implicit, powerless dependence upon God, -- Shall I live, or shall I die? shall I have a body instinct with vitality, or a body crumbling amidst the clods of the valley? After all your work, your anxiety gets but such a little way down; like some passing shower of rain, that only softens an inch of the hard-baked surface of the soil, and has no power to fructify the seed that lies feet below the reach of its useless moisture. Anxious care is foolish; for far beyond the region within which your anxieties move, there is the greater region in which there must be entire dependence upon God. 'Is not the life more than meat? Is not the body more than raiment?' You must trust Him for these; you may as well trust Him for all the rest. Then, again, there comes up this other thought: Not only are you compelled to exercise unanxious dependence in regard to a matter which you cannot influence -- the life of the body -- and that is the greater; but, still further, God gives you that. Very well: God gives you the greater; and God's great gifts are always inclusive of God's little gifts. When He bestows a thing, He bestows all the consequences of the thing as well. When He gives a life, He swears by the gift, that He will give what is needful to sustain it. God does not stop half way in any of His bestowments. He gives royally and liberally, honestly and sincerely, logically and completely. When He bestows a life, therefore, you may be quite sure that He is not going to stultify His own gift by retaining unbestowed anything that is wanted for its blessing and its power. You have had to trust Him for the greater; trust Him for the less. He has given you the greater -- no doubt He will give you the less. 'The life is more than meat, and the body than raiment.' 'Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment?' Then there is another thought. Look at God's ways of doing with all His creatures. The animate and the inanimate creation are appealed to, the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, the one in reference to food and the other in reference to clothing, which are the two great wants already spoken of by Christ in the previous verses. I am not going to linger at all on the exquisite beauty of these illustrations. Every sensitive heart and pure eye dwell upon them with delight. The 'fowls of the air,' the lilies of the field,' 'they toil not, neither do they spin'; and then, with what an eye for the beauty of God's universe, -- 'Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these!' Now, what is the force of this consideration? It is this -- There is a specimen, in an inferior creation, of the divine care which you can trust, you men who are 'better than they.' And not only that: -- There is an instance, not only of God's giving things that are necessary, but of God's giving more, lavishing beauty upon the flowers of the field. I do not think that we sufficiently dwell upon the moral and spiritual uses of beauty in God's universe.

That everywhere His loving, wooing hand should touch the flower into grace, and deck all barren places with glory and with fairness -- what does that reveal to us about Him? It says to us, He does not give scantily: it is not the mere measure of what is wanted, absolutely needed, to support a bare existence, that God bestows. He 'taketh pleasure in the prosperity of His servants.' Joy, and love, and beauty, belong to Him; and the smile upon His face that comes from the contemplation of His own fairness flung out into His glorious creation, is a prophecy of the gladness that comes into His heart from His own holiness and more ethereal beauty adorning the spiritual creatures whom He has made to flash back His likeness. The flowers of the field are so clothed that we may learn the lesson that it is a fair Spirit, and a loving Spirit, and a bountiful Spirit, and a royal Heart, that presides over the bestowments of creation, and allots gifts to men. But notice further, how much of the force of what Christ says here depends on the consideration of the inferiority of these creatures who are thus blessed; and also notice what are the particulars of that inferiority. We read that verse, 'They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns,' as if it marked out a particular in which their free and untoilsome lives were superior to ours. It is the very opposite. It is part of the characteristics that mark them as lower than we, that they have not to work for the future. They reap not, they sow not, they gather not; -- are ye not much better than they? Better in this, amongst other things, that God has given us the privilege of influencing the future by our faithful toil, by the sweat of our brow and the labour of our hands. These creatures labour not, and yet they are fed. And the lesson for us is -- much more may we, whom God has blessed with the power of work, and gifted with force to mould the future, be sure that He will bless the exercise of the prerogative by which He exalts us above inferior creatures, and makes us capable of toil. You can influence to-morrow. What you can influence by work, fret not about, for you can work. What you cannot influence by work, fret not about, for it is vain. 'They toil not, neither do they spin.' You are lifted above them because God has given you hands that can grasp the tool or the pen. Man's crown of glory, as well as man's curse and punishment, is, 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.' So learn what you have to do with that great power of anticipation. It is meant to be the guide of wise work. It is meant to be the support for far-reaching, strenuous action. It is meant to elevate us above mere living from hand to mouth; to ennoble our whole being by leading to and directing toil that is blessed because there is no anxiety in it, labour that will be successful since it is according to the will of that God who has endowed us with the power of putting it forth. Then there comes another inferiority. 'Your heavenly Father feedeth them.' They cannot say 'Father!' and yet they are fed. You are above them by the prerogative of toil. You are above them by the nearer relation which you sustain to your Father in heaven. He is their Maker, and lavishes His goodness upon them: He is your Father, and He will not forget His child. They cannot trust: you can. They might be anxious, if they could look forward, for they know not the hand that feeds them; but you can turn round, and recognise the source of all blessings. So, doubly ought you to be guarded from care by the lesson of that free joyful Nature that lies round about you, and to say, 'I have no fear of famine, nor of poverty, nor of want; for He feedeth the ravens when they cry. There is no reason for distrust. Shame on me if I am anxious, for every lily of the field blows its beauty, and every bird of the air carols its song without sorrowful foreboding, and yet there is no Father in heaven to them!' And the last Inferiority is this; 'To-day it is, and to-morrow it is cast into the oven.' Their little life is thus blessed and brightened. Oh, how much greater will be the mercies that belong to them who have a longer life upon earth, and who never die! The lesson is not -- These are the plebeians in God's universe, and you are the aristocracy, and you may trust Him; but it is --

They, by their inferior place, have lesser and lower wants, wants but for a bounded being, wants that stretch not beyond earthly existence, and that for a brief span. They are blessed in the present, for the oven to-morrow saddens not the blossoming to-day. You have nobler necessities and higher longings, wants that belong to a soul that never dies, to a nature which may glow with the consciousness that God is your Father, wants which 'look before and after,' therefore, you are 'better than they'; and 'shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' II. And now, in the second place, there is here another general line of considerations tending to dispel all anxious care -- the thought that it is contrary to all the lessons of Religion, or Revelation, which show it to be heathenish.There are three clauses devoted to the illustration of this thought: 'After all these things do the Gentiles seek'; 'your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things'; 'seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.'The first clause contains the principle, that solicitude for the future is at bottom heathen worldly-mindedness. The heathen tendency in us all leads to an overestimate of material good, and it is a question of circumstances whether that shall show itself in heaping up earthly treasures, or in anxious care. These are the same plant, only the one is growing in the tropics of sunny prosperity, and the other in the arctic zone of chill penury. The one is the sin of the worldly-minded rich man, the other is the sin of the worldly-minded poor man. The character is the same in both, turned inside out! And, therefore, the words, 'ye cannot serve God and Mammon,' stand in this chapter in the centre between our Lord's warning against laying up treasures on earth, and His warning against being full of cares for earth. He would show us thereby that these two apparently opposite states of mind in reality spring from that one root, and are equally, though differently, 'serving Mammon.' We do not sufficiently reflect upon that. We say, perhaps, this intense solicitude of ours is a matter of temperament, or of circumstances. So it may be: but the Gospel was sent to help us to cure worldly temperaments, and to master circumstances. But the reason why we are troubled and careful about the things of this life lies here, that our hearts have taken an earthly direction, that we are at bottom heathenish in our lives and in our desires. It is the very characteristic of the Gentile (that is to say, of the heathen) that earth should bound his horizon. It is the very characteristic of the worldly man that all his anxieties on the one hand, and all his joys on the other, should be 'cribbed, cabined and confined' within the narrow sphere of the visible. When a Christian is living in the foreboding of some earthly sorrow coming down upon him, and is feeling as if there would be nothing left if some earthly treasure were swept away, is that not, in the very root of it, idolatry -- worldly-mindedness? Is it not clean contrary to all our profession that for us 'there is none upon earth that we desire besides Thee'? Anxious care rests upon a basis of heathen worldly-mindedness.Anxious care rests upon a basis, too, of heathen misunderstanding of the character of God. 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things.' The heathen thought of God is that He is far removed from our perplexities, either ignorant of our struggles, or unsympathising with them. The Christian has the double armour against anxiety -- the name of the Father, and the conviction that the Father's knowledge is co-extensive with the Father's love. He who calls us His children thoroughly understands what His children want. And so, anxiety is contrary to the very name by which we have learned to call God, and to the pledge of pitying care and perfect knowledge of our frame which lies in the words 'our Father.' Our Father is the name of God, and our Father intensely cares for us, and lovingly does all things for us.And then, still further, Christ points out here, not only what is the real root of this solicitous care -- something very like worldly-mindedness, heathen worldly-mindedness; but He points out what is

the one counterpoise of it -- 'seek first the kingdom of God.' It is of no use only to tell men that they ought to trust, that the birds of the air might teach them to trust, that the flowers of the field might preach resignation and confidence to them. It is of no use to attempt to scold them into trust, by telling them that distrust is heathenish. You must fill the heart with a supreme and transcendent desire after the one supreme object, and then there will be no room or leisure left for anxious care after the lesser. Have inwrought into your being, Christian man, the opposite of that heathen over-regard for earthly things. 'Seek first the kingdom of God.' Let all your spirit be stretching itself out towards that divine and blessed reality, longing to be a subject of that kingdom, and a possessor of that righteousness; and 'the cares that infest the day' will steal away from out of the sacred pavilion of your believing spirit. Fill your heart with desires after what is worthy of desire; and the greater having entered in, all lesser objects will rank themselves in the right place, and the 'glory that excelleth' will outshine the seducing brightness of the paltry present. Oh! it is want of love, it is want of earnest desire, it is want of firm conviction that God, God only, God by Himself, is enough for me, that makes me careful and troubled. And therefore, if I could only attain unto that sublime and calm height of perfect conviction, that He is sufficient for me, that He is with me for ever, -- the satisfying object of my desires and the glorious reward of my searchings, -- let life and death come as they may, let riches, poverty, health, sickness, all the antitheses of human circumstances storm down upon me in quick alternation, yet in them all I shall be content and peaceful. God is beside me, and His presence brings in its train whatsoever things I need. You cannot cast out the sin of foreboding thoughts by any power short of the entrance of Christ and His love. The blessings of faith and felt communion leave no room nor leisure for anxiety. III. Finally, Christ here tells us, that thought for the morrow is contrary to all the scheme of Providence, which shows it to be vain. 'The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'I interpret these two clauses as meaning this: To-morrow has anxieties enough of its own, alter and in spite of all the anxieties about it to-day by which you try to free it from care when it comes. Every day -- every day will have its evil, have it to the end. And every day will have evil enough to task all the strength that a man has to cope with it. So that it just comes to this: Anxiety, -- it is all vain. After all your careful watching for the corner of the heaven where the cloud is to come from, there will be a cloud, and it will rise somewhere, but you never know beforehand from what quarter. The morrow shall have its own anxieties. After all your fortifying of the castle of your life, there will be some little postern left unguarded, some little weak place in the wall left uncommanded by a battery; and there, where you never looked for him, the inevitable invader will come in. After all the plunging of the hero in the fabled waters that made him invulnerable, there was the little spot on the heel, and the arrow found its way there? There is nothing certain to happen, says the proverb, but the unforeseen. To-morrow will have its cares, spite of anything that anxiety and foreboding can do. It is God's law of Providence that a man shall be disciplined by sorrow; and to try to escape from that law by any forecasting prudence, is utterly hopeless, and madness.And what does your anxiety do? It does not empty to-morrow, brother, of its sorrows; but, ah! it empties to-day of its strength. It does not enable you to escape the evil, it makes you unfit to cope with it when it comes. It does not bless to-morrow, but it robs to-day. For every day has its own burden. Sufficient for each day is the evil which properly belongs to it. Do not add to-morrow's to to-day's. Do not drag the future into the present. The present has enough to do with its own proper concerns. We have always strength to bear the evil when it comes. We have not strength to bear the foreboding of it. 'As thy day, thy strength shall be.' In strict proportion to the

existing exigencies will be the God-given power; but if you cram and condense to-day's sorrows by experience, and to-morrow's sorrows by anticipation, into the narrow round of the one four-and-twenty hours, there is no promise that 'as that day thy strength shall be.' God gives us (His name be praised!) -- God gives us power to bear all the sorrows of His making; but He does not give us power to bear the sorrows of our own making, which the anticipation of sorrow most assuredly is.Then: contrary to the lessons of Nature, contrary to the teachings of Religion, contrary to the scheme of Providence; weakening your strength, distracting your mind, sucking the sunshine out of every landscape, and casting a shadow over all the beauty -- the curse of our lives is that heathenish, blind, useless, faithless, needless anxiety in which we do indulge. Look forward, my brother, for God has given you that royal and wonderful gift of dwelling in the future, and bringing all its glories around your present. Look forward, not for life, but for heaven; not for food and raiment, but for the righteousness after which it is blessed to hunger and thirst, and wherewith it is blessed to be clothed. Not for earth, but for heaven, let your forecasting gift of prophecy come into play. Fill the present with quiet faith, with patient waiting, with honest work, with wise reading of God's lessons of nature, of providence, and of grace, all of which say to us, Live in God's future, that the present may be bright: work in the present, that the future may be certain! They may well look around in expectation, sunny and unclouded, of a blessed time to come, whose hearts are already 'fixed, trusting in the Lord.' He to whom there are a present Christ, and a present Spirit, and a present Father, and a present forgiveness, and a present redemption, may well live expatiating in all the glorious distance of the unknown to come, sending out (if I may use such a figure) from his placid heart over all the weltering waters of this lower world, the peaceful seeking dove, his meek hope, that shall come back again from its flight with some palm-branch broken from the trees of Paradise between its bill. And he that has no such present has a future dark, chaotic, a heaving, destructive ocean; and over it there goes for ever -- black-pinioned, winging its solitary and hopeless flight -- the raven of his anxious thoughts, which finds no place to rest, and comes back again to the desolate ark with its foreboding croak of evil in the present and evil in the future. Live in Christ, 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever'; and His presence shall make all your past, present, and future -- memory, enjoyment, and hope -- to be bright and beautiful, because all are centred in Him.

Chapter 95

JUDGING, ASKING, AND GIVING

'Judge not, that ye be not judged.2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye! 5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.6. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.7. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: 8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.9. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? 10. Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him? 12. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.' -- MATT. vii.1-12. I. How can we help 'judging,' and why should we not 'judge'? The power of seeing into character is to be coveted and cultivated, and the absence of it makes simpletons, not saints. Quite true: but seeing into character is not what Jesus is condemning here. The 'judging' of which He speaks sees motes in a brother's eye. That is to say, it is one-sided, and fixes on faults, which it magnifies, passing by virtues. Carrion flies that buzz with a sickening hum of satisfaction over sores, and prefer corruption to soundness, are as good judges of meat as such critics are of character. That Mephistophelean spirit of detraction has wide scope in this day. Literature and politics, as well as social life with its rivalries, are infested by it, and it finds its way into the church and threatens us all. The race of fault-finders we have always with us, blind as moles to beauties and goodness, but lynx-eyed for failings, and finding meat and drink in proclaiming them in tones of affected sorrow. How flagrant a breach of the laws of the kingdom this temper implies, and how grave an evil it is, though thought little of, or even admired as cleverness and a mark of a very superior person, Christ shows us by this earnest warning, embedded among His fundamental moral teachings. He points out first how certainly that disposition provokes retaliation. Who is the Judge that judges us as we do others? Perhaps it is best to say that both the divine and the human estimates are included in the purposely undefined expression. Certainly both are included in fact. For a carping spirit of eager fault-finding necessarily tinges people's feelings towards its possessor, and he cannot complain if the severe tests which he applied to others are used on his own conduct. A cynical critic cannot expect his victims to be profoundly attached to him, or ready to be lenient to his failings. If he chooses to fight with a tomahawk, he will be scalped some day, and the bystanders will not lament profusely. But a more righteous tribunal than that of his victims condemns him. For in God's eyes the man who covers not his neighbour's faults with the mantle of charity has not his own blotted out by divine forgiveness. This spirit is always accompanied by ignorance of one's own faults, which makes him who indulges in it ludicrous. So our Lord would seem to intend by the figure of the mote and the beam. It takes a great deal of close peering to see

a mote; but the censorious man sees only the mote, and sees it out of scale. No matter how bright the eye, though it be clear as a hawk's, its beauty is of no moment to him. The mote magnified, and nothing but the mote, is his object; and he calls this one-sided exaggeration 'criticism,' and prides himself on the accuracy of his judgment. He makes just the opposite mistake in his estimate of his own faults, if he sees them at all. We look at our neighbour's errors with a microscope, and at our own through the wrong end of a telescope. We see neither in their real magnitude, and the former mistake is sure to lead to the latter. We have two sets of weights and measures: one for home use, the other for foreign. Every vice has two names; and we call it by its flattering and minimising one when we commit it, and by its ugly one when our neighbour does it. Everybody can see the hump on his friend's shoulders, but it takes some effort to see our own. David was angry enough at the man who stole his neighbour's ewe lamb, but quite unaware that he was guilty of a meaner, crueller theft. The mote can be seen; but the beam, big though it is, needs to be 'considered.' So it often escapes notice, and will surely do so, if we are yielding to the temptation of harsh judgment of others. Every one may be aware of faults of his own very much bigger than any that he can see in another, for each of us may fathom the depth of our own sinfulness in motive and unspoken, unacted thought, while we can see only the surface acts of others. Our Lord points out, in verse 4, a still more subtle form of this harsh judgment, when it assumes the appearance of solicitude for the improvement of others, and He thus teaches us that all honest desire to help in the moral reformation of our neighbours must be preceded by earnest efforts at mending our own conduct. If we have grave faults of our own undetected and unconquered, we are incapable either of judging or of helping our brethren. Such efforts will be hypocritical, for they pretend to come from genuine zeal for righteousness and care for another's good, whereas their real root is simply censorious exaggeration of a neighbour's faults; they imply that the person affected with such a tender care for another's eyes has his own in good condition. A blind guide is bad enough, but a blind oculist is a still more ridiculous anomaly. Note, too, that the result of clearing our own vision is beautifully put as being, not ability to see, but ability to cure, our fellows. It is only the experience of the pain of casting out a darling evil, and the consciousness of God's pitying mercy as given to us, that makes the eye keen enough, and the hand steady and gentle enough, to pull out the mote. It is a delicate operation, and one which a clumsy operator may make very painful, and useless, after all. A rough finger or a harsh spirit makes success impossible. II. Verse 6 comes in singular juxtaposition with the preceding warning against uncharitable judgments. Christ's calling men dogs and swine does not sound like obeying His own precept. But the very shock which the words give at first hearing is part of their value. There are men whom Jesus, for all His gentleness, has to estimate thus. His pitying eyes were not blind to truth. It was no breach of infinite charity in Him to see facts, and to give them their right names; and His previous precept does not bid us shut our eyes, or give up the use of common sense. This verse limits the application of the preceding one, and inculcates prudence, tact, and discernment of character, as no less essential to His servants than the sweet charity, slow to suspect and sorrowful to expose a brother's fault. The fact that His gentle lips used such words may well make us shudder as we think of the deforming of human nature into pure animalism which some men achieve, and which is possible for all. The inculcation of discretion in the presentation of the truth may easily be exaggerated into a doctrine of reserve which is more Jesuitical than Christian. Even when guarded and limited, it may seem scarcely in harmony with the commission to preach the gospel to every creature, or with the sublime confidence that God's word finds something to

appeal to in every heart, and has power to subdue the animal in every man. But the divergence is only apparent. The most expansive zeal is to be guided by prudence, and the most enthusiastic confidence in the universal power of the gospel does not take leave of common sense. There are people who will certainly be repelled, and perhaps stirred to furious antagonism to the gospel and its messengers, if they are not approached with discretion. It is bad to hide the treasure in a napkin; it is quite as bad to fling it down before some people without preparation. Jesus Himself locked His lips before Herod, although the curious ruler asked many questions; and we have sometimes to remember that there are people who 'will not hear the word,' and who must first 'be won without the word.' Heavy rains run off hard-baked earth. It must first be softened by a gentle drizzle. Luther once told this fable: 'The lion made a great feast, and he invited all the beasts, and among the rest, a sow. When all manner of costly dishes were set before the guests, the sow asked, "Have you no bran?" Even so, said he, we preachers set forth the most dainty dishes, -- the forgiveness of sins, and the grace of God; but they turn up their snouts, and grub for guilders.' This precept is one side of the truth. The other is the adaptation of the gospel to all men, and the obligation on us to preach it to all. We can only tell most men's disposition towards it by offering it to them, and we are not to be in a hurry to conclude that men are dogs and swine. III. It may be a question whether, in verse 8, the emphasis is to be laid on 'every one' or on 'that asketh,' or, in other words, whether the saying is an assurance that the universal law will be followed in our case, or a statement of the universal condition without which no receiving is possible, and, least of all, the receiving of the gifts of the kingdom by its subjects. In either case, this verse gives the reason for the preceding exhortation. Then follows the tender illustration in which the dim-sighted love of earthly fathers is taken as a parable of the all-wise tenderness and desire to bestow which move the hand of the giving God. There is some resemblance between an Eastern loaf and a stone, and some between a fish and a serpent. However imperfect a father's love, he will neither be cruel enough to cheat his unsuspecting child with what looks like an answer to his wish but is useless or hurtful, nor foolish enough to make a mistake. All human relationships are in some measure marred by the faults of those who sustain them. What a solemn attestation of universal sinfulness is in these words of Christ's, and how calmly He separates Himself by His sinlessness from us! I do not know that there is anywhere a stronger scriptural proof of these two truths than this one incidental clause, 'ye, being evil.' I wonder whether the people who pit the Sermon on the Mount against evangelical Christianity are ready to take this part of it into their creeds. It is noteworthy, also, that the emphasis is laid, not on the earthly father's willingness, but on his knowing how to give good gifts. Our Lord seems to think that He need not assure us of the plain truth that of course our Father in heaven is willing, just because He is our Father, to give us all good; but He heartens us with the assurance that His love is wisdom, and that He cannot make any mistakes. There are no stones mingled with our bread, nor any serpents among the fish. He gives good, and nothing but good. IV. The great precept which closes the section is not only to be taken as an inference from the immediately preceding context, but as the summing up of all the duties to our neighbours, in which Christ has been laying down the law of the kingdom from Matthew v.17. This general reference of the 'therefore' is confirmed by the subsequent clause, 'this is the law and the prophets'; the summing up of the whole past revelation of the divine will, and therefore in accordance with our Lord's previous exposition of the relation between His new law and that former one. As Luther puts it in his vigorous, homely way, 'With these words He now closes His instructions given in these three chapters, and ties it all up in a little bundle.' But a connection may

also be traced with the preceding paragraph. There our desires were treated as securing God's corresponding gifts. Here our desires, when turned to men, are regarded, not as securing their corresponding conduct, but as obliging us to action. By taking our wishes as the rule of our dealings with others, we shall be like God, who in regard to His best gifts takes our wishes as the rule of His dealings with us. Our desires sent heavenward procure blessings for us; sent earthward, they prescribe our blessing of others. That is a startling turn to give to our claims on our fellows. It rests on the principle that every man has equal rights, therefore we ought not to look for anything from others which we are not prepared to extend to others. A. should give B. whatever A. thinks B. should give him. Our error is in making ourselves our own centre, and thinking more of our claims on others than of our obligations to them. Christ teaches us that these are one. Such a principle applied to our lives would wonderfully pull down our expectations and lift up our obligations. It is really but another way of putting the law of loving our neighbours as ourselves. If observed, it would revolutionise society. Nothing short of it is the law of the kingdom, and the duty of all who call themselves Christ's subjects. This is the inmost meaning, says Jesus, of the law and the prophets. All former revelations of the divine will in regard to men's relations to men are summed in this. Of course, this does not mean, as some people would like to make it mean, that morality is to take the place of religion, but simply that all the precepts touching conduct to men are gathered up, for the subjects of the kingdom, in this one. 'Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.'

Chapter 96

OUR KNOCKING

'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' -- MATT, vii.7. In the letter to the church at Laodicea, we read, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' The image is there employed to set forth the tenderness and patience of the exalted Christ, who condescends to sue for entrance into every human heart, and comes in with His hands full of blessing. Now, it is very striking, I think, that the same symbol is employed in this text in reference to our duty. There is such a thing as our knocking at some door for entrance and blessing. What is that knocking? The answer which is popularly given, I suppose, is that all these three injunctions in our text, 'Ask -- seek -- knock,' are but diverse aspects of the one exhortation to prayerfulness. And that may, perhaps, exhaust their meaning; but I am rather disposed to think that it is possible to trace a difference and a climax in them. To ask is obviously to apply to a person who can give, and that is prayer. To seek is not, as I think, quite the same thing, but rather expresses the idea of effort, the personal effort which ought to accompany and will accompany all real prayer. And to knock possibly adds to the conception of prayer and of effort, the idea, as common to both of them, of a certain persistency and continuity born of earnestness. So that we have here, as I think, a threefold statement of the conditions under which certain great blessings are given, and a threefold exhortation as to our Christian duty. I. In considering these words I would first inquire to whom such exhortations are rightly addressed. Now, it is to be remembered that these words occur in that great discourse of our Lord's which is called the Sermon on the Mount. And for the right understanding of that great embodiment of Christian morality, and of its relations to the whole body of Christian truth, it is, I think, very needful to remember that the Sermon on the Mount is addressed to Christ's disciples, that it is the promulgation of the laws of the kingdom by the King for His subjects; that it presupposes discipleship and entrance into the kingdom, and has not a word to say about the method of entrance. So that, though very many of its exhortations are but the republication in nobler form of the common laws of morality which are binding upon all men, and may be addressed to all men, the form in which they appear in that Sermon, the connection in which they stand, the height to which they are elevated, and the motives by which they are enforced, all limit their application to men who are truly followers and disciples of Jesus Christ. And this consideration especially bears on these words of our text. The first exhortation which Christianity addresses to a man is not 'ask.' The first duty that a man has to discharge in regard to Christ and His grace, and the revelation that is in Him, is neither to seek nor to knock, but it is to take and to open. Christ knocks first, and when He knocks we should say, 'Come in, Thou blessed of the Lord.' To bid a man pray, when he should be exhorted to believe, is to darken the clearness of the divine counsel, and to narrow the fulness of the divine grace. God does not wait to be asked for His mercy and His pardon. Like the dew on the grass, He 'tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.' Before we call, He answers; and to say to people, 'Pray!' 'Seek!' 'Knock!' when the one thing to say is 'Take the gifts that God sent you before you asked for them,' is folly, and has often led to a course of painful and profitless struggling, which was all unnecessary and wide of the mark. It is like telling a man to pray for rain when the reservoirs at his side are full, and every flower is bending its chalice, charged with the blessing. It is needless to tell a man to seek for the

treasure that is lying there at his side, and to which he has only to turn his eyes and stretch out his hands. It is folly to exhort a man to beat at a door that is standing wide open. The door of God's grace is thus wide open, and the treasure of God's mercy has come down, and the rain of God's forgiving love has dropped upon all of us, and made the wilderness to rejoice. And so my message to some of you, dear brethren, is to say that you have nothing whatever to do, primarily, with this text. You have neither to ask, nor to seek, nor to knock, but to listen to Him, whose gentle hand knocks at your hearts, and to open the door and let Him come in with His grace and mercy. II. And now, in the next place, let me ask you to consider in what region of life these promises are true. They sound at first as if they were dead in the teeth of the facts of life. Is there any region of experience in which to ask is to receive, to seek is to find, and in which every door flies open at our touch? If there be, it is not in the ordinary work-a-day world in which you and I live, where we all have to put up with a great many bitter disappointments and refused requests, where we have all searched long and sorely for some things that we have not found, and the search has aged and saddened us. It seems to be perfectly certain that the distinct purpose which our Lord here has in view, is to assert that the law of His Kingdom is the direct opposite of the law of earthly life, and that the sad discrepancy between desire and possession, between wish and fact, is done away with for His followers. 'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' is the charter of His Kingdom. Now, dear brethren, it does not want much wisdom to know that that would be a very questionable blessing indeed, if it were taken to apply to the outward circumstances of our lives. There are a good many people, in all ages, and there are some people in this day, who set themselves up for very lofty and spiritual Christians who have made deep discoveries as to the power of prayer, and who seem to understand by it just exactly this, that if a man will only pray for what he wishes instead of working for it, he will get what he wishes. And I make bold to say that all forms of so-called higher experience which involve anything like that thought are, instead of being an exaltation, a degradation, of the very idea of Christian prayer. For the meaning of prayer is not that I shall force my will upon God, but that I shall bend my will to His.There is one region, and one only, in which it is true, absolutely, unconditionally, without limitation, and always, that what we ask we get, what we seek we find, and that the door at which we knock shall be opened unto us; and that is not the region of outward, questionable, and changeful good.Why, the very context of these words shows us that. It dwells upon the discrimination of an earthly father in answering his child's requests; and says: 'he knows how to give good gifts,' and 'so will your heavenly Father.' And it takes an illustration which we may extend in that same direction when it says, 'If a child ask a loaf, will the father give him a stone? or if he ask for a fish, will he give him a serpent?' We may turn the question and say: If the child ask for a serpent because he fancies that it is a fish, will his father give him that? Or if he cast his eye upon a thing which he imagines to be a loaf when it is only a stone, will his father let him break his teeth upon that? Surely no! He knows how to give good gifts, and an essential condition of that divine knowledge of how to give good gifts is the knowledge of how to refuse mistaken and foolish wishes.So let us be thankful that His divine providence does not spoil His children, and make them, as all spoiled children are, a curse and a misery to themselves and to everybody round about them; but He disciplines them by a gracious 'No' as well as by a frank, glad 'Yes,' and often refuses the petition and grants the deeper-lying meaning of the same.Therefore, I say that the region in which this great and liberal charter of entire response to our desires has force is simply and only the spiritual region in which the highest good is. You may grow as Christian men just as fast and just as far as you choose. A fuller knowledge of God's truth,

a more entire conformity to Christ's pattern, a deeper communion with God -- they are all possible for every one of us in any measure to which we choose to set our expectations, and to shape our desires and our actions. 'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.' The stretch of the jaws determines the size of the portion that is put into them; and He Himself who is the only real limit of His gifts, in His endless fulness, always imparts to you and me just as much of Himself as we like and wish to take. 'Ye are not straitened in Me, ye are straitened in yourselves.'And oh! brethren, what a solemn light such thoughts as that throw on the low attainments of our average Christianity! So many of us, like Gideon's fleece, dry in the midst of the dew that comes down from heaven! So many of us in the midst of the blessed sunshine of His grace, standing like deep gorges on a mountain in cold shadow! How much you have lying at hand; how little of it you take for your own!Suppose one of those old Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century had been led into some of those rich Mexican treasure-houses, where all round him were massive bars of gold and gleaming diamonds and precious stones, and had come out from the abundance with sixpence-worth in His palm, when he might have loaded himself with ingots of pure and priceless metal. That is what some of you do, when Jesus Christ puts the key of His storehouse in your hands and says to you, 'Go in and help yourselves,' You stop as soon as you are within the threshold. You do little more than take some insignificant corner nibbled off the great solid mass of riches that might belong to you, and bear that away. The only conclusion is that you do not care much about His wealth. Dear brethren, you professing Christian people that are listening to me, if life is scant in your veins, if your faith is, as it is with many of you, all but dead, if your Christian character is very little better than the character of the people round you, if your religion does not give you any happiness, nor do other people much good, if your love is so cold that it has almost expired, and your hopes dim, there is no creature in heaven or earth or hell that is to blame for it but yourselves. 'Ye have not because ye ask not; ye ask and have not because ye ask amiss.'III. And that brings me to the last question, namely, on what conditions these promises depend. 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened.' I said at the beginning of these remarks that I traced a difference between these three commands, and I take that difference for granted now as the basis of the few words I have to say. The first condition is -- desires presented to Him who can grant them. To ask implies the will of a person that will hear and respond and has the power to bestow. That Person is God in Christ. Go and ask Him. We all know that prayer is essential, and so I do not need to dwell upon it; go and ask Him, and you will get what you need.Do you ever pray, you professing Christian people? I do not mean with your mouths, but with your hearts; do you ever pray to be made less worldly? Do you ever wish to be so? Do you ever really desire that your love of this present should be diminished? Have you any appetite for righteousness? Does it seem to you to be a good thing that you should have less pleasure in the present and more joys in the future? Would you like to be a devouter Christian than you are? I very much question it about many of you. I am not hitting at individuals, but I am speaking about the average type of professing Christians in this generation.If you desire it you will ask it. Is there any place in any of your rooms where there is a little bit of carpet worn white by your knees? Or do you pray when you are half asleep at night, and before you are well awake in the morning, and scramble through a prayer as the necessary preliminary to going to the work that really interests you, the work of your trade or business? 'Ask, and ye shall receive.'The second condition is effort. 'Seek, and ye shall find.' There are a great many things in this world that cannot be given to a wish. There are a great many things in the Kingdom of Grace that Jesus Christ

cannot give to a mere wish. There must be my own personal effort if I am to secure that which I desire. That is the reason why so many prayers seem to go unanswered. Think of the thousands of supplications that will go up in churches and chapels to-day for spiritual blessings. How comes it that such an enormous proportion of these prayers will never be answered at all? Well, if a man stand at the butts and shoot his arrow at a target, and does not care enough for its fate to stand there long enough to see whether it hits the bull's eye, the probability is that it will never reach its aim. And if men pray, and pray, and pray, in public, and then come out of their churches and chapels and not only forget all about their prayers but never expect an answer to them, and do nothing in their lives in accordance therewith, is there any wonder that they are not answered? Men repeat the Lord's Prayer every morning, and ask God day by day 'lead us not into temptation,' and then go out into daily life, and are willing to fling themselves into temptation, and go through the very thick of the fire of it, if there is a ten pound note on the other side of the flame. And men ask God that He will help them to 'grow in grace' and Christian character, and seldom do a single thing that they know will promote that growth. All such prayer is vain and unresponded to. With prayer there must go effort.And then, lastly, the third condition is continuity or persistence. 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you,' 'Then there is such a thing as a delay in these answers that you have been speaking about,' you say. No! there is no delay, but there is such a thing as the beginning of a long task; and therefore there is such a thing as the necessity for persistent and continuous perseverance even in the offering of the desires, which to express is to have satisfied; and in putting forth of the efforts in which to seek is to find. "Tis a lifelong task ere the lump be leavened.' Eternal life is a gift, but the building of a Christian character is the result of patient, continuous, well-directed efforts to the appropriation and employment of the gift that we have received. 'Forty-and-six years was this temple in building,' they said, and it was not finished then. It will take more than forty-and-six years to build up in my poor heart, full of rubbish and of evil, a temple to the Holy Ghost.I need not insist upon the virtue of perseverance; that is a commonplace written on the head of all copybooks, but let me remind you that in the Christian life, as much as in any other, that virtue is needful, and unless a man is content to do as Abraham Lincoln said, 'Keep pegging away' at the duties of Christian life with continual effort, there is no promise and no possibility that that man shall grow in grace.Now, two last words: one is, we want nothing more for the largest and most blessed possession of the true riches and eternal joys of the kingdom than the application to our Christian life of the very same qualities, virtues, excellences, which we need for the successful prosecution of our daily business. Dear brethren, draw for yourselves the contrast between the eagerness with which you pursue that, and the tepidity with which you pursue this. You know that effort and perseverance are wanted there, and you do not grudge them; they are wanted just as much here. Do you put them forth? Some of you are all fire in the one place, and are all frost in the other. You Christian men and women, give the kingdom as much as you give the world, and you will be strong and growing Christians; but if you will not, do not wonder that you are so feeble as you are. And the last remark I make is -- this great symbol of my text which is used in reference to our Lord's condescending beseechings for the entrance into our hearts, and is also used, as we have seen, in reference to our own continuity of prayerful effort, is used in another and very solemn application, in words of His 'Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able, when once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door; and will begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying, Lord! Lord! open to us; and He' -- He who said 'Knock, and it shall be opened' -- 'He shall answer and say to you, I know you not whence ye

are.' That you may escape that repulse, oh my friend! do you open your heart now to the knocking Christ, and then, then, and not till then, 'Ask!' that you may be filled with the treasures of His love, 'seek!' that you may find the rich provision He has laid up for us all, 'knock!' that door after door in the many mansions of the Father's House may be opened unto you; until at last an entrance is ministered abundantly into the everlasting kingdom, and you go in with the King to the eternal feast.

Chapter 97

THE TWO PATHS

'Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.' -- MATT. vii.13-14. A frank statement of the hardships and difficulties involved in a course of conduct does not seem a very likely way to induce men to adopt it, but it often proves so. There is something in human nature which responds to the bracing tonic of the exhortation: 'By doing thus you will have to face many hardships and many difficulties which you may avoid by leaving it alone; but do it, because it is best in the long run, being right from the beginning.' So the story of the martyrs' fires has lighted many a man to the faith for which the martyr was burned. Many a youth has been led to take the shilling and enlist by reading accounts of wounds and battles and sufferings. Our Lord will have no soldiers in His army on false pretences. They shall know exactly what they have to reckon on if they take service with Him. And thus, in the solemn and familiar words of my text, He enjoins each of us to become His disciples; and that not only because -- as is sometimes supposed -- of the blessing that lies at the end for His servants, but because of the very things on the road to the end which, at first sight, seemed difficulties. For you will observe that in my text the exhortation, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate,' is followed by two clauses, each of which begins with a 'for'; the one being a description of the road that is to be shunned; the other, an account of the path that is to be followed. In each description there are four contrasted particulars: the gate, strait or wide; the road, narrow or broad; the travellers, many or few; and the ends, life or destruction. Now, people generally read these words as if our Lord was saying, 'Though the one path is narrow and rugged and steep and unfrequented, yet walk on it, because it leads to life; and though the other presents the opposite of all these characteristics, yet avoid it, because pleasant and popular as it is, its end is destruction.' But that is not what He says. All four things are reasons for avoiding the one and following the other; which, being turned into plain English, is just this, that we ought to be Christian people precisely because there are difficulties and pains and sacrifices in being so, which we may ignobly shirk if we like. It is not, Though the road be narrow it leads to life, therefore enter it; but Because it is narrow, and leads to life, therefore blessed are the feet that are set upon it. Let us, then, look at these four characteristics, and note how they all enforce the merciful summons which our Lord is addressing to each of us, as truly as He did to the hearers gathered around Him on the mountain: 'Enter ye in at the strait gate.' I. The gates. The gate is in view here merely as a means of access to the road, and the metaphor simply comes to this, that it is more difficult to be a Christian man than not to be one, and therefore you ought to be one. Now, what makes a Christian? We do not need to go further than this Sermon on the Mount for answer. The two first of our Lord's Beatitudes, as they are called, are 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' and 'Blessed are they that mourn.' These two carry the conditions of entrance on the Christian life. There must be consciousness of our own emptiness, weakness, and need; there must be penitent recognition of our own ill-desert and lamentation over that. These two things, the consciousness of emptiness, and the sorrow for sin, make -- I was going to say -- the two door-posts of the narrow gate through which a man has to press. It is too narrow for any of his dignities or honours. A camel cannot go

through the eye of a needle, not only because of its own bulk, but because of the burdens which flap on either side of it, and catch against the jambs. All my self-confidence, and reputation, and righteousness, will be rubbed off when I try to press through that narrow aperture. You may find on a lonely moor low, contracted openings that lead into tortuous passages -- the approaches to some of the ancient 'Picts' houses,' where a feeble folk dwelt, and secured themselves from their enemies. The only way to get into them is to go down upon your knees; and the only way to get into this road -- the way of righteousness -- is by taking the same attitude. No man can enter unless -- like that German Emperor whom a Pope kept standing in the snow for three days outside the gate of Canossa -- he is stripped of everything, down to the hair-shirt of penitence. And that is not easy. Naaman wanted to be healed as a great man in the court of Damascus. He had to strip himself of his offices, and dignities, and pride, and to come down to the level of any other leper. You and I, dear brother, have to go through the same process of stripping ourselves of all the adventitious accretions that have clung to us, and to know ourselves naked and helpless, before we can pass through the gate. Further, we have to go in one by one. Two cannot pass the turnstile at the same time. We have to enter singly, as we shall have to pass through the other 'dark gates, across the wild which no man knows,' at the end of life. Because it is strait, it is a great deal easier to stop outside, as so many of those to whom I speak are doing. For that, you have nothing to do but to drift and let things drift. No decision nor effort is needed; no coming out of yourselves. It is all as easy as it is for a wild animal to enter in between the broadly extending palisades that converge as they come nearer the trap, so that the creature is snared before he knows. The gate is wide: that is the sure condemnation of it. It is always easy to begin bad and unworthy things, of all sorts. And there is nothing easier than to keep in the negative position which so many of my audience, I fear me, are in, of not being a Christian. But, on the other side, it is not so hard as it looks to go in, and it is not so easy as it seems to stop out. For there are two men in every man -- a better and a worse; and what pleases the one disgusts the other. The choice which each of us has to make is whether we shall do the things that are easiest to our worst self, or those that are easiest to our best self. For in either case there will be difficulties; in either case there will be antagonisms. But it is good for us to make the effort, apart altogether from the end. If there were no life eternal at the far end of the road which at this end has the narrow gate, it would contribute to all that is noblest and best in our characters, and to the repression of all that is ignoble and worst, that we should take that lowly position which Christ requires, and by the heroism of a self-abandoning faith, fling ourselves into His arms.Remember, too, that the strait gate, by reason of its very straitness, is in the noblest sense wide. If there were anything else required of a man than simply self-distrust and reliance on Jesus Christ, then this great Gospel that I am feebly trying to preach would be a more sectional and narrower thing than it is. But its glory is that it requires nothing which any man is unable to bring, that it has no invitation for sections, classes, grades of culture or intelligence or morality, but that in its great cosmopolitanism and universality it comes to every man; because it treats all as on one level, and requires from each only what all can bring -- knowledge of themselves as sinners, and humble trust in Jesus Christ as a Saviour. It is narrow because there is no room for sin or self-righteousness to go in; it is wide as the world, and, like the capacious portals of some vast cathedral, ample enough to receive without hustling, and to accommodate without inconvenience, every soul of man.II. Notice the contrast of the two roads, which, in like manner, points the exhortation to choose the better.The one is broad; the other is narrow. Which, being turned into plain English, is just this -- that the Christian course has limitations which do not

hamper the godless man; and that on the path of godlessness or Christlessness there is a deceptive appearance of freedom and independence which attracts many.'Narrow is the road.' Yes, if you are to be a Christian, you must have your whole life concentrated on, and consecrated to, one thing; and, just as the vagrant rays of sunshine have to be collected into a focus before they burn, so the wandering manifoldnesses of our aims and purposes have all to be brought to a point, 'This one thing I do,' and whatsoever we do we have to do it as in God, and for God, and by God, and with God. Therefore the road is narrow because, being directed to one aim, it has to exclude great tracts on either side, in which people that have a less absorbing and lofty purpose wander and expatiate at will. As on some narrow path in Eastern lands, with high, prickly-pear hedges on either side, and vineyards stretching beyond them, with luscious grapes in abundance, a traveller has to keep on the road, within the prickly fences, dusty though it may be, and though his thirsty lips may be cracking.I remember once going to that strange island-fortress off the Normandy coast, which stands on an isolated rock in the midst of a wide bay. One narrow causeway leads across the sands. Does a traveller complain of having to keep it? It is safety and life, for on either side stretches the tremulous sand, on which, if a foot is planted, the pedestrian is engulfed. So the narrow way on which we have to journey is a highway cast up, on which no evil will befall us, while on each hand away out to the horizon lie the treacherous quicksands. Narrowness is sometimes safety. If the road is narrow it is the better guide, and they who travel along it travel safely. Restrictions and limitations are of the essence of all nobleness and virtue. 'So did not I because of the fear of the Lord.'Set side by side with that the competing path. Wide? Yes! 'Do as you like' -- that is sufficiently wide. And even where that gospel of the animal has not become the guide to a man, there are many occupations, pursuits, recreations which men who lack the supreme concentration and consecration that come through over mastering love to Jesus Christ who has redeemed them, may legitimately in their own estimation do, but which no Christian man should do.But, as I said before about the gates, it is not so easy as it looks to walk the broad road, nor so hard as it seems to tread the narrow one. For 'her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace'; and, on the other hand, licentiousness and liberty are not the same thing, and true freedom is not to do as you like, but to like to do as you ought. Besides, the path which looks attractive, and tempts to the indulgence of many appetites and habits which a Christian man must rigidly subdue, does not continue so attractive. Earthly pleasures have a strange knack of losing their charm, and, at the same time, increasing their hold, with familiarity. Many a man who has plunged into some kind of dissipation because of the titillation of his senses which he found in it, discovers that the titillation diminishes and the tyranny grows; and that when he thought that he had bought a joy, he has sold himself slave to a master.So, dear friends, and especially you young people, let me beseech you to be suspicious of courses of conduct which come to you with the whisper, 'pleasant, sweet.' If you have two things before you, one of which is easy and the other hard, ninety times out of a hundred it will be safe for you to choose the hard one, and the odd ten times it will be at least as well for you to choose it. 'Thus we travel to the stars.' As one of our poets has it, 'the path of duty is the way of glory,' and those that 'scorn delights and live laborious days,' and listen not to the voices that say 'Come and enjoy this,' but to the sterner voice that says 'Come and bear this' -- these will 'Find the stubborn thistles bursting

Into glossy purples that outredden

All voluptuous garden roses.'So, because the road is narrow, therefore choose it. Because the other path is wide, I beseech you to avoid it.III. Note the travellers.On the one road there are 'few,' on the other, by comparison,'many.' That was true in Christ's time, and although the world is better since, and many feet have trodden the narrow way, and have found that it leads to life, yet I am afraid it is so still.Now, did you ever think, or do you believe, that the fact of a course of conduct, or of an opinion, being the conduct or the opinion of a majority, is pro tanto against it? 'What everybody says must be true,' says the old proverb, and I do not dispute it. What most people say is, I think, most often false. And that is true about conduct, as well as about opinion. It is very unsafe to take the general sense of a community for your direction. It is unsafe in regard to matters of opinion, it is even more unsafe in regard to matters of conduct. That there are many on a road is no sign that the road is a right one; but it is rather an argument the other way; looking at the gregariousness of human nature, and how much people like to save themselves the trouble of thinking and decision, and to run in ruts; just as a cab-driver will get upon the tram-lines when he can, because his vehicle runs easier there. So the fact that, if you are going to be Christ-like Christians, you will be in the minority, is a reason for being such.You young men in warehouses, and all of you in your different spheres and circles, do not be afraid of being singular. And remember that Jesus Christ, and one man with Him, though it is Athanasius contra mundum, are always in the majority.Now that is good, bracing teaching, apart altogether from Christianity. But I wish to bring it to bear especially in that direction. And so I would remind you that after all, the solitude in which a man may have to walk, if he sets Christ before him, and tries to follow Him with His cross upon his shoulders, is only an apparent solitude. For, look, whose footsteps are these on my path, not without spots of blood, where the tender feet have trod upon thorns and briars? There has been Somebody here before me. Who? 'Let him take up his cross and follow Me.' And if we follow Him, the solitude will be like that in which the two sad disciples walked on the Resurrection day, when a third came and joined Himself to them. So a second will come to each of us, if we are alone, and our hearts will burn within us. Nor shall we need to wait till the repose of the evening and the breaking of bread, before we know that 'it is the Lord'; nor, known and recognised, will He vanish from our sides.Dear brethren, because 'few there be that go in thereat,' and walk thereon, I beseech you to go in through the door of faith, and to walk in the way of Christ, who has left us an ensample that we should follow in His steps. If of thee it can be said, as the great Puritan poet said of one virgin pure, that thou' -- Wisely hast shunned the broad way and the green, And with those few art eminently seen

That labour up the hill of heavenly truth,' -- his assurance to her will be applicable to thee, and' -- Thou, when the Bridegroom, with His feastful friends, Passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night,

Hast gained thy entrance.'IV. That leads me to the last point -- viz. the contrasted ends of these two paths.Christ assumes the right to speak decisively and authoritatively with regard to the ultimate issues of human conduct, in a way which, as I believe, marks His divinity, and which no man can venture upon without presumption. Of the one path He declares without hesitation that it leads to life; of the other He affirms uncompromisingly that it 'leads to destruction.' Now, I dare not dwell upon these solemn thoughts with any enfeebling expansion by my own words, but I beseech you to lay them to heart -- only take the simple remark, as a commentary and an exposition of the solemn meaning of these issues, that life does not mean mere continuous existence, but, as it generally does upon His lips, means that which alone He recognises as being the true life of such

a creature as man -- viz. existence in union with Himself, the Source of life; and that, conversely, destruction does not mean merely the cessation of being, or what we call the destruction of consciousness and the annihilation of a soul, but that it means the continued consciousness of a soul rent away from Him in whom alone is life, and which therefore has made shipwreck of everything, and has destroyed itself.There are the issues, then, before us, and I dare not blur the clear distinction which Jesus Christ draws. I listen to Him, and accept His word, and I press upon you, dear brethren, that the main thing about a road is, after all, where it leads us; and I ask you to remember that your life-path -- as I try to remember that mine -- is tending to one or other of these two issues. The one path may be, and is, rough and steep though its delights are nobler, more poignant, and more permanent than any that can be found elsewhere. Steadily climbing like some mountain railway, it reaches at last the short tunnel on the summit level, and then dashes out into the blinding blaze of a new sunshine. The other goes merrily enough, at first, downhill, but at last it comes to the edge of the abyss, and there it stops, but the traveller does not. He goes over; and nobody can see the darkness into which he falls. Dear friends, Christ says, 'I am the Way.' Do you go to Him and cry, 'See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me into the way everlasting.'

Chapter 98

THE TWO HOUSES

'Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock....25. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.' -- Matt. vii.24, 25. Our Lord closes the so-called Sermon on the Mount, which is really the King's proclamation of the law of His Kingdom, with three pairs of contrasts, all meant to sway us to obedience. The first is that of the two ways: one broad, and leading down to abysses of destruction; the other narrow, and leading up to shining heights of life. The second is that of the two trees, one good and one bad, each bearing fruit according to its nature; by which our Lord would teach us that conduct is the outcome and revelation of character, and the test of being a follower of His. The third is that of our text, the two houses on the two foundations, and their fate before the one storm; by which our Lord would teach us that the only foundation on which can be built a life that will stand the blast of final judgment is His sayings and Himself. Now, there are many very important and profound links of connection and relation between these three contrasted pictures, but I only point to one thing here, and that is that in all of them Jesus Christ most decisively divides all His hearers -- for it is about them that He is speaking -- into two classes: either on the broad road or on the narrow, not a foot in each; either the good tree or the bad; either the house on the sand or the house on the rock. Such a sharp division is said nowadays to be narrow, and to be contradicted by the facts of life, in which the great mass of men are neither very white nor very black, but a kind of neutral grey. Yes, they are -- on the surface. But if you go down to the bottom, and grasp the life in its inmost principles and essential nature, I fancy that Jesus Christ's narrowness is true to fact. At all events, there it is. Now, following out the imagery of our text, I wish to bring before you the two foundations, the two houses, the one storm, the two endings. I. The two foundations: Rock, Sand. Now, to build on the Rock, Jesus Christ Himself explains to us as being the same thing as to hear and do His sayings. The one representation is plain fact, the other is metaphor which points precisely in the same direction. It is scarcely a digression if I pause for a moment, and point you to the singular and unique attitude which this Carpenter's Son of Nazareth takes up here, fronting the whole race with that 'whosoever,' and alleging that His sayings are an infallible law for conduct, and that He has the right absolutely to command every man, woman, and child of the sons and daughters of Adam. And the strange thing is that the best men have admitted His claim, have recognised that He had the right, and have seen that His precepts are the very ideal of human conduct, and, if they have ventured to criticise at all, their criticism has only been that the precepts are too good to be obeyed, and contemplate an ideal that is unreachable in human society. Be that as it may, there stands the fact that this Man, in this Sermon on the Mount, which so many people say has no doctrinal teaching in it, assumes an attitude which nothing can warrant and nothing explain except the full-toned belief that in Him we have God manifest in the flesh. But what I desire to point to now is the significance of this demand that He makes, that we shall take His sayings as the foundation of our lives. The metaphor is a very plain one, by which the principles that underlie or dominate and mould our conduct are regarded as the foundation upon which we build the structure of our lives. But the

Sermon on the Mount is not all of these 'sayings of Mine.' It is fashionable in certain quarters to-day to isolate these precepts, and to regard them as being the part of Christian Revelation by which men who set little store by theological subtleties, and reject the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Atonement, may still abide. But I would have you notice that it is absurd to isolate this Sermon on the Mount, or to deal with it as if it were the very centre of the Christian Revelation. It is nothing of the sort. Beautiful as it is, wonderful as it is as a high ideal of human conduct, it is a law still, though it is a perfect law; and it has all the impotences and all the deficiencies that attach to a law, if you take it and rend it out of its place, and insist upon dealing with it as if it stood alone. There is not a word in it that tells you how to keep its precepts. There is no power in it, or raying from it, to make a man obey any one of its commandments. It comes radiant and beautiful, but imperative, and just because no man keeps it to the full, its very beauty becomes menacing, and it stands there over against us, showing us what we ought to be, and, by consequence, what we are not. And is that all that Jesus Christ came into the world to do? God forbid! If He had only spoken this Sermon on the Mount -- which some of you take for the Alpha and the Omega of Christianity as far as you are concerned -- He would not have been different in essence from other teachers, -- though high above them in degree, -- who speak to us of the shining heights of duty that we are to scale, but leave us grovelling in the mire. The Sermon on the Mount, with its stringent requirements, absolutely demands to be completed by other thoughts and other 'sayings of Mine.' And so I remind you, not only that there are other 'sayings of Mine' to be kept than it, but also that there is no keeping of it without keeping other sayings first. For the highest of Christ's commandments is 'Believe also in Me,' and you have to take Him as your Redeemer and Saviour from death before you will ever thoroughly accept Him as your Guide and Pattern for life. We must first draw near to Him in humble penitence and lowly faith, and then there comes into our hearts a power which makes it possible and delightsome to keep even the loftiest, and in other aspects the hardest, of 'those sayings of Mine.' So, brethren, the obedience of which this text speaks is second, and the building of ourselves on Jesus Christ Himself, by faith in Him, is first. Only when we build on Him as our Saviour shall we build our lives upon Him in obedience to His commands. 'Behold! I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried corner-stone, a sure foundation, and he that believeth shall not make haste'; and long after the prophet said that, the Apostle catches up the same thought when he says, 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid. Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon.' Jesus Christ is the foundation of our lives, if we have any true life at all. He ought to be the foundation of all our thinking. His word should be the absolute truth, His life the final all-satisfying, perfect revelation of God, to our hearts. 'In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' The facts of His Incarnation, earthly life, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and present Sovereignty -- these facts, with the truths that are deduced from them, and the great glimpses which they afford into the heart of God and the depths of things, are the foundations of all true thinking on moral and social and religious questions, and on not a few other questions besides. Christ in His Revelation gives us the ultimate truth on which we have to build. He is also the foundation of all our hope, the foundation of all our security, the foundation of all our effort and aspiration. His Cross goes before the nations and leads them, His Cross stands by the individual, and anodynes the sense of guilt, and breaks the bondage and captivity of sin, and stirs to all lofty emotions and holy living, and moves ever in the van like the pillar of cloud and fire, the Pattern of our lives and the Guide of our pilgrimage. It is Christ Himself who is the foundation, and His death and sacrifice which are the sure basis of our hope, safety, and

blessedness; and it is only because He Himself is the Foundation, and what He has done for us is the basis of hope and blessedness, that He has the right to come to us and say, 'Take My commandments as the foundation on which you build your lives.' The Rock of Ages cleft for us, is the Rock on which we build if we are Christians; the other man built his house upon the sand. That is to say, shifting inclinations, short-lived appetites, transitory aims, varying judgments of men, the fashions of the day in morality, the changing judgments of our own consciences -- these are the things on which men build, if they are not building upon Jesus Christ. Like a vessel that has a raw hand at the helm, you sometimes head one way, and then the puff of wind that fills your sails dies down, or the sails that were flat as a board belly out a little, or you are caught in some current, and round goes the bowsprit on another tack altogether. How many of us are pursuing the objects which we pursued five-and-twenty years ago, if we have numbered so many years? What has become of aims that were everything to us then? We have won some of them, and they have turned out not half as good as we thought they would be. The hare is never so big when it is in the bag as when it is hurrying across the fields. We have missed some of them, and we scarcely remember that we once wanted them. We have outlived a great many, and they lie away behind us, hull down on the horizon, and we are making for some other point that, in like manner, if we reach it, will be left behind and be lost. There is nothing that lasts but God and Christ, and the people that build their lives upon them. I press upon all your hearts that one simple thought -- what an absurdity it is for us to choose for our life's object anything that is shorter-lived than ourselves! -- and how long-lived you are you know. They tell us that sand makes a very good foundation under certain circumstances. I believe it does, but what if the water gets in? What about it then? But in regard to all these transitory aims and short-lived purposes on which some of you are building your lives, there is a certainty that the water will come in some day. So, friend, dig deeper down, even to the Eternal Rock. That is the only foundation on which an immortal man or woman like you is wise to build your life. Are you doing it?II. Let me say a word, in the next place, about the two houses.The one is built upon the rock. That just means, of course -- and I need not enlarge upon that -- a life which is based upon, and shaped after, the commandments of Jesus Christ, His Pattern and Example. And that life will stand. Now, of course, the ideal would be that the whole of His sayings should enter into the whole of our lives, that no commandment of that dear Lord should be left unobeyed, and that no action of ours should be unaffected by His known will. That is the ideal, and for us the task of wisdom is daily to draw nearer and nearer to that ideal, and to bring the whole of our lives more and more under the sway and sanctifying influence of the whole sum of Christ's precepts. Of course, on the other side, the life that is built on the sand is the life which is not thus regulated by Christ's will and known commandments.But I desire rather to bring out, in a word or two, some of the lessons that may be gathered from this general metaphor of a man's life as a house. And the first that I would suggest is this: -- Have you ever thought of your life as being a whole, with a definite moral characteristic stamped upon it? I look upon the men and women that I come across in the world, and I cannot help seeing that a great many of them have never got into their heads the idea that their life is a whole. A house? No. A cartload of bricks, tumbled down at random, would be a better metaphor. A chain? No! A heap of links not linked. Many of you live from hand to mouth. Many of you have such unity in your life as comes from the pressure of the external circumstances of your trade or profession. But for anything like the living consciousness that life is a whole, with a definite moral character for which you are responsible, it has never dawned upon your mind. And so you go on haphazard, never bringing reflection to bear

upon the trend and drift of your days; doing what you must do because your occupation is this, that, or the other thing; doing what you incline to do in the matter of recreation; now and then sporadically, and for a minute or two, bringing conscience to bear, and being very uncomfortable sometimes when you do. But as for recognising the mystic solemnity of all these days of yours in that they are welded together, and are all tending to one end, and that each passing moment contributes its infinitesimal share to the awful solemn whole -- that has seldom entered your minds, and for a great many of you it has never had any effect in restraining or stimulating or regulating your conduct.Then there is another consideration which this metaphor suggests -- viz. that the house is built up by slow degrees, brick upon brick, course by course, day by day, and moment by moment. It is slow work, but certain work. 'Let every man take heed how he buildeth,' and never despise the little things. Very small bricks make a large house.Then there is another consideration that I would suggest, and that is, you have to live in the house that you build. Your deeds make the house that Christ is here speaking of. Like the chrysalis that spins out of its own entrails the cocoon in which it lies, so are you spinning, to vary the metaphor, what you lodge in, until you eat your way through it, and pass into the next stage of being. Our deeds seem transient, but although we are building on the sand we are building for Eternity, because, though the deeds are transient in appearance, they abide.They abide in memory. Some of you know how true that is. Black memories haunt some of us, and there could be for some no worse hell than that God should say, 'Son, remember.' You have to live in the house that you build. The deeds abide in habit. They abide in limiting and determining what we can be and do in the future; and in a hundred other ways that I must not touch upon. Only, I bring to you this question, and I pray God that you may listen to it and answer it: What are you building? A shop? That is a noble ambition, is it not? A pleasure-house? That is worse. A prison? Some of you are rearing for your incarceration a jail where you will be tied and held by the cords of your sins, and whence you will be unable to break out. Or are you building a temple? If you are building on Christ it is all right. Only take heed what you build on that foundation. III. Now let me say a word, in the next place, about the storm.I need not dwell upon the picturesque force of our Lord's description, so true to the sudden inundations of Eastern lands, and as true to the sudden floods of Northern countries when the snows melt. The house is attacked on all sides. From above, the rain comes down to beat on the roof, the wind rages round the walls, the flood comes swirling round the eaves from beneath, and if the house stands upon a cliff, the polished rock turns the flood off innocuous, but if it stands upon sand, the furious rush of waters eats a way beneath and undermines the whole.But you will notice that the description of the storm is repeated in both cases, and is verbatim the same in each. And the lesson from that is just this -- let no Christian man fancy that he is not going to be judged according to his works, for he is. The storm that comes, which I take distinctly to mean the final judgment which falls upon all men, beats against the house that is built upon the rock. For every one of us, Christian or not Christian, 'must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that we may receive according to the deeds done in the body.' Christian people, do not fancy that the great doctrine of forgiveness of sins and acceptance in the Beloved, means that you have not to stand His judgment according to your works. According to the other metaphor of the Apostle, working out the same idea with some changes in figure, the Christian man who builds 'upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble,' has his 'work tried by fire.' So all of us have to face that prospect, and I beseech you to face it wisely. A sensible builder calculates the strain to which his work will be exposed before he begins to put it up. Or if he does not there will befall it the

same fate that years ago befell that unfortunate Tay Bridge, where, by reason of girders too feeble, and piers not solid enough, and rivets left out where they should have been put in, one December night the whole thing went over into the water below. You have to stand the hurtling black storm. Take into account the strain which your building will have to resist, and build accordingly.IV. And now, lastly, one word about the two endings.'It stood'; 'it fell'; that is all. A life of obedience to Christ is stable, a life not based on Christ vanishes; and these two statements are true because whatsoever a man does for himself, apart from God in Christ, he is sowing to corruption, and he will reap corruption. As I said, nothing lasts but God, and what is done according to the will of God. And when the storm conies, whether the builder was a Christian man or not, all which was not thus built on Christ will be swept away, as the flimsy habitation of Eastern people, made of bamboos and oiled paper, are whirled away before the typhoon. All that was not built upon Christ -- and much of you Christian people's lives is not built on Christ -- will have to go.And what about the builders? 'If any man's work abide he will receive a reward.' 'Their works do follow them.' 'If any man's work is burned, he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.' And if any man has reared a structure of a life ignoring Jesus Christ, and with no connection with Him, then house and builder will perish together.Jesus Christ does not speak in my text about the righteousness or the unrighteousness of these two courses of conduct. He does not say, 'a good man does so-and-so, or a bad man does the other thing,' but he says: A wise man builds his house on the Rock, and a foolish man builds his on the sand. To live by faith and obedience is supreme wisdom. Every life which is not built upon Christ is the perfection of folly.

Chapter 99

THE CHRIST OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

'And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: 29. For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' -- MATT. vii.28-29. It appears, then, from these words, that the first impression made on the masses by the Sermon on the Mount was not so much an appreciation of its high morality, as a feeling of the personal authority with which Christ spoke. Had the scribes, then, no authority? They ruled the whole life of the nation with tyrannical power. They sat in Moses' seat, and claimed all manner of sway and control. And yet when people listened to Jesus, they heard something ringing in His voice that they missed in the rabbis. They only set themselves up, in their highest claims, as being commentators upon, and the expositors of, the Law. Their language was 'Moses commanded'; 'Rabbi this said so-and-so; Rabbi that said such-and-such.' But as even the crowd that listened to Him detected, Jesus Christ, in these great laws of His kingdom, adduced no authority but His own; stood forth as a Legislator, not as a commentator; and commanded, and prohibited, and repealed, and promised, on His own bare word. That is a characteristic of all Christ's teaching; and, as we see from my text, to the apprehension of the first auditors, it was deeply stamped on the Sermon on the Mount. I purpose to turn to that Sermon now, and try if we can make out the points in it which impressed these people, who first heard it, with the sense that they were in the presence of an autocratic Voice that had a right to speak, and which did speak, with absolute and unexampled authority. And I do that the more readily because I dare say you have all heard people that said 'Oh! I do not care about the dogmas of Christianity; give me the Sermon on the Mount and its sublime morality; that is Christianity enough for me.' Well, I should be disposed to say so pretty nearly too, if you will take all the Sermon on the Mount, and not go picking and choosing bits out of it. For I am sure that if you will take the whole of its teaching you will find yourself next door to, if not in the very inmost chamber of, the mysticism of the Gospel of John and the theology of Paul. I. I ask you, then, to note that the Sermon claims for Jesus Christ the authority of supremacy above all former revelation and revealers. 'Think not,' says He, 'that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' And then He goes on, in five cases, to illustrate, in a very remarkable way, the authority that He claimed over the former Law, moulding it according to His will. Now I do not propose to do more than suggest, in a sentence, two points that I think of importance. Observe that remarkable form of speech, 'I am come.' May we not fairly say that it implies that He existed before birth, and that His appearance among men was the result of His own act? Does it not imply that He was not merely born, but came, choosing to be born just as He chose to die? In what sense can we understand the Apostle's view that it was an infinite and stupendous act of condescension in Christ to 'be found in fashion as a man,' unless we believe that by His own will and act He came forth from the Father and entered into the world, just as by His own will and act He left the world and went unto the Father? But I do not dwell upon that, nor upon another very important consideration. Why was it that Jesus Christ, at the very beginning of His mission, felt Himself bound to disclaim any intention of destroying the law or the prophets? Must not the people have begun to feel that there was something revolutionary and novel about His teaching, and that it was threatening to disturb what had been consecrated by ages? So that it

was needful that He should begin His career with this disclaimer of the intention of destruction. Strange for a divine messenger, if He simply stood as one in the line and sequence of divine revelation, to begin His work by saying, 'Now, I do not mean to annihilate all that is behind Me!' The question arises how anybody should have supposed that He did, and why it should ever have been needful for Him to say that He did not. But I pass by all that, and ask you to think how much lies in these words of our Lord: 'I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' They imply a claim that His life was a complete embodiment of God's law. Here is a man beginning His ministry as a religious teacher, with the assertion, stupendous, and, upon any other lips but His, insane arrogance, that He had come to do everything which God demanded, and to set forth before the world a living Pattern of the whole obedience of a human nature to the whole law of God. Who is He that said that? And how do we account for the fact that nineteen centuries have passed, and, excepting in the case of here and there a bitter foe whose hostility had robbed him of his common sense, no lip has ventured to say that He claimed too much for Himself when He said, 'I am come to fulfil the law'; or that He falsely read the facts of His own experience and consciousness when He declared, 'I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.' Still further, here our Lord claims specifically and expressly to fulfil not only law but prophets. That is to say, He sets Himself forth as the Reality which had filled the imaginations and the hearts of a whole nation for centuries; as the living Reality which had been meant by all those lofty words of seers and prophets in the past. He declares that all those rapturous forecastings, all those dim anticipations, all those triumphant promises, were not left to swing in vacuo, or to float about unfulfilled, but that He stood there, the actual Realisation of them all; and in Him, wrapped up as in a seed, the Kingdom of Heaven was among men. And still further, He claims not only personal purity and completeness, and the fulfilment of all prior and prophetic anticipation, but also He claims to have, and He exercises, the power of moulding, expanding, interpreting, and in some cases brushing aside, laws which He and they alike knew to be the laws of God. I do not need to specify in detail the instances which are contained in this Sermon on the Mount. But I simply ask you to consider the formula with which our Lord introduces each of His references to that subject. 'Ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old time' so-and-so, -- and then follows a command of the Mosaic law; but 'I say unto you' so-and-so, -- and then follows a deepening or a modification or a repeal, of statutes acknowledged by Him and His hearers to be divine. He certainly claims to speak with the same right and authority as the old Law did. He as certainly claims to speak with incomparably higher authority than Moses did, for the latter never professed to give precepts of his own. He was not the Lawgiver, as he is often called, but only the messenger of the Lawgiver. But Christ is Himself the fountain of the laws of His Kingdom. Nor only so, but He puts Himself without apology or explanation in front of Moses and asserts power to modify, to set aside, or to re-enact with new stringency, the precepts of the divine law. One supposition alone accounts for Christ's attitude to law and prophets in this Sermon, and that is that the Eternal Wisdom and Personal Word of God, which at sundry times and in 'divers manners' spake to the old world by Moses, itself at last, in human form and personal guise, came here on earth and spake to us men. It is the same Voice that breathed through the prophets of old, and that spake on the lips of the Christ of Nazareth; the same Eternal Word who manifested Himself in a 'fiery law' on Sinai, and in words of no less majesty and of deepened gentleness, when He gathered the people round about Him, and said to them, 'It hath been said to them of old time, ... but I say unto you ...'Here is the sum and climax of all revelation, the last word of the divine mind and will and heart, to the world. Moses and Elias stand beside Him on the Mount

of Transfiguration, witnesses of His superiority and servants at His feet, and they vanish into mist and darkness, and leave there, erect, white-robed, solitary, the unique figure of the One Lawgiver and the perfect Revealer of God to men.And this is the authority which struck even on the unsusceptible hearts of the listening crowds.II. Still further, let me ask you to consider how, in this same great Sermon, He claims the authority of One who is unique in His relation to the Father.You will find that in it there occurs very frequently the expression, 'your Father which is in Heaven'; or sometimes with the variation,'thy Father which is in Heaven,' or, 'which seeth in secret.' But you will also find that whilst our Lord speaks about 'My Father which is in Heaven,' He never says 'our Father'; excepting in the exception which proves the rule when He is putting into the lips of His disciples the great formula of prayer which we call the 'Lord's Prayer'; and there speaking as through their consciousness, and teaching them their lesson, He says 'Our Father,' not as if He Himself were praying, but as if He were telling them how to pray. But when He speaks out of His own consciousness He speaks of 'My Father' and 'your Father,' never of 'our Father.'And that corresponds with other phenomena in Scripture in our Lord's own language where you find that always He draws this broad distinction. He never associates Himself with us in His Sonship. He ever asserts that He is the Son of God. Even when He wishes to speak with the utmost tenderness, He bids the weeping Mary hear the message, 'I go unto My Father and your Father.' This doctrine is thought by many to be one of those which they get rid of by professing the Christianity of the Sermon on the Mount. But it is there as plainly as in other parts of Scripture. If we accept all which it teaches, we cannot escape from the belief that He is the only begotten and well-beloved Son of the Father; and also that through Him and in Him we, too, may receive the adoption of sons.Dear friends, I press this upon you as no mere piece of hard theological doctrine, but as containing in it the very essentials of all spiritual life for each of us, that all our spiritual life must come by participation in Christ, and that we enter into an altogether new and blessed relation to God when, laying our humble and penitent hands on the head of that dear Sacrifice that died on the Cross for as, we through Him cease to be children of wrath and become heirs of God. 'To as many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become the children of God, even to them that believe in His name,' but His Sonship stands unique and unapproachable, though it is the foundation from which flows all the sonship of the whole family in heaven and in earth. Moses and the prophets, teachers and guides, Apostles and Helpers, they are all but the servants of the family; this is the Son through whom we receive the adoption of sons.III. We have in this great discourse the authority of One who is absolute Lord and Master over men.'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord! Lord! shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?' 'Whoso heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.'Jesus Christ here comes before the whole race, and claims an absolute submission. His word is to control, with authoritative and all-comprehensive scrutiny and power, every aim of our lives, and every action. In His name we may be strong, in His name we may cast out devils, in His name we may do many wonderful works. If we build upon Him we build upon a rock; if we build anywhere else we build upon the sand.Strange, outrageous claims for a man to make! 'Give me the Sermon on the Mount, and keep your doctrinal theology,' say people. But I want to know what kind of morality it is that is all traceable up to this -- 'Do as I bid you, My will is your law; My smile is your reward; to obey Me is perfection.' I think that takes you a good long way into 'theology.' I think that the Man who said that -- and you all know that He said it -- must he

either a good deal more or a good deal less than a perfect man. If He is only that He is not that; for if He is only that, He has no business to tell me to obey Him. He has no business to substitute His will for every other law; and you have no business -- and it will be at the peril of your manhood if you do -- to take any man, the Man Christ or any other, as an absolute example and pattern and master. My brethren, Christ's claim to absolute obedience rests upon His divine nature and on His redeeming work. He has delivered us from our enemies, and therefore He commands us. He has given Himself for us, and therefore He has a right to say, 'Give yourselves to Me.' He is God manifest in the flesh, and therefore absolute power becomes His lips, and utter submission is our dignity. To say to Him 'Lord, Lord,' carries us whole universes beyond saying to Him, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'IV. And now, lastly, we have in this great discourse the authority of our Lord set forth as being the authority of Him who is to be the Judge of the world.'Then will I profess unto you I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.' He, the meek, the humble, who never claimed for Himself anything except what His consciousness compelled Him to assert, who desired only that men should know Him for what He was, because it was their life so to know Him, here declares that the whole world is to be judged by Him, that He has such knowledge of men as will pierce beneath the surface of professions and will be undazzled by the most stupendous miracles, and beneath the eloquent words of many a preacher and the wonderful works of many a so-called Christian philanthropist, will see the hidden rottenness that they never saw, and, tearing down the veil, will reveal men at the last to themselves.That is no human function, that is no work that belongs to a mere teacher, pattern, martyr, sage, philosopher, or saint. That is a divine work; and the authority of Him whose final word to each of us will settle beyond appeal our fate, and reveal beyond cavil our character, is a divine authority. He has a right to command because He is going to judge; and the lips that declare the law are the lips that will read the sentence.So, my brethren, do you take the whole Christ for yours, the Son of God, the crown and end of revelation, the sinless and the perfect, who died on the Cross for our salvation, and loves and pities, and is ready to help every one of us; who, therefore, commands us with an absolute authority, and who one day comes to be our Judge? If you turn to Him and ask Him, 'Art Thou He that should come?' let Him speak for Himself, and He will answer you: 'I that speak unto thee am He.' When He asks each of us, as He does now, 'Whom sayest thou that I am?' oh that we may all answer, with the assent of our understandings, with the love of our hearts, with the submission of our wills, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

Chapter 100

THE TOUCH THAT CLEANSES

'When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him.1. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.3. And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will; he thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.4. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.' -- MATT. viii.14. THE great collection of Jesus' sayings, which we call the Sermon on the Mount, is followed by a similar collection of Jesus' doings, which we call miracles. It is significant that Matthew puts the words first and the works second, as if to teach us the relative importance of the two. Some one has said that miracles are 'the bell rung before the sermon,' but Matthew thinks that the sermon comes first. He masses together nine miracles (the raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the woman with the bloody issue being so closely connected that they may be regarded as one) which are divided into three groups of three each, and are separated by three sections of more general character, like three landings in a broad flight of stairs, or three breaks in a procession (ch. viii.18-22; ix.9-17, 35-38). The first triplet comprises miracles of bodily healing, and shows Jesus as the great physician, curing leprosy, palsy, and fever, three types of disease which have their analogues in the moral world. The cure of the leper comes first, apparently not from chronological reasons, but because leprosy had been made by the Old Testament legislation the symbol of sin. The story is found in all the Synoptic Gospels, with slight variations, which make more impressive their verbal identity in reporting the leper's appeal and the Lord's answer. A leper had to keep apart from men and was shunned by them, but this one ventured to mingle with the 'great multitudes' that 'followed' Jesus, till he reached His side. He must have known something of Christ to have approached Him with a flicker of long-absent hope in his heart. No doubt he had heard of some of the earlier miracles; and no doubt the crowd recoiled from him so that he could easily reach Jesus. When he got there he worshipped, or, as Luke puts it, 'fell on his face,' and made his appeal. It would be all the more piteous, because it was spoken in that feeble, hoarse voice characteristic of leprosy, and it was in itself most pathetic. The poor creature has won his way to a surprising confidence, dashed with a yet more surprising diffidence and doubt. He is sure of the power, but not of the willingness, of this wonderful healer. 'Thou canst,' does not make him confident, because it is weakened by 'If Thou wilt.' Faith, desire, humility, and submissiveness are beautifully smelted together in the wistful words, which are all the more prevalent a prayer, because they do not venture to take the form of prayer. To tell Jesus that His will was all that was needed to heal him was, as it were, to throw the responsibility for this continued misery on Him who could so easily deliver, if He only willed to do it. But the hope which gleamed before his poor eyes was only a gleam, obscured by his ignorance of Jesus' disposition towards him. The lowly acquiescence, with which he leaves Jesus to decide whether he is to be freed from his horrible, living death, is very beautiful, and speaks of a patient, disciplined spirit, as well as of a profound insight into our Lord's authority. The leper does cling to the hope that Jesus does will to heal him, but he will not rebel if he is left shut up in his prison-house. Surely in such a blending of trust, yearning, and acceptance of that Will, whatever it involved, there was the germ of discipleship.

Surely there was, at least, the beginning of a living union with Jesus, which would heal more than the leprosy of the flesh. Mark gives the precious addition to the narrative, of a glimpse into the heart of Jesus, when he tells us that, 'moved with compassion,' He 'put forth His hand and touched him.' Swift and, we may almost say, instinctive was the outgoing of pity from the heart, which was so pitiful because it was so pure, and laid on itself every man's sorrow because it carried no burden of its own sin or self-regard. That touch had deep meaning, but it was not done for the sake of a meaning. It was the spontaneous expression of love, and revealed the delicate quickness of perception of another's feelings which flows from love only. The leper had almost forgotten what the touch of a hand felt like. He had lived, ever since his disease was manifest, apart from others, had perhaps lost the embraces of wife and children, had walked alone in crowds, and had a heart-chilling circle cleared round him everywhere. But now this Man stretches His hand across the dreary gulf, and lets him feel once more the sweetness of a warm and gentle touch. It was half the cure; it was the complete clearing away of the last film of the cloud of doubt as to the will of Jesus. It answered the 'if' by something that spoke louder than any word. And, though it was not meant for anything but the silent voice of pity and love, we do not rob it of its beautiful spontaneity when we see, in the touch of that pure hand on the rotting feculence of leprosy, a parable of the Incarnation, in which He lays hold on our flesh of sin and is yet without sin -- contracts no defilement by contact, but by touching cleanses the foulness on which He lays His white fingers. By that touch He proclaimed Himself the priest, to whom the Law gave the office of laying his hand on the leper. But the great word accompanying the touch is majestic in its brevity and absolute claim to absolute power. Jesus accepts the leper's lofty conception of His omnipotent will, as He always accepted the highest conceptions that any formed of His person or authority. The sovereign utterance, 'I will,' claims possession of the divine prerogative of affecting dead matter by the mere outgoing of His volition. Not only is it true of Him that 'He spake and it was done,' but He willed and it was done; and these are the hall-marks of divine power. Neither the touch of His hand nor the word of His lips cleansed the leper, but simply the exercise of His will, of which word and touch were but audible and visible tokens for sense to grasp. The form of the poor husky croak for help determined the form of the answer, and the correspondence is marked by all the evangelists as a striking instance of Christ's loving way of echoing our petitions in His replies, and moulding His gifts to match our desires. Thunder in heaven wakes echoes on earth, but more wonderful is it that the thin voice of our supplications, when we scarcely dare to shape them into prayers, should wake a voice from the throne, which, though it is mighty as 'the voice of many waters' and sweet as that of 'harpers harping with their harps,' deigns to echo our poor cries. The prohibition to speak of the cure till the priests had pronounced it real and complete is more stringent in Mark, who also tells how utterly it was disregarded. Its reason was obviously the wish to comply with the law, and also the wish to get the official seal to the cure. Jesus did desire the miracle to be known, but not till it was authoritatively certified by the priest whose business it was to pronounce a sufferer clean. It was for the leper's advantage, too, that he should have the official certificate, since he would not be restored to society without it. One does not wonder that the prohibition was disregarded in the uncontrollable delight and wonder at such an experience. The leper was eloquent, as we all can be, when our hearts are engaged, and his blessing refused to be hid. Alas, how many of us, who profess to have been cleansed from a worse defilement, find no such impulse to speak welling up in ourselves! Alas, how superfluous is the injunction to hundreds of Christ's disciples: 'See thou say nothing to any man'!

Chapter 101

THE FAITH WHICH CHRIST PRAISES

'The centurion answered and said: Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.9. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go! and he goeth; and to another, Come I and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this; and he doeth it.' -- MATT. viii.8-9. This miracle of the healing of the centurion's servant is the second of the great series which Matthew gives us. It is perhaps not accidental that both the first and the second miracles in his collection point out our Lord's relation to outcasts from Israel. The first of them deals with a leper, the second with the prayer of a heathen. And so they both contribute to the great purpose of Matthew's Gospel, the bringing out of the nature of the kingdom and the glory of the King. My object now is to deal with the whole of the incident of which I have read the most important part. We have in the story three things: the man and his faith; Christ's eulogium upon the faith, and declaration of its place in His kingdom; and the answer to the faith. Look, then, at these three in succession. I. We consider, first, the man and his faith. He was a heathen and a Gentile. The Herod, who then ruled over Galilee, had a little army, officered by Romans, of whom probably this centurion was one; the commander, perhaps, of some small garrison of a hundred men, the sixtieth part of a legion, which was stationed in Capernaum. If we look at all the features of his character which come out in the story, we get a very lovable picture of a much more tender heart than might have been supposed to beat under the armour of a mercenary soldier set to overawe a sullen people. 'He loveth our nation,' say the elders of the Jews, -- not certainly because of their amiability, but because of the revelation which they possessed. Like a great many others in that strange, restless era when our Lord came, this man seems to have become tired of the hollowness of heathenism, and to have been groping for the light. His military service brought him into contact with Judaism and its monotheism, and his heart sprang to that as the thing he had been seeking. 'He hath built us a synagogue,' thereby expressing his adhesion to, or at least his lofty estimate of, the worship which was there carried on. Just as, if an English officer in India were, in some little village or other, to repair a ruined temple, he would win the hearts of all the people, because they would think he was coming over to Brahminism; so this soldier was felt to be nearer to the Jews than his official position might have suggested. Then, there was in him a beautiful human kindliness, which neither the rough military life, nor that carelessness about a slave -- which is one of the worst fruits of slavery, had been able to sour or destroy. He was tenderly anxious about his servant, who, according to Luke's expression, was 'dear to him.' Then we get as the crown of all the beauty of his character, the lowliness of spirit which the 'little brief authority' in which he 'was dressed' had not puffed up. 'I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof.' That lowliness is emphasised in Luke's version of the story, which is more detailed and particularly accurate than Matthew's summary account. By it we learn that he did not venture to come himself, but sent His messengers to Jesus. If we take Matthew's version, there is another lovely trait. He does not ask Christ to do anything. He simply spreads the necessity before Him, in the confidence that His pitying love lies so near the surface that it was sure to flow forth, even at that light touch. He will not prescribe, he tells the story, and leaves all to Him. Christ's answer, 'I will come and heal him,' throbs with the

consciousness of power, and is gentle with tenderness, quick to interpret unspoken wishes, and not slow to answer, unless it is for the wisher's good to be refused. When He was asked to go, because the asker considered that His presence was necessary for His power to have effect, He refused; when He is not asked to go, He volunteers to do so. He is moved to apparently opposite actions by the same motive, the good of the petitioner, whose weak faith He strengthens by refusal, whose strong faith He confirms by acquiescence. And that is the law of His conduct always, and you and I may trust it absolutely, He may give, or retain ungiven, what we desire; in either case, He will be acting in order that our trust in Him may be deepened. That brings us to the remarkable and unique conception of our Lord's manner of working and power to which this centurion gives utterance. 'I also' (for the true text of Matthew has that 'also,' as the Revised Version shows), 'I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. Speak thou with a word only and my servant shall be healed.' A centurion was likely to understand the power of a word of command. His whole training had taught him the omnipotence of the uttered will of the authoritative general, and although he was but an officer over a poor sixtieth part of a legion, yet in some limited measure the same power lay in him, and his word could secure unhesitating submission. One good thing about the devilish trade of war is that it teaches the might of authority and the virtue of absolute obedience. And even his profession, with all its roughness and wickedness, had taught the centurion this precious lesson, a jewel that he had found in a dunghill, the lesson that, given the authoritative lip, a word is omnipotent. The commander speaks and the legion goes, though it be to dash itself to death. So he turns to Christ. Does he mean to parallel or to contrast his subordination and Christ's position? The 'also,' which, as I remarked, the Revised Version has rightly replaced in the text here, is in favour of the former supposition, that he means to parallel Christ's position with his own. And it is much more natural to suppose that a heathen man, with little knowledge of Christ and of the depths of the divine revelation in the past, should have attained to the conception of Jesus as possessing a real but subordinate and derived authority, than to suppose that he had grasped, at that early stage, the truth which Christ's nearest friends took long years to understand, and which some of them do not understand yet, viz. that Christ possessed as His own the power which He wielded. But if we take this point of view, and consider that the centurion's conception falls beneath the lofty Christian ideal of Christ's power in the universe, as it is set forth to us in the New Testament, even then His words set forth a truth. For if we believe on the one hand in the divinity of our Lord and Saviour, we also believe that 'the Son is subject to the Father' and listen to His own words when He says, 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.' So that whatever difference there may be between His relation to the power which He wields and that of a prophet or miracle-worker, who derives his power from Him, this is true, that Christ's power, too, is a power given to Him. But the other side is one that I desire to emphasise in a few words, viz. that the centurion's conception falls short of the truth, inasmuch as, if we believe in Christ's witness to Himself, we must believe that the power which acted through His word, dwelt in Him, in an altogether different relation to His person from that in which an analogous power may have dwelt in any other man. 'He spake and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast.' Diseases fled at His word. 'By the breath of His mouth He slew' these enemies of men. He rebuked the storm, and the howling of the wind and the dashing of the waves were less loud than His calm voice. He flung a word into the depths of the grave, strangely speaking to, and yet more strangely heard by, the dull cold ear of death, and Lazarus, dazzled, stumbles out into

the light. Who is this, that commandeth the waves, and the seas, and the sicknesses, and they obey Him? My brother, I pray that you and I, in these days of hesitation, when many a truth is clouded by doubt, may be able to answer with the full assent and consent of understanding and heart, 'this is God manifest in the flesh.' And remember that this prerogative of dealing with physical nature, by the bare forth-putting of His word, is not only a doctrine of Christianity, but that more and more physical investigation is coming to the unifying of all forces in one, and to the resolving of that one into the force of a will, and that all that will, as the Christian scheme teaches us, is lodged in Jesus Christ. His lip speaks, and it is power. He moves in nature, in providence, in history, in grace, because in Him abides now in the form of a man, that same everlasting Word which was with the Father, and by whom all things were made. The centurion bows before the Commander, and the Christ says, 'as Captain of the Lord's host am I now come.' Such, then, is the faith of this soldier taught him by the Legion. II. Now a word next as to our Lord's eulogium on his faith. Jesus Christ accepts and endorses the centurion's estimate of Him, as He always accepts the highest place offered Him. No one ever proffered to Jesus Christ honours that He put by. No one ever brought to Him a trust which He said was either excessive or misdirected. 'Speak the word and my servant shall be healed,' said the centurion. Contrast Christ's acceptance of this confidence in his power with Elijah's 'Am I a God, to kill and to make alive, that they send this man to me to recover him of his leprosy?' Or contrast it with Peter's 'Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?' Christ takes as His due all the honour, love, and trust, which any man can give Him -- either an exorbitant appetite for adulation, or the manifestation of conscious divinity.'And He marvelled.' Twice we read in Scripture that Christ wondered -- once at this heathen's faith, so strongly grown, with so few advantages of culture; once at Jewish unbelief, so feeble and fruitless, after so much expenditure of patience and care. But passing from that, notice how much lies in these sad and yet astonished words of His: 'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.' Then, He came seeking faith from this people whom God had cared for during centuries. The one fruit that He desired was trust in Him. That is what He is seeking for in us -- not lives of profession, not orthodoxy of conception, not even fruits in work, but before all this, and productive of all that is good in any of them, He desires to find in our hearts the child's trust that casts itself wholly on His Omnipotent word, and is sure of an answer. This man's faith was great, great in the rapidity of its growth, great in the difficulties which it had overcome, great in the clearness of its conception, great in the firmness of its affiance, great in the humility with which it was accompanied. Such a faith He seeks as the thirsty traveller seeks grapes in the wilderness, and when He finds it growing in our hearts, then He is satisfied and glad.Still further, there is brought out the dignity of faith as being not only the great desire of Christ's heart for each of us, but also as being the one means of admission into the kingdom. 'I say unto you, many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness.' Strange that Matthew's, the Jewish gospel, should record that saying. Strange that Luke's, the universal human gospel, should omit it. But it was relevant to Matthew's great purpose to make very plain this truth -- which the nation were forgetting, and which was gall and wormwood to them, -- that hereditary descent and outward privileges had no power to open the door of Christ's Kingdom to any man, and that the one thing which had, was the one thing which the centurion possessed and the Jews did not, a simple trust in that divine Lord.My brethren, there are many of us who attach precisely the same value as these Jews did, in

slightly different forms, to external connection with religion and religious institutions. What blunts the sharpest words that come from pulpits, and prevents them from getting to hearts and consciences, is just that pestilent old Jewish error, that because men have always had a kind of outward hold on the Kingdom, therefore they do not need the teaching that the publicans and the harlots want.My dear friend, nothing binds a man to Christ but trust. Nothing opens the doors of His Kingdom, either here on earth or yonder, but reliance upon Him. And although you were steeped to the eye-brows in religious privileges, and high in place in His church, it would avail nothing. The Kingdom of Christ is a Kingdom into which faith, and faith only, admits a man. Therefore from the furthest corners of the world Christ's sad prescience saw the Gentiles flocking, and the Jews who trusted in externals, cast out.I need not dwell on the two halves of the picture here, the radiant glow of the one, the tragic darkness of the other. The feast expresses abundance, joy, rest, companionship. 'They shall come' says Christ; then He is there, and sitting at the head of the table; and the Master's welcome makes the feast. On the other hand, that which is without the banqueting hall is dark. That darkness is but the making visible of the nature of the men. Hell comes out of a man before it surrounds him. They 'were sometime darkness,' and now they are in the darkness. I say no more about that, I dare not; but I pray you to remember that the lips which said this 'spake that He did know'; and to take heed lest, speculating and arguing, and sometimes quarrelling, about the nature and the duration of future retribution, we should lose our sense of the awfulness and certainty of the fact.III. So one word lastly as to the answer that faith brings.'Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.' He heals at a distance, and shapes His gift by the man's desire. The form of the vase that is dipped into the sea settles the quantity and the shape of the water that is taken out. There is a wide truth in that, on which I do not now enlarge. The measure of my faith is the measure of my possession of Christ. He puts the key of the treasure-house into our hands and says, 'Go in, and take as much as you like'; and some of us come out with a halfpenny as all that we care to bring away. You are starving, some of you, whilst you are sitting in a granary bursting with plenty. Suppose a proclamation were made, 'There will be given away gold to anybody that likes to come. Let them bring a purse, and it will be filled.' How large a purse do you think you would like to take? A sack, I should think. Christ says that to you; and you bring a tiny thing like what they keep sovereigns in, that will scarcely hold a farthing, with such a narrow throat is it provided, and so small its interior accommodation. 'Ye have not because ye ask not.' 'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.'

Chapter 102

SWIFT HEALING AND IMMEDIATE SERVICE

'And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.15. And He touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose and ministered unto them.' -- MATT. viii.14-15. Other accounts give a few additional points. Mark: -- That the house was that of Peter and Andrew. That Christ went with James and John. That He was told of the sickness. That He lifted her up. Luke, physician-like, diagnoses the fever as 'great.' He also tells us that the sick woman's friends besought Jesus and did not merely 'tell' Him of her. May we infer that to His ear the telling of His servants' woes is a prayer for His help? He does not mention Christ's touch, which Mark here and elsewhere delights to record, and which Matthew also specifies. He fixes attention on the all-powerful word which was the vehicle of Christ's healing might. Both evangelists put this miracle in its chronological order, from which it appears that it was done on the Sabbath day, which explains our verse 16, 'when the even was come.' I. The scene of the miracle. The domestic privacy of the great event seems to have struck the evangelists. It stands between the narrative of Christ's public work in the synagogue, and the story of the eager crowds who came round the doors. So it gives us a glimpse of the uniformity of that life of blessing as being the same in public and in private. Again, it suggests the characteristic absence of all ostentation in His works. We can scarcely suppose this miracle done for the sake of showing His divinity. It was pure goodness and sympathy which moved Him.It occurred in a household of His disciples. There, too, sorrow will come. But there, if they tell Him of it, His help will not be far away. This is one of the few miracles wrought on one of His more immediate followers. The Resurrection of Lazarus, so like this in many respects, is the only other.This scene of the healing Christ in His disciples' household suggests the whole subject of the effect on domestic life of Christianity, or more truly of Christ Himself. It is scarcely too much to say that the home, as many of us blessedly know, is the creation of Christ. Cana of Galilee -- The household at Bethany.II. The time.After His long day's toil -- the unwearied mercy. On the Sabbath -- the Lord of the Sabbath.III. The person.The woman. How Christianity embodies the true emancipation of women. They are participants in an equal gift, honoured by admission to equal service.IV. The effect.'She ministered'; testimony of the completeness of the cure. Which completeness is also real in the spiritual region.How the basis of all our service must be His healing. Ours second, not first.How the end of His healing is our service. We are bound to render it: He desires it. How each one's character and circumstances determine his service. How common duties may be sanctified. He accepts our service whatever it be.The Sabbath. The services of love come before ritual observance, in Jesus and in the cured woman.

Chapter 103

THE HEALING CHRIST

'Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.' -- MATT. viii.17. You will remember, probably, that in our Old Testament translation of these words they are made to refer to man's mental and spiritual evils: 'He bare our griefs and carried our sorrows.' Our evangelist takes them to refer, certainly not exclusively, but in part, to men's corporeal evils -- 'our infirmities' (bodily weaknesses, that is) 'and our sicknesses.' He was distinctly justified in so doing, both by the meaning of the original words, which are perfectly general and capable of either application, and by the true and deep view of the comprehensiveness of our Lord's mission and purpose. Christ is the antagonist of all the evils that affect man's life, whether his corporeal or his spiritual; and no less true is it that, in His deep sympathy, 'He bare our sicknesses' than that, in the mystery of His atoning death, 'He was wounded for our transgressions.' It is, therefore, this point of view of Christ, as the Healer, which I desire to bring before you now. I. First, I ask you to look at the plain facts as to our Lord's ministry which are contained in these words: -- 'Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.' Now, there are two points that I desire to emphasise very briefly. One is the prominence in Christ's life which is given to His healing energy. We are accustomed to think of His cures as miracles. We are accustomed to think of them in that aspect as evidences of His mission, or as difficulties and stumbling-blocks, as the case may be. But I ask you to put away all such thoughts for a minute, and think about the miracles simply as being cures. Remember how enormous a proportion of our Lord's time and pains and sympathy and thoughts was directed to that one purpose of healing people of their bodily infirmities. We may almost say that to an outsider He would look a great deal liker a man who, as the Apostle Peter painted Him in one of his earliest addresses, 'went about doing good and healing,' than as a teacher of divine wisdom, to say nothing of an incarnation of the divine nature. His miracles of healing were certainly the most conspicuous part of His life's work. And then, remember, that whilst the great proportion of our Lord's miracles are miracles of healing, we are sure that the whole of the recorded miraculous works of our Lord are the smallest fraction of what He really did. You remember how there crop up, here and there, in the Gospels, general resumes of our Lord's work, of such a kind as this: -- 'And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy and He healed them.' Or, again: -- 'And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee, and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto Him, having those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them.' Now these are but specimens of the occasional generalisations which we find in the Gospels, which warrant us in saying that, according to the New Testament record, Christ's works of healing were to be numbered, not by tens, but by hundreds, and perhaps by thousands. That is the first fact calling for notice. The words of our text suggest a second thought as to the cost at which these cures were wrought. 'Himself took and bare' does not mean only 'took away.' It includes that, as a consequence, but it points to something before the removal

of the sicknesses. It points to the fact that Christ in some real sense endured the loads which He removed. Of course, His cross is the highest exemplification of the great law which runs through His whole life, that He identifies Himself with all the evil which He takes away, and is able to take it away only because He identifies Himself with it. But whilst the cross is the highest exemplification of this, every miracle of mercy which He wrought is an illustration of the same principle in its appropriate fashion, and upon a lower level. And although we cannot say that the physical sufferings which He alleviated were physically laid upon Him, yet we can say that He so identified Himself with all sufferers by His swift sympathy as that He bore, and therefore bore away, the diseases as well as the sins of the men for whose healing He lived, and for whose redemption He died. The proof of this crops up now and then. What did it mean that, when He stood beside one poor sufferer, before He could utter from His authoritative lips the divine word of power, 'Ephphatha, be opened,' the same lips had to shape themselves for the utterance of an altogether human and brotherly sigh? Did it not mean that the condition of His healing power was sympathy, that He must bring Himself to feel the burden that He will roll away? That sigh proves that His cures were the works, not without cost to the doer, of a sympathising heart, and not the mere passionless acts of a miracle-monger. In like manner, what meant that strange tempest of agitation that swept across the pacific ocean of His nature ere He stood by the grave of Lazarus? Why that being 'troubled in Himself' before He raised him? Wherefore the tears that heralded the restoration of the man to life? They could not be shed for the loss that was so soon to be repaired. They can only have been the emotion and tears of One who saw, as massed in one black whole, the entire sorrows that affected physical humanity, and rose in a holy passion of indignation and of sorrow at the sight of that enemy, Death, with whose beginnings He had wrestled in many a miracle of restoration, and whose sceptre He was now about to pluck from his bony clutch. Therefore I say that Christ the healer bore, and thereby bore away, the sicknesses and the infirmities of men. Amidst mountains of rubbish and chaff, the Rabbis have a grain of wheat in their legend which tells us that Messias is to come as a leper, and to be found sitting amongst the lepers at the city's gate; which is a picturesque and symbolical way of declaring the same truth that I am now insisting upon, the participation by the Redeemer in all burdens and sorrows of body and of spirit which He takes away. II. And now with these facts -- for I take them to be such -- for the basis of our thoughts, let me ask you to turn, in the second place, to some plain practical conclusions that come from them. The first of these that I would suggest is the lesson as to the proper sweep and sphere of Christian beneficence. As I said in my introductory remarks, we do not rightly measure the whole circumference of Christ's work unless we regard it as covering and including all forms of human evil. He is the antagonist of everything that is antagonistic to man -- pain, misery, sickness, death itself. All these are excrescences on the divine design, transient accompaniments of disordered relations between God and man. And this great physician of souls fights the disease and does not neglect the symptoms; deals with the central evil and is not so absorbed with that as to omit from His view or His treatment the merely superficial manifestations of it.So that if Christian people, individually and as Churches, are justly exposed, in any measure, to the sarcasm which is freely cast upon them, that they neglect the temporal well-being of men in order to attend exclusively to their spiritual wants, they have not learned the example of such partial treatment from their Master; nor have they taken in the significance and the power of His life in its relation to human sorrow. All that makes the heart bleed Christ comes to take away. 'All the ills that flesh is heir to,' as well as those which each spirit, by rebellion, brings upon itself -- are the

foes with whom Christ has left His Church in the world in order to wage incessant warfare. If we Christians, oppressed with the sense of the depth and central nature of the evil of man's sin, have so devoted ourselves to preaching and evangelising, that we are, in any measure, rightly chargeable with neglecting hospitals and infirmaries and other forms of relief for temporal necessities, just in that proportion have we departed from our Master's spirit. But I do not, for my part, much believe, either in the good faith of the accusers or in the applicability of the charge which men, who never do anything for the religious improvement of their fellows, are apt to bring against us. My little experience, I think, teaches me that the folk who say to us 'Do not waste your money on Bibles and missionaries, give it to hospitals and schools,' are not usually the people that 'waste their money' on either; and that the largest portion of all the work that is done in England to-day, for the temporal well-being of men, comes from the Christians who also do work for their spiritual well-being.But let us learn the lesson, if we need it, from our enemies and our critics; and see to it that the more we feel the lofty and transcendent importance of carrying Christ's salvation to men's souls, the more we endeavour, likewise, to live amongst them as He did, the embodiment of pity, wide-eyed and comprehensive, for every evil that racks their hearts and every pain that tortures their nerves. As a fact, hospitals are found within the limits of Christianity, and not outside it; and so far, Christendom, though it is largely professing Christendom only, has learned that it follows a Christ who is the Saviour of the body and the Physician of the soul.In the next place, another practical lesson which I would draw from this is, as to the sole conditions upon which any form of Christian help can be rendered. The condition for the elevation of men is that the lever which lifts them must have its point below them. That is to say, you have to go down if you would heave up. You have to go amongst if you would deliver; you have to make your own, by a sympathy which you have learned of your Master, the sorrows and the sins of humanity, if you would effectually remedy them. A guinea to an hospital is not your contribution to the Christ-like relief of human suffering. It wants, and He wants, your heart, your sympathy. Think for a moment of the universe of anguish that may lie within the narrow limits of one human body -- that awful mystery of pain which holds in its red-hot pincers hundreds and thousands of men and women in this city at this moment. Try to imagine the mass of bodily agony, an enormous percentage of which is utterly innocent, and a still larger percentage of it perfectly remediable, which at this hour, whilst we sit here, is torturing mankind. And oh! brethren, do not let any thought of the transcendent importance of Christ's gospel, and what it does to men's hearts, make us careless about these real, though lesser, evils which lie beside us, and which we can remedy and help.Only, remember the condition of help for them all. The newspapers went into raptures some years since, and wisely, over a Roman Catholic priest who shut himself up in a little island with a colony of lepers. Some Protestant martyrs have done the same before him, without any chorus of newspaper praise. Whoever did it had penetrated to the secret of Christian help -- identification with the evil. If we would take away any misery or sin, we must act like that doctor who shut himself up in the wards of an hospital, and kept a diary of the symptoms of his disease, till the pen dropped from his fingers and the film came over his eyes. Are we ready to do anything like that for our brethren? Until we are, we have yet to learn and to practise the pattern which He has set, 'Who, though He was rich, for our sins became poor': and who, 'forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, Himself likewise' -- in their own fashion of weakness, and weariness, and sorrow, and pain, and ultimately death -- 'took part of the same.' 'He bore our sicknesses,' therefore He bore them away, and, in so doing, taught us the law of Christian help. And lastly, let

me not pass from this subject without leaving on your hearts, dear friends, the other thought, of the connection and the relative importance of these two hemispheres of Christ's work. The sicknesses are symbols of the sins; the removal of the bodily pain and disease is a prophecy and a visible parable proclaiming the removal of all the harassment and abnormal action that afflict intellect, will, or spirit. Christ Himself has taught us to regard His miracles of healing as the making visible, in the outward sphere, of the analogous miracles of healing in the spiritual realm. And although I have been saying a great deal about the preciousness and the sacredness of the curative influences which flow from Christ, and deal with outward diseases and evils, let us not forget that a sound body is of small worth as compared with a sound mind; that the body is the servant of the spirit, meant mainly to do its behests, bring it knowledge, and express its will; and that high above, and pointed to by, the lower, though precious work of healing men's sicknesses, towers that work which we all of us need, and the robustest of us, perhaps, need most, the healing of our sick souls and their deliverance from death.Every one of these manifold miracles which the Saviour wrought may be taken as parabolical. You and I grope in darkness as the blind. You and I have ears deaf to hear, and lips dumb to speak, the praises and the love and the word of God. We are lame in the powers of mind and spirit to run in the way of His commandments, and to walk unfainting in the paths of duty. The fever of hot, passionate, foolish desires burns in the veins of us all with its poison. The paralysis of a will that is slothful to good infests and hinders us all. But there comes to us that great hope and promise that Christ has the Spirit of the Lord upon Him to bring liberty to the captive, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, healing to the fevered, vigour to the palsied, activity to the lame. Only let us set our trust in Him, carry our weaknesses to Him, acknowledge our sins to Him, seek the touch of His healing and quickening hand, and the miracle shall be wrought.The old-fashioned surgery used to believe in the transfusion of blood from a sound to a diseased person, and the consequent expulsion of disease. That is the fact about our relation to Christ. Put your arm side by side with His by simple faith in Him. Come into contact with Him, and the blood of Jesus Christ, the 'law of the spirit of life that was in Him,' will pass into the veins of your spirits, and make you whole of whatsoever disease you have. 'Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.' And so shall you begin that course of healing and purifying, which will know no pause nor natural termination until, redeemed in body, soul, and spirit, you reach the land 'where the inhabitant thereof shall no more say, I am sick,' -- 'and there shall be no more death, neither shall there be any more pain.'

Chapter 104

CHRIST REPRESSING RASH DISCIPLESHIP

'And a certain scribe came, and said unto Him, Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.20. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' -- MATT. viii.19-20. Our Lord was just on the point of leaving Capernaum for the other side of the lake. His intended departure from the city, in which He had spent so long a time, and wrought so many miracles, produced precisely opposite effects on two of the crowd around Him, both of whom seem to have been, in the loose sense of the word, disciples. One was this scribe, whom the prospect of losing the Master from his side, hurried into a too lightly formed and too confidently expressed undertaking. The other presented exactly the opposite fault. That other man in the crowd, at the prospect of losing sight of the Christ, began to think that there were imperative duties at home which would prevent his following the Master, and said, 'Suffer me first to go and bury my father.' A sacred obligation, and one which Christ would not have desired him to suspend, unless there had been something more behind it! These two men, then, represent the two opposite poles of weakness, the one too swift, the other too slow, to take a decisive step. And Christ's treatment of them is, in like manner, a representation of the two opposite methods which He adopts for curing opposite diseases, and bringing both back to the same state of health. He stimulates the too sluggish, He represses the too willing (if such a paradox may be allowed). His treatment is at once spur and bridle. To the one man He administers a sobering representation of what he is undertaking with so light a heart; to the other He gives the commandment that sounds so stern: 'Leave the highest duty, if you cannot do it without conflicting with your higher to Me.' And so I think that Matthew's arrangement of this pair of companion pictures is to be preferred to that which we find in Luke, who localises the incident in a different part of our Lord's ministry, and on a different occasion. I deal now only with the first of these two contrasted pictures, and consider the lightly-made vow, and Christ's sobering treatment of it. I. The too lightly uttered vow. There is a certain almost jaunty air of self-complacence about the man and his facile promise. What he promised was no more than what Christ requires from each of us, no more than what Christ was infinitely glad to have laid at His feet. And he promised it with absolute sincerity, meaning every word that he said, and believing that he could fulfil it all. What was the fault? There were three: taking counsel of a transitory feeling; making a vow with a very slight knowledge of what it meant; and relying with foolish confidence on his own strength. Vows which rest on no firmer foundation than these are sure to sink and topple over into ruin. Discipleship which is the result of mere emotion must be evanescent, for all emotion is so. Effervescence cannot last, and when the cause ceases the effect ceases too. Discipleship which enlists in Christ's army, in ignorance of the hard marching and fighting which have to be gone through, will very soon be skulking in the rear or deserting the flag altogether. Discipleship which offers faithful following because it relies on its own fervour and force will, sooner or later, feel its unthinkingly undertaken obligations too heavy, and be glad to shake off the yoke which it was so eager to put on. These three things, singly or combined, are the explanations, as they are the causes, of half the stagnant Christianity that chokes our churches. Men have vowed, and did not know what they were vowing, pledging themselves, in a moment of excitement, to what after years discover to

them to be a hard and uncongenial course of life. They have been carried into the position of professed disciples on the top of a wave of emotion which has long since broken and retreated, leaving them stranded and motionless in a place where they have no business to be. Every community of professing Christians is weakened, and its vitality is lowered, by the presence and influence of members who have said, 'I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest,' but whose vow was but a flash in the pan, and never meant anything. They did not know what they were saying. They had not stopped to think why they were saying it, still less did they take the advice of the Master to count their forces before they went into the battle, and see whether their ten thousand could meet him that would come against them with twenty thousand. I do not suppose that much of our modern religionism is in great danger from too fervid emotion. That, certainly, is not the side on which our average Christianity is defective. No feeling can be too fervid which has been kindled by profound contemplation and hearty acceptance of Christ's redeeming love. The facts to which sound religious emotion looks, warrant, and the work in the Christian life which it has to do, needs that it shall be at white-heat, if it is to be worthy of its object and equal to its tasks. But there very often is emotion which is too fervid for the convictions which are presumed to kindle it, and which burns itself out quickly because it neither comes from principle nor leads to action. No resolution to follow Christ can be too enthusiastic, nor any renunciation for His sake too absolute, to correspond to His supreme authority. But there may very easily be brave words much too great for the real determination which is in them. A half-empty bottle makes more noise, if you shake it, than a full one. We cannot estimate the hindrances of the Christian life too lightly; if we do so knowing them, and thinking little of them because we think so joyfully of Christ our helper. But there may very easily be a presumptuous contempt of these, which is only the result of ignorance and self-confidence, and will soon be abased into dread of them, and probably end in desertion of Him. A sadly large number of professing Christians may see their own faces in this mirror. How many of us are exactly like this man? Long, long ago we vowed to follow Christ. Have we advanced a yard on the Christian course since then, or do we stand very much at the same point as on that far-off day? Some of us, who spent no breath in saying what we were going to do, but used it in the prayer, 'Draw me, and I will run after Thee,' have followed the Captain. Some of us have been like clumsy recruits, who have only been marking time all the while, one foot up and the other down, but always in the same place. That is the kind of advance that the lightly formed resolution -- formed in ignorance of what it involved, and in foolish confidence in the resolver's strength -- is too apt to lead to. Is it not so in all life? No caravan ever starts from a port on the coast to go up-country, but there is a percentage of deserters in the first week. There are always, in every good work, adherents, easily moved, pushing themselves into the front, full of resolves in the beginning, and then, when the tug comes, they drop out of the ranks and leave the quiet ones, that did not say, 'I am going to do it,' but thought to themselves, 'I should uncommonly like to try whether I can.' to bear the burden and heat of the march. A sad, wise, self-distrustful valour is the temper that wins. Let us see to it, dear brethren, not that our fervour be less -- I do not know how the fervour of some of you could be less and keep alive at all -- but that our principle be more; not that our resolutions be less noble, but that they be more deeply engrained. You can light a fire of the chips and paper in an instant, and the flimsier the material the more quickly it will crackle; it takes a longer time to get coals in a blaze, and they will last longer. Be your resolves slow to begin and never-ending,' especially when you say, as we are all bound to say, 'Lord! I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.' II. Note our Lord's treatment of this too lightly uttered vow.It is

wonderfully gentle and lenient. He speaks no rebuke. He does not reject the proffered devotion. He does not even say that there was anything defective in it, but simply answers by a quiet statement of what the vow was pledging the rash utterer to do. Christ's words are a douche of cold water to condense the steam which was so noisily escaping, to turn the vaporous enthusiasm into something more solid, with the particles nearer each other. His object was not to repel, but to turn an ignorant, somewhat bragging vow into a calm, humble determination, with a silent 'God helping me' for its foundation. To repel is sometimes the way to attract. Jesus Christ would not have any one coming after Him on a misunderstanding of where he is going, or what he will have to do. It shall be all fair and above board, and the difficulties and sacrifices and necessary restrictions and inconveniences shall all be stated. He does not need to hide from His recruits the black side of the war for which He seeks to enlist them, but He tells it all to them to begin with, and then waits -- and He only knows how longingly He waits -- for their repeating, with full knowledge and humble determination, the vow that sprang so lightly to their lips when they did not understand what they were saying. Of course our Lord's words had literal truth, and their original intention was to bring clearly before this man the hard fact that following Jesus meant homelessness. It is as if He had said, 'You are ready to follow Me wherever I go -- are you? You will have to go far, and to be always going. Creatures have their burrows and their roosting-places, but I, the Lord of creatures, the Son of Man, whose kingdom prophets proclaimed, am houseless in My own realm, and My followers must share My wandering life. Are you ready for that?' Jesus was homeless. He was born in a hired stable, cradled in a manger, owed shelter to faithful friends, was buried in a borrowed grave; He had 'not where to lay His head,' living or dying. And His servants, in literal truth, had to tramp after Him, through the length and breadth of the land. And if this man was meaning to follow Him whithersoever He went, he had not before him a little pleasure-journey across the lake, to come back again in a day or two, but he was enlisting for a term of service, that extended over a life.But then, beyond that, there is a deeper lesson here. 'The Son of Man' on our Lord's lips not only expressed His dignity as Messiah, but His relation to the whole race of men; and declared that He was what we nowadays call ideal manhood. And that is the point, as I take it, of the contrast between the restful lives of the lower creatures, who all have a place fitted to them, where they curl themselves up, and go to sleep, and are comfortable, and the higher life of men, which is homeless in the deepest sense. 'The Son of Man,' He in whom the whole essence of humanity is, as it were, concentrated; and who, in His own person, presents the very type and perfection of manhood, cannot but be homeless.Ah, yes I man's prerogative is unrest, and he should recognise it as a blessing. It is the condition of all noble life; it is the condition of all growth. 'The foxes have holes,' and the fox's hole fits it, and therefore the hole of the fox to-day is what it was in the beginning, and ever shall be. Man has no such abode, therefore he grows. Man is blessed with that great 'discourse that looks before and after,' and his thoughts wander through eternity, and therefore he is capable of endless advance, and if he is in the path where his Maker has meant him to be, sure of endless growth. The more a man gets like a beast, the more has he of the beast's lot of happy contentment in this world. And the more he gets like a man, like the 'Son of Man,' the more has he to realise that he is a pilgrim and a sojourner, as all his fathers were.And so, dear friends, because disciples must follow the Son of Man who is the King, and whose life is the perfect mirror of manhood, restless homelessness is our lot, if we are His disciples. Ay! and it is our blessing. It is better to sleep beneath the stars than beneath golden canopies, and to lay the head upon a stone than upon a lace pillow, if the ladder is at our side and the face of God above it.

Better be out in the fields, a homeless stranger with the Lord, than huddling together and perfectly comfortable in houses of clay that perish before the moth.Do not let us repine; let us be thankful that we cannot, if we are Christ's, but be strangers here; for all the bitterness and pain of unrest and homelessness pass away, and all sweetness and gladness is breathed into them, when we can say, 'I am a sojourner and a stranger with Thee,' and when in our unrest we are 'following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'

Chapter 105

CHRIST STIMULATING SLUGGISH DISCIPLESHIP

'And another of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.22. But Jesus said unto him, Follow Me; and let the dead bury their dead.' -- MATT. viii.21-22. The very first words of these verses, 'And another of His disciples,' show us that the incident recorded in them is only half of a whole. We have already considered the other half, and supplement our former remarks by a glance at the remaining portion now. The two men, whose treatment by Christ is narrated, are the antipodes of each other. The former is a type of well-meaning, lightly formed, and so, probably, swiftly abandoned purposes. This man is one of the people who always see something else to be done first, when any plain duty comes before them. Sluggish, hesitating, keenly conscious of other possibilities and demands, he needs precisely the opposite treatment from his light-hearted and light-purposed brother. Some plants want putting into a cold house to be checked, some into a greenhouse to be forwarded. Diversity of treatment, even when it amounts to opposition of treatment, comes from the same single purpose. And so here the spur is applied, whilst in the former incident it was the rein that was needed. I. Note, then, first of all, this apparently most laudable and reasonable request. 'Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.' Nature says 'Go,' and religion enjoins it, and everything seems to say that it is the right thing for a man to do. The man was perfectly sincere in his petition, and perfectly sincere in the implied promise that, as soon as the funeral was over, he would come back. He meant it, out and out. If he had not, he would have received different treatment; and if he had not, he would have ceased to be the valuable example and lesson that he is to us. So we have here a disciple quite sincere, who believes himself to have already obeyed in spirit and only to be hindered from obeying in outward act by an imperative duty that even a barbarian would know to be imperative. And yet Jesus Christ read him better than he read himself; and by His answer lets us see that the tone of mind into which we are all tempted to drop, and which is the characteristic natural tendency of some of us, that of being hindered from doing the plain thing that lies before us, because something else crops up, which we also think is imperative upon us, is full of danger, and may be the cover of a great deal of self-deception; and, at any rate, is not in consonance with Christ's supreme and pressing and immediate claims. The temper which says, 'Suffer me first to go and bury my father,' is full of danger. One never knows but that, after he has got his father buried, there will be something else turning up equally important. There was the will to be read afterwards, and if he was, as probably he was, the eldest son, he would most likely be the executor. There would be all sorts of affairs to settle up before he might feel that it was his duty to leave everything and follow the Master. And so it always is. 'Suffer me first, and when we get to the top of that hill, there is another one beyond. And so we go on from step to step, getting ready to do the duties that we know are most imperative upon us, by sweeping preliminaries out of the way, and so we go on until our dying day, when somebody else buries us. Like some backwoodsman in the American forests who should say to himself, 'Now, I will not sow a grain of wheat until I have cleared all the land that belongs to me. I will do that first and then begin to reap,' he would be a great deal wiser if he cleared and sowed a little bit first, and lived upon it, and then cleared a little bit more. Mark the plain lesson that comes out of this incident, that the habit, for it is a habit with some of us, of putting other pressing

duties forward, before we attend to the highest claims of Christ, is full of danger, because there will be no end to them if we once admit the principle. And this is true not only in regard to Christianity, but in regard to everything that is worth doing in this world. Whenever some great and noble task presents itself with its solemn call for consecration, some dwarf of an apparent duty thrusts itself in between and perks up in our faces with its demand, 'Attend to me first, and then I will let you go on to that other.' But morally, this plea, however sincerely urged, is more or less unconscious self-deception. The person who says 'Suffer me first' is usually hoodwinking conscience, and covering over, if not a determination not to do, at least a reluctance to determine to do, the postponed duty. And although we may think ourselves quite resolved in spirit, and only needing the fitting vacant space to show that we are ready to act, in the majority of cases the man who says 'Suffer me first' means, though he often does not know it, 'I do not think I will do it, after all, even then.' Now there are a great many good people who, when urged to some of the plain duties of discipleship -- such as Christian work, Christian beneficence, the consecration of themselves to the service of their Master -- have always something else very important, and of immediate, pressing urgency, that has to be done first. And then and then, ay? and then, -- something else, and then -- something else. And so some of you go on, and will go on, unless by God's grace you shake off the evil habit, to the end of your days, fancying yourselves disciples, and yet all the while delaying really to follow the Master until the close. And 'all your yesterdays will be but lighting you, with unfulfilled purposes, to dusty death.' II. Now look at the apparently harsh and unreasonable refusal of this reasonable request. It is extremely unlike Jesus Christ in substance and in tone. It is unlike Him to put any barrier in the way of a son's yielding to the impulses of his heart and attending to the last duties to his father. It is extremely unlike Him to couch His refusal in words that sound, at first hearing, so harsh and contemptuous, and that seem to say, 'Let the dead world go as it will; never you mind it, do you not go after it at all or care about it.' But if we remember that it is Jesus Christ, who came to bring life into the dead world, who says this, then, I think, we shall understand better what He means. I do not need to explain, I suppose, that by the one 'dead' here is meant the physical and natural 'dead,' and by the other the morally and religiously 'dead'; and that what Christ says, in the picturesque way that He so often affected in order to bring great truths home in concrete form to sluggish understandings, is in effect, 'Nay! For the men in the world that are separated from God, and so are dead in their selfhood and their sin, burying other dead people is appropriate work. But your business, as living by Me, is to carry life, and let the burying alone, to be done by the dead people that can do nothing else.' Now the spirit of our Lord's answer may be put thus: -- It must always be Christ first, and every one else second; and it must therefore sometimes be Christ only, and no one else. 'Let me bury my father and then I will come.' 'No,' says Christ; 'first your duty to Me': first in order and time, because first in order of importance. And this is His habitual tone, 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.'Did you ever think of what a strange claim that is for a man to make upon others? This Jesus Christ comes to you and me, and to every man, and says, 'I demand, and I have a right to demand, thy supreme affection and thy first obedience. All other relations are subordinate to thy relation to Me. All other persons ought to be less dear to thee than I am. No other duty can be so imperative as the duty of following Me.' What right has He to speak thus to us? On what does such a tremendous claim rest? Who is it that fronts humanity and says, 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me'? He had a right to say it, because He is more than they, and has done more than they, because He is the Son of God manifest in the flesh, and because on the Cross He has died

for all men. Therefore all other claims dwindle and sink into nothingness before His. Therefore His will is supreme, and our relation to Him is the dominant fact in our whole moral and religious character. He must be first, whoever comes second, and between the first and the second there is a great gulf fixed.Remember that this postponing of all other duties, relationships, and claims to Christ's claims and relationships, and to our duties to Him, lifts them up, and does not lower them; exalts, and does not degrade, the earthly affections. They are nobler and loftier, being second, than when perversely, and, in the literal sense, preposterously, they assume to be first. The little hills in the foreground are never so green and fair as when they are looked at in connection with the great white Alps that tower behind them; and all earthly loves and relationships catch a tinge of more ethereal beauty, and are lifted into a loftier region, when they are rigidly subordinated to our love to Him. Being second, they are more than when they bragged that they were first.Again, if it must be Christ first, and everybody and everything besides second, then to carry that out, it will often have to be Christ only, and no one else. There will come in every man's life the need for a sharp decision between conflicting allegiances. Life is full of harsh alternatives, and it is of no use to kick against the pricks. The divine order is Jesus first and all things second. But we sometimes break that order, and then it comes to be, 'Very well, then, if you cannot keep the lower in their right places, you must learn to do without them altogether; and if you will not have Him first and them second, you must not have them at all.' 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out,' it would be far better for thee to keep it without offence. 'If thine hand offend thee,' put it down on the block, and take the cleaver in the other hand, and off with it, it would be better for thee to go into life whole than maimed, but it is better to go into life maimed, than to go into destruction whole. The abandonment of the father's bier is second best; but it is sometimes imperative. When you find a taste, a pursuit, a study, an occupation, a recreation coming between you and Jesus Christ -- when you do not know how it is, but, somehow or other, the sky that was blue a minute or two ago has a doleful veil of grey creeping all over it, be sure that something or other which ought to be under has got topmost, and you will have to get rid of it in order to come right again. If this man would certainly have come back had Jesus let him go, he would have been let go; but because Jesus knew that he would not come back, therefore He said, 'You must deny your natural affection, because it is coming between you and Me.'So, dear brethren, when we find that earthly duties, pursuits, occupations of any kind, affections, pure and beautiful as in themselves they may be, are hindering our following the Master, then, if they are things of which we can denude ourselves, though it be at a distinct sacrifice, we are bound to do so; or else we are not loving the Master more than all besides.Let me remind you in closing of the variation in this story which the evangelist Luke gives us. He interprets Christ's commandment, 'Follow Me,' and expands it into 'preach the Gospel,' which was involved in it. There are many of you who are busily engaged in legitimate occupations, and devoting yourselves in various degrees to various forms of beneficence touching the secular condition of the people around us. May I hint to such, 'Let the dead bury their dead; preach thou the gospel?' A Christian man's first business is to witness for Jesus Christ, and no amount of diligence in legitimate occupations or in work for the good of others will absolve him from the charge of having turned duties upside down, if he says, 'I cannot witness for Jesus Christ, for I am so busy about these other things.' This command has a special application to us ministers. There are hosts of admirable things that we are tempted to engage in nowadays, with the enlarged opportunities that we have of influencing men, socially, politically, intellectually, and it wants rigid concentration for us to keep out of the paths which might hinder our

usefulness, or, at all events, dissipate our strength. Let us hear that ringing voice ringing always in our ears, 'Preach thou the gospel of the kingdom.'

Chapter 106

THE PEACE-BRINGER IN THE NATURAL WORLD

'And when He was entered into a ship, His disciples followed Him.24. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; but He was asleep.25. And His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.26. And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.27. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man la this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!' -- MATT. viii.23-27. The second group of miracles in these chapters shows us Christ as the Prince of Peace, and that in three regions -- the material, the superhuman, and the moral. He stills the tempest, casts out demons, and forgives sins, thus quieting nature, spirit, and conscience. Mountain-girdled lakes are exposed to sudden storms from the wind sweeping down the glens. Such a one comes roaring down as the little boat, probably belonging to James and John, is labouring across the six or seven miles to the eastern side. Matthew describes the boat as it would appear from shore, as being 'covered' and lost to sight by the breaking waves. Mark, who is Peter's mouthpiece, describes the desperate plight as one on board knew it, and says the boat was 'filling.' It must have been a serious gale which frightened a crew who had spent all their lives on the lake. Note Christ's sleep in the storm. His calm slumber is contrasted with the hurly-burly of the tempest and the alarm of the crew. It was the sleep of physical exhaustion after a hard day's work. He was too tired to keep awake, or to be disturbed by the tumult. His fatigue is a sign of His true manhood, of His toil up to the very edge of His strength; a characteristic of His life of service, which we do not make as prominent in our thoughts as we should. It is also a sign of His calm conscience and pure heart. Jonah slept through the storm because his conscience was stupefied; but Christ, as a tired child laying its head on its mother's lap. That sleep may have a symbolical meaning for us. Though Christ is present, the storm comes, and He sleeps through it. Lazarus dies, and He makes no sign of sympathy. Peter lies in prison, and not till the hammers of the carpenters putting up the gibbet for to-morrow are heard, does deliverance come. He delays His help, that He may try our faith and quicken our prayers. The boat may be covered with the waves, and He sleeps on, but He will wake before it sinks. He sleeps, but He never over-sleeps, and there are no too-lates with Him. Note next the awaking cry of fear. The broken abruptness of their appeal reveals the urgency of the case in the experienced eyes of these fishermen. Their summons is a curious mixture of fear and faith. 'Save us' is the language of faith; 'we perish' is that of fear. That strange blending of opposites is often repeated by us. The office of faith is to suppress fear. But the origin of faith is often in fear, and we are driven to trust just because we are so much afraid. A faith which does not wholly suppress fear may still be most real; and the highest faith has ever the consciousness that unless Christ help, and that speedily, we perish. So note next the gentle remonstrance. There is something very majestic in the tranquillity of our Lord's awaking, and, if we follow Matthew's order, in His addressing Himself first to the disciples' weakness, and letting the storm rage on. It can do no harm, and for the present may blow as it listeth, while He gives the trembling disciples a lesson. Observe how lovingly our Lord meets an imperfect faith. He has no rebuke for their rude awaking of Him. He does not find fault with them for being 'fearful,' but for being 'so fearful' as to let fear

cover faith, just as the waves were doing the boat. He pityingly recognises the struggle in their souls, and their possession of some spark of faith which He would fain blow into a flame. He shows them and us the reason for overwhelming fear as being a deficiency in faith. And He casts all into the form of a question, thus softening rebuke, and calming their terrors by the appeal to their common sense. Fear is irrational if we can exercise faith. It is mere bravado to say 'I will not be afraid,' for this awful universe is full of occasions for just terror; but it is the voice of sober reason which says 'I will trust, and not be afraid.' Christ answers His own question in the act of putting it, -- ye are of little faith, that is why ye are so fearful. Note, next, the word that calms the storm. Christ yields to the cry of an imperfect faith, and so strengthens it. If He did not, what would become of any of us? He does not quench the dimly burning wick, but tends it and feeds it with oil -- by His inward gifts and by His answers to prayer -- till it burns up clear and smokeless, a faith without fear. Even smoke needs but a higher temperature to flame; and fear which is mingled with faith needs but a little more heat to be converted into radiance of trust. That is precisely what Christ does by this miracle. His royal word is all-powerful. We see Him rising in the stern of the fishing-boat, and sending His voice into the howling darkness, and wind and waves cower at His feet like dogs that know their master. As in the healing of the centurion's servant, we have the token of divinity in that His bare word is able to produce effects in the natural realm. As He lay asleep He showed the weakness of manhood; but He woke to manifest the power of indwelling divinity. So it is always in His life, where, side by side with the signs of humiliation and participation in man's weakness, we ever have tokens of His divinity breaking through the veil. All this power is put forth at the cry of timid men. The storm was meant to move to terror; terror was meant to evoke the miracle -- the result was complete and immediate. No after-swell disturbed the placid waters when the wind dropped. There had been 'a great tempest,' and now there was 'a great calm,' as the fishermen floated peacefully to their landing-place beneath the shadow of the hills. The wilder the tempest, the profounder the subsequent repose. All this is a true symbol of our individual lives, as well as of the history of the Church. Storms will come, and He may seem to be heedless. He is ever awakened by our cry, which needs not to be pure faith in order to bring the answer, but may be strangely intertwined of faith and fear. 'The Lord will help ... and that right early,' and the peace that He brings is peace indeed. So it may be with us amid the struggles of life. So may it be with us when the voyage on this storm-tossed sea of time is done! 'They cry unto the Lord in their trouble. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven.'

Chapter 107

THE PEACE-BRINGER IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

'And when He was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.29. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art Thou come hither to torment us before the time? 30. And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding.31. So the devils besought Him, saying, If Thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.32. And He said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.33. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.34. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw Him, they besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts.' -- MATT. viii.28-34. Matthew keeps to chronological order in the first and second miracles of the second triplet, but probably His reason for bringing them together was rather similarity in their contents than proximity in their time. For one cannot but feel that the stilling of the storm, which manifested Jesus as the Peace-bringer in the realm of the Natural, is fitly followed by the casting out of demons, which showed Him as the Lord of still wider and darker realms, and the Peace-bringer to spirits tortured and torn by a mysterious tyranny. His meek power sways all creatures; His 'word runneth very swiftly.' Winds and seas and demons hearken and obey. Cheap ridicule has been plentifully flung at this miracle, and some defenders of the Gospels have tried to explain it away, and have almost apologised for it, but, while it raises difficult problems in its details, the total effect of it is to present a sublime conception of Jesus and of His absolute, universal authority. The conception is heightened in sublimity when the two adjacent miracles are contemplated in connection. There is singular variation in the readings of the name of the scene of the miracle in the three evangelists. According to the reading of the Authorised Version, Matthew locates it in the 'country of the Gergesenes'; Mark and Luke, in the 'country of the Gadarenes'; whereas the Revised Version, following the general consensus of textual critics, reads 'Gadarenes' in Matthew and 'Gerasenes' in Mark and Luke. Now, Gadara is over six miles from the lake, and the deep gorge of a river lies between, so that it is out of the question as the scene of the miracle. But the only Gerasa known, till lately, is even more impossible, for it is far to the east of the lake. But some years since, Thomson found ruins bearing the name of Khersa or Gersa, 'at the only portion of that coast on which the steep hills come down to the shore' (Smith, Historical Geography of the Holy Land, p.459). This is probably the site of the miracle, and may have been included in the territory dependent on Gadara, and so have been rightly described as in 'the country of the Gadarenes.' Matthew again abbreviates, omitting many of the most striking and solemn features of the narrative as given by the other two evangelists, and he also diverges from them in mentioning two demoniacs instead of one. That is not contradiction, for if there were two, there was one, but it is divergence, due to more accurate information. Whether they were meant so or no, the abbreviations have the striking result that Jesus speaks but one word, the permissive 'Go,' and that thus His simple presence is the potent spell before which the demons cower and flee. They

know Him as 'the Son of God'; a name which, on their lips, must be taken in its full significance. If demoniacal possession is a fact, there is no difficulty in accounting for the name here given to Jesus, nor for the sudden change from the fierce purpose of barring an intruder's path to abject submission. If it is not a fact, to make a plausible explanation of either circumstance will be a task needing many contortions, as is seen by the attempts to achieve it. For example, we are told that the demoniacs were afraid of Jesus, because He 'was not afraid of them,' and they knew Him, because 'men with shattered reason also felt the spell, while the wise and the strong-minded often used their intellect, under the force of passion or prejudice, to resist the force of truth.' Possibly the last clause goes as far to explain some critics' non-recognition of demoniacal possession as the first does to explain the demoniacs' recognition of Jesus! To the demonic nature Christ's coming brought torture, as the sunbeam, which gives life to many, also gives death to ugly creatures that crawl and swarm in the dark. Turn up a stone, and the creeping things hurry out of the penetrating glare so unwelcome. 'What maketh heaven, that maketh hell,' and the same presence is life or death, joy or agony. The dear perception of divine purity and the shuddering recoil of impotent hatred from it are surely of the very essence of the demonic nature, and every man, who looks into the depths of his own spirit, knows that the possibilities of such a state are in him. Our Lord discriminated between healing the sick and casting out demons. He distinguished between forms of disease due to possession and the same diseases when dissociated from it, as, for example, cases of dumbness. His whole attitude, both in His actual dealing with the possessed and in His referring to the subject, gave His complete adhesion to the reality of the awful thing. It is vain to say that He humoured the delusions of insanity in order to cure them. That theory does not adequately explain any of the facts and does not touch some of them. It is perilous to try to weaken the force of the narrative by saying that the evangelists were under the influence of popular notions (which are quietly assumed to have been wrong), and hence that their prepossessions coloured their representations. If the mirror was so distorted, what reliance can be placed on any part of its reflection of Jesus? There can be no doubt that the Gospel narrative asserts and assumes the reality of demoniacal possession, and if the representation that Jesus also assumed it is due to the evangelists, what trust can be reposed in authorities which misrepresent Him in such a matter? On the other hand, if they do not misrepresent Him, and He blundered, confounding mere insanity with possession by a demon, what reliance can be reposed in Him as our Teacher of the Unseen World? The issues involved are very grave and far-reaching, and raillery or sarcasm is out of place. But the question is pertinent: By what right do we allege that demoniacal possession is an exploded figment and an impossibility? Do we know ourselves or our fellows so thoroughly as to be warranted in denying that deep down in the mysterious 'subliminal consciousness' there is a gate through which spiritual beings may come into contact with human personalities? He would be bold, to the verge of presumption or somewhat further, who should take up such a position. And have we any better right to assume that we know so much of the universe as to be sure that there are no evil spirits there, who can come into contact with human spirits and wield an alien tyranny over them? The Christian attitude is not that of such far-reaching denial which outruns our knowledge, but that of calm belief that Jesus is the head of all principality and power, and that to Him all are subject. It is taken for granted that the supposed possession is insanity. But may it not rather be that to-day some of the supposed insanity is possession? Be that as it may -- and perhaps those who have the widest experience of 'lunatics' would be the least ready to dismiss the possibility, -- Jesus recognised the reality that there were souls oppressed by

a real personality, which had settled itself in the house of life, and none of us has wide and deep enough knowledge to contradict Him. Might it not be better to accept His witness in this, as in other matters beyond our ken, as true, and to ponder it? The demons' petition, according to the Received Text, takes the form, 'Suffer us to go,' while the reading adopted by most modern editors is 'Send us.' The former reading seems to be taken from Luke (viii.32), while Mark has 'Send' (not the same word as now read in Matthew). But Mark goes on to say, not that Jesus sent them, but that He 'suffered them' or 'gave them leave' (the same word as in Matthew, according to the Received Text). Thus, Jesus' part in the transaction is simply permissive, and the one word which He speaks is authoritative indeed in its curtness, and means simply 'away,' or 'begone.' It casts them out but does not send them in. He did not send them into the herd, but out of the men, and did not prevent their entrance into the swine. It should further be noted that nothing in the narrative suggests that the destruction of the herd was designed even by the demons, much less by Jesus. The maddened brutes rushed straight before them, not knowing why or where; the steep slope was in front, and the sea was at its foot, and their terrified, short gallop ended there. The last thing the demons would have done would have been to banish themselves, as the death of the swine did banish them, from their new shelter. There is no need, then, to invent justifications for Christ's destroying the herd, for He did not destroy it. No doubt, keeping swine was a breach of Jewish law; no doubt the two demoniacs and the bystanders would be more convinced of the reality of the exorcism by the fate of the swine, but these apologies are needless. The narrative suggests some affinity between the demoniac and the animal nature, and though it is easy to ridicule, it is impossible to disprove, the suggestion. We know too little about either to do that, and what we cannot disprove it is somewhat venturesome hardily to deny. There are depths in the one nature, which we cannot fathom though its possessors are close to us; the other is removed from our investigation altogether. Where we are so utterly ignorant we had better neither affirm nor deny. But we may take a homiletical use out of that apparent affinity, and recognise that a spirit in rebellion against God necessarily gravitates downwards, and becomes more or less bestialised. No wonder that the swineherds fled, but, surely, it is a wonder that eagerness to be rid of Jesus was the sole result of the miracle. Perhaps the reason was the loss of the swine, which would bulk largest in their keepers' excited story; perhaps the reason was a fear that He would find out and rebuke other instances of breach of strict Jewish propriety, perhaps it was simply the shrinking from any close contact with the heavenly, or apparently supernatural, which is so instinctive in us, and witnesses to a dormant consciousness of discord with Heaven. 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man,' is the cry of the roused conscience. And, alas! it has power to send away Him whom we need, and who comes to us, just because we are sinful, and just that He may deliver us from our sin.

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