

The Past a Prophecy of the Future and

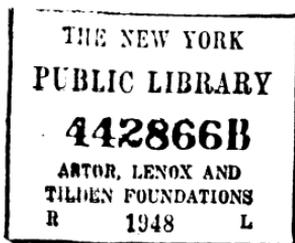
Other Sermons by the REV.

S. H. KEILLOGG D.D. LL.D. O . . .

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**THE PAST A PROPHECY OF THE
FUTURE**

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I

“THAT WHICH HATH BEEN IS THAT WHICH SHALL BE; AND THAT WHICH HATH BEEN DONE IS THAT WHICH SHALL BE DONE.”—ECCLES. i. 9 (R.V.)

(1)

IN these words is formulated one of the most important positions of those maintained by modern science. They state the principle of the uniformity of the system of order in the universe. This uniformity has always been to some extent discerned by the observing, but in our day it has been discovered to be far more wide-reaching than in the earlier ages was suspected. And upon this observed fact of the uniformity of law in nature has been confidently based one of the most effective arguments against the system of facts and doctrines affirmed in the Scriptures. We are told that if the principle of the uniformity of law be granted, then the most momentous statements which we find in the Bible, as also by necessary consequence the doctrines which are founded upon them, must be rejected, because rendered incredible by their variance from the established order.

I believe that this argument is grounded in error ;

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that it is based upon a hasty and too narrow induction of facts. I do not indeed know, and feel in no wise concerned to prove, that there has never been any interruption of the established order. The God who established the order is certainly competent for good and sufficient reasons to change it or vary it. What I do now say is this, that when we extend our horizon we may see that if the principle of the uniformity of the established order be granted, and if the great facts be admitted as to the path by which the world has been brought into its present condition, then many of the most important and fundamental facts and doctrines which are taught us in Holy Scripture will immediately appear, not as violations, but, on the contrary, as new manifestations of an order established from of old by God.

Reviewing what we have in the last few Sabbaths seen to be true according to both Scripture and science, as to the creation of the world, we may discover *six fundamental laws*, according to which the creative work proceeded. To each of these six laws I wish in succession to call your attention, and I ask you to observe their momentous bearing on certain central facts and doctrines of Holy Scripture. Each will furnish a most interesting and impressive illustration of the truth of the text, "That which is hath been already; and that which is to be hath already been."

The first of these laws to which I refer is the law of *progress*.

According to the record in Genesis, the world as we see it was not created all at once. There was an *order* in which God manifested His creative power.

And it was an order of *progress* from the lower to the higher. Geological science, as we have seen, affirms the same thing. There was a time when in all the earth was nothing but inorganic existence—no living thing. Then came life: first, in its lowest forms—according to Genesis, plant-life, a fact to which the vast accumulations of carbon deposits in the primitive rocks, according to Sir William Dawson and others, distinctly point. Then followed animal life, and that not all at once, but still according to this law of progress. First appeared the lowest forms of invertebrate life, the protozoa, the molluscs, the articulates. Then came in the life of the vertebrate, still introduced, however, in strict accordance with this law of progress from the lower to the higher: first, then, the fishes, at the bottom of the scale, after them the amphibians, then the reptiles and the birds, and last of all the mammals, ending with Man!

Such is the history thus far. As we contemplate this wonderful and unbroken progression culminating in man, the marvellous creature who can stand on the earth and measure and weigh the stars, and by his spiritual sense can apprehend even the invisible, it becomes a question of the most intense interest, both from a scientific and from a religious point of view, “Is the progress at last ended? Is man, as we know him, the last and highest form of life that this earth shall see?”

Remember the words of the text! “That which hath been is that which shall be.” According to this principle, the law of progress should ever hold good, until the highest possible point should be

reached. Is there evidence, then, that with man as he now is the highest possible point has been reached? Is man, as we see him, the highest conceivable type of created life? To this we must certainly answer, "No!" Even to *imagine* a created being of higher order than man (as man is now) were not difficult. Fiske says that evolution henceforth must be psychical or ethical; that as far as type of organization is concerned the end is reached. But who knows this? Even grant that with matter as we know it no higher type of life may be possible, yet who can say that there may not be *matter*, so to speak, of a higher order than this matter with which we are familiar, as recent speculations seem to suggest? It is not hard to imagine an intelligent fish in the Devonian age arguing in a strain similar to this, arbitrarily asserting that evolution *could* not proceed further along a certain line than the point which it had already reached. I must, then, according to the great principle of the uniformity of law, look for yet further progress in the future; the appearing on this earth of a yet higher order of being than man as he is known to us.

We may put the question in a different way, and still be led to the same conclusion. Reason and Scripture alike teach that the self-manifestation of God must be the highest end of this earthly creation. To demonstrate, then, that progress can go no further, one would need to prove that that purpose of creation has already been reached in man. But is there any evidence of this? Certainly we must again say, "No!" Far indeed from perfect is the manifestation of God in man!

According to Holy Scripture, man was indeed created "in the image of God,"¹ but by his sin the image has become sadly defaced and obscured: we need no Bible to tell us that. What then? The end is not reached. I must therefore look, according to the ancient order of law, for progress. Nay, more: I must anticipate, on this principle of the uniformity of law, that the progress will not, cannot stop, until a perfect manifestation of God be reached: until, in other words, there shall appear a form of life which shall perfectly image God. Such is the anticipation which the principle of the text awakens: and this principle, be it ever remembered, is a *scientific* principle.

And now I turn to the New Testament with intense interest to hear if it has anything to say on this matter. And the first circumstance with which I am met is just this, that the New Testament represents the most momentous and the most significant fact in all history to be the appearance of One upon this earth, who claimed to be this very thing, a perfect representation of God on earth: so perfect, indeed, that whoever had seen Him could be said to have seen the Father.² He is elsewhere described as "the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His substance."³ And again it is said that He—not the first Adam, but He the second Adam—is the *telos*, the *end*, of creation.⁴

I do not now touch on the mighty proofs by which He supported this unparalleled claim. I

¹ Gen. i. 27

² John xiv. 9.

³ Heb. i. 3.

⁴ Col. i.

am only concerned to call your attention to the fact, that this appearing in the earthly creation, of a manhood of a higher order, is exactly what, according to this special application of the principle of the text, we are led to anticipate.

But even this is not all. For the Scripture tells us that the Second Adam, like the first, is the head of a race, the head of a new line and type of manhood, connected indeed by the law of natural descent, through physical generation, with the first Adam, but by regeneration of the Holy Spirit begotten into the image of God, through union with His Son, Jesus the Christ. This is more than the *improvement* of the old man: it is the introduction of an altogether *new order of life*. We thus meet, in the New Testament teaching, entire accordance with the principle of the text, and the law of progress from the lower to the higher.

Very full and clear is the exposition of this matter given by Paul. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul distinguishes two orders of manhood, which he calls (in the words of our translation) the *natural* and the *spiritual*. The rendering *natural*, as you have often been told, is unfortunate and inadequate. We might better render the Greek word as *psychical* or *animal*, as does the Vulgate. Of these two orders thus distinguished by Paul, the natural, or animal man, is the man of this present age; a type of manhood in which the dominant principle of organization is the *psyche* or principle of *animal life*. Man is more than an animal, but he is none the less truly animal, and accordingly takes his place in the zoologies as a

vertebrate, class mammalia, order primates. Paul now goes on to teach that this present order of manhood is not the final order; the natural man is not the last man, nor is he the highest man; the law of progress from the lower to the higher is still in full force, and is to receive a new and most astonishing illustration when in resurrection shall at last appear a new manhood, which he calls the *spiritual*. With what scientific exactness he speaks! "If there is a natural (animal) body, there is also a spiritual body. Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual (that had been to violate the ancient law of progress), but that which is natural (animal), and afterward that which is spiritual."⁵ Then Paul goes on to discriminate these two bodies. "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."⁶

The conclusion to which the application of the great law of the uniformity of the established order conducts us is evident. When the Holy Scriptures tell us of the appearance on earth of a God Man, the perfect image of the invisible God, and when they tell us of a new order of manhood, begotten by regeneration into union with this Second Man, the Lord from heaven, and renewed after the image of the Creator, an order of manhood to be manifested hereafter in a new embodiment through a resurrection from the dead, all this, so far from being *contrary* to the order established in creation, is only a new and stupendous illustration of the

⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 44, 46.

⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 47, 49.

principle affirmed in the text : " That which hath been is that which shall be ; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done. "

A second law which we have observed in the creative process is the law of *progress by ages*, the ages called in Genesis *days*. Progress, then, is not by an inclined plane, as it were, but rather by a *stairway* Godward.

That geology teaches a progress by successive ages all admit ; the book of Genesis is equally explicit in teaching that such was the law of creation. There were *periods* of creative activity. The work had its evenings and its mornings, repeatedly recurring. These different ages are not, indeed, so sharply divided in the record of the rocks that we can tell precisely where one ended and another began ; but as to the fact of distinctly marked ages, there is no dispute. What is meant by this has been very clearly expressed by Professor Dana in words which apply as well to the first chapter of Genesis as to geology : " The reality of an age is marked by the development of *some new idea* in the system of progress. " Thus there have been, first, the primal or inorganic age ; then a new age, when life was introduced ; then, with animal life, another—first a long age of invertebrate life, wherein such animals as jelly-fish, starfish and worms formed the highest type of life anywhere existing ; then, following, the age of fishes ; then the age of coal plants and the great amphibians ; succeeding that, the age of reptiles ; and then lastly the age of mammals, culminating with the appearance of man as we know him,

the natural, the "psychical" man, as Paul calls him.

It is, moreover, to be further observed that each new age was marked not merely by the presence but by the *dominance* of a higher grade of life than the one preceding. Many of the forms already existing still existed, but they no longer ruled. Thus, in the age of fishes there were still the lower forms of life which had preceded; in the age of reptiles there were still fishes. But it was the wonderful development and commanding position of the gigantic reptilian life that gave to the period in question its distinctive character. And so it has been even to the present; forms of life even yet existing have come down from the time before man, though they are no longer dominant—do not *characterize* our present age.

Now, we have seen that according to the Scripture the law of *progress* still holds; after man as he now is shall appear in the earth a humanity of a higher type, "the spiritual man," as he is called by Paul. Does the Scripture also recognize this plan of *progress by ages* as still in force? Nothing can be clearer than that this is true, though the truth is somewhat obscured in the received version, which has rendered two totally distinct words by the same term "world," whereas the one of these⁷ is strictly a time word, and, as the margin of the revised version always informs us, is precisely the equivalent of our word "age." Thus we read "the world which now is," i.e. "the present *age*;" and, on the other hand, are told that

⁷ *αἰών*—aeon.

this present world (age) shall come to an end, and shall be succeeded by another age, of which the Saviour speaks where He tells us of some "who shall be counted worthy to attain that *age*, and the resurrection of the dead," being "sons of God" and "children of the resurrection."⁸ The contrast, in fact, between this *age* and that which is to come is one of the fundamental things in the Scriptural representations of the progress of events.

The law of progress by ages is, then, still in force. Not only is there a progress, a progress manifested in the introduction upon earth of a new and higher type of manhood, the manhood which is from heaven, the spiritual manhood; but the full introduction and dominance of that higher life, the life of the resurrection, shall begin *a new age*. In the age which now is, the dominant type of life is the life of the natural man; in the age which is to come, the regnant type of life shall be higher far, even the spiritual or resurrection manhood. It shall be represented by the presence and rule on earth of men described by our Lord as men "who cannot die any more, but are equal unto the angels!"⁹

When, therefore, the Scripture tells us of a time that is coming, which shall be marked by the introduction and dominance of a higher order of manhood than the present, they speak with scientific accuracy in calling that coming time an "age." It will be, if possible, even more markedly than any of the ages which have preceded in geologic history, distinguished by the development of "a

⁸ Luke xx. 35.

⁹ Luke xx. 36.

new idea in the system of progress." Thus again is the text illustrated. Again, "that which hath already been."—a law of progress by ages—"is that which shall yet be."

There is another most important law, and one that may well be noticed. We may call it the law of *preparation*.

It were thinkable that each age should have been introduced as an absolutely new thing, having no connection with the ages that had been before. It was certainly quite possible that God should in each case, by a direct act of creative power, have prepared the earth for the new type of life that was to come, just as He was upon the point of introducing it. But, as a matter of fact, He did not act in this way. These ages of creation were so constituted that each was a preparation for that which was to come afterward. Illustrations are as numerous as the periods and ages of geologic time. Take the primal inorganic age. Nowhere in the earth was there a sign of life, life even of the lowest type. Geology and Genesis are at one in telling us of a time when the waters that were above the firmament, or expanse, were as yet commingled with the waters which were below,¹⁰ and when the distinction of dry land and sea was as yet unknown. In those primitive ages, with the earth like a hot volcanic cinder, there was not—could not have been even soil in which any green thing could root itself. The very soil had to be *made*; made by processes the same as those by which we see, even now, in some lands,

¹⁰ Gen. i. 2, 6, 7.

soil making out of volcanic rocks by the disintegrating influence of heat and cold, and air and water. The whole Archaean period was thus an age of preparation for the age of plant life which was to succeed, and indeed for all that was to come afterward.

Let us take another illustration. Long after that primitive time, although still ages before our own day, there was the age of the great coal plants. Their work is sufficiently plain from the result of it, seen in our coal beds. Where did all that coal or carbon come from? For the answer there is need but to refer to a process of nature which we are constantly seeing around us. The plant lives, in a large part, by withdrawing carbon from the air, where it now exists in very small proportion: and with this carbon it builds up its own tissues and fibre. The inevitable conclusion from the fact of the existence of these immense coal beds is that by the luxuriant vegetation of those ancient days a prodigious amount of carbonic acid must have been withdrawn from the air, and transmuted into the forms in which we have carbon in the coal. But carbonic acid is death to man, and to every form of the higher animal life. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary that before the higher life could be introduced the air should be purified. And so it was that the great coal age was, in a no less eminent and wonderful way than the primitive age, a period of preparation for a higher order of things on earth, which was to come thereafter. Many other illustrations might be given, but these will suffice to make it clear

that another of the great laws concerning the ages of God's creative work is the law of preparation.

Does this law also still hold good? Is it true in this again, that "that which hath been is that which shall be"? There is to be, as we have seen, according to the constant teaching of Holy Scripture, an "age to come" to succeed the "age that now is." Is this present age, then, nothing more or less than simply a preparation for that age which is coming?

I need not remind you that this is the very truth. It is, indeed, one of the thoughts upon which God in His revelation has laid the greatest stress. It is one of the chief thoughts of the Bible that the age or dispensation in which we are living is a *preparation* for another that is coming, for that which Paul calls "the dispensation of the fulness of the times."¹¹ It is, in fact, the radical and fatal blunder of those whom the Bible in striking language calls "men of this world" (literally, "the men of this age") that they persist in living as if this present age were all—as if it were final, when in fact it is not final. They know not of the resurrection, and of that age to come which the resurrection shall introduce; that age and that resurrection of which Holy Scripture has so much to say. Or if they know it they ignore it. But whether men will weigh the fact and act accordingly, or whether they will not, it is none the less certainly true, that in this respect again that which hath been already is that which still is. The law

¹¹ Eph. i. 10.

of preparation for a coming age in an age preceding is in full force still.

We find this law, indeed, illustrated in many ways in the Scripture. For just as in the great geologic ages there were subordinate periods, less sharply distinct, into which the great ages were subdivided, so the present age of the natural man is, according to the Scripture, divided in God's plan into what we call successive dispensations. And in the case of each one of these we can see that the law of preparation was exemplified. Each dispensation was a preparation for that which was to come after. The Adamic age prepared for the Noachian, the Noachian for the Abrahamic and the Mosaic, and the Mosaic and all of these again for the present dispensation, which we call the Christian. All this is as clear as need be. But it is so also now with regard to this whole great age of the natural man upon the earth. In a manner still more momentous and most comprehensive, it, like all the great geologic ages that have preceded, is an age of preparation for the age which is to come, the resurrection age.

It may be so even in a physical sense. In the new age there is to be what Peter calls "a new earth," which shall appear out of the engulfing fires in which the earth which now is shall yet be wrapped.¹² We know not what tremendous secret forces may even now be silently working beneath our very feet to prepare the earth for the coming of the new age, when there shall be a "new earth."

But of more practical importance is it for us now,

¹² 2 Pet. iii. 7, 10, 12, 13.

to emphasize the thought that the present age is an age of preparation in the moral and spiritual part of our being for that which is coming. Regeneration, sanctification, the manifold discipline of life—need I remind you that these all are preparatory in their nature? Thus it is that the new man is “curiously wrought, being yet unperfect, in the lowest parts of the earth.”¹³ Nay, death itself, according to Scripture, whether the death of the saint or the death of the sinner, is one of the important elements in the preparation for the age to come. In the case of the sinner, it takes him out of this earthly order, which he has defiled, to enter it no more for ever. With the saved man it is the preparation for the assumption of the new and spiritual body which he will need in order that he may live under the new conditions to which the age of resurrection manhood will introduce him.

And this brings me to the first of two practical thoughts with which I will close, reserving for another time the consideration of the other three laws to which reference was made. The first thought which I wish to urge upon you is this. If the present age and this present order of things is not final, but is merely preparatory to another and far more glorious age which is coming on the earth; and if, again—unlike the case in the geologic ages, when if a creature proved itself unfit for the coming age there was for it no help, but it must inevitably perish—if, I say, it is now, in the infinite goodness of God, made possible, through

¹³ Ps. cxxxix. 15.

faith in the crucified and risen Son of God, for the sinful, natural man of this present age to "attain unto that other age" which is coming, being made in Christ a son of God and a child of the resurrection, then do you not see that to live as if these things were not so is the most stupendous folly? If the limits of the present age and the present order of things do not constitute the boundary of life and of possibilities for us, is it anything but suicidal madness to live as if they did? If the attainment of that other age is made to depend upon a preparation in this age, namely, upon our repentance and our free exercise of faith in the ascended Son of God, is it not, again, folly unspeakable for any man to delay a single hour thus to repent and commit himself to Christ? Does not such a man verily commit the sin of Esau, who sold his birthright for a morsel of meat, and afterward, when he would have inherited a blessing, found no means of obtaining it? Gone, it was gone for ever. Lost, it was lost *for ever!*

And yet how awfully common is folly just such as this! Do you ask who they are that so do? Every one of you who is making anything of this present age and order the chief end of life is one of such. I care not whether that earthly end be higher or lower: so that the end for which you are living is only what this present age can give, you shall never attain unto the age which is to come. Be it money, honour, preferment, be it even friends and family—humanity, if you like—all these are of the present order, and the fashion of this world passeth away. Be sure that if this

age is not final, but only preparatory to another, then if any of us live as though the fact were otherwise, we shall without doubt come to bitter, bitter grief.

Here is a law established, as science and Scripture show us, since before yonder sun enlightened this our earth; the law that each successive age shall be a preparation for the one which comes after. It is in full force now. We can ignore it if we like, and live as if there were no such law. But escape from it we cannot; and if we do so ignore it, we shall surely perish. You can have no more hope of escaping the bitterness of woe, if so you live, than you could have of escaping with your life were you to stand in the track of some on-rushing planet! How the light from all the past geologic ages seems now to centre on those so familiar, but so sadly neglected words, "Behold, *now* is the accepted time! Behold, *now* is the day of salvation!"

Again, this line of thought points to the solution of many of the doubts that distress us. Much in the present age, as we shall all confess, is dark with painful mystery. If there be a God, infinite in holiness, goodness and power, then why such a miserable, imperfect world? Why the tempest, the earthquake, the pestilence and the famine, with the agony they bring? Why, above all, sorrow, and sin, and death? Why the disappointed hopes, the darkened homes, the seemingly blighted lives of many of the saintliest that we have ever known? And the question burdens the holy, while the scoffer answers in his desperation,

“There is no God!” By whom shall the answer be given?

Brethren, I risk nothing in saying that if the present age were the last age *there would be no possible answer* to these questions. But there is an age, or world, to come; and remembering these ancient laws, I think we can see, not indeed the answer itself, but the direction in which an answer lies.

Think for a moment how it was in those old creative ages. Suppose that an angel flying through the heavenly spaces had come upon this earth in that bygone second or third day when, a glowing, fiery cinder, enshrouded in impenetrable cloud of a vapourized ocean, it passed hissing along its orbit. How easily that angel might have started questions which, apart from a revelation of God's purpose touching the ages that were to come, no created mind could have answered! He might well have asked, “Of what possible use this huge, fiery ball, on which is neither life, nor chance for any? To what end all this waste of energy? How can such a wanton, useless display of mere power be worthy of a God who is not mere power, but right and love eternal?” And no one could have answered, without a knowledge of the age that was to come.

Or suppose that again, at a later day, some wandering spirit had alighted on this globe in that reptilian age, when the whole earth knew nothing higher than those gross, unwieldy forms which crept about those primeval lagoons, dense with unwholesome exhalations, and which basked in

sunshine in the solitudes of a world where higher than themselves there was nothing. Might not such a celestial spirit have raised difficulties which no one ignorant of the ages that were to come could possibly have met by answering? He might have said, "If God is infinite in power, and if He loves the noble and the beautiful, why people a world with forms like these, incapable of knowing and loving Him, or of lifting themselves above the slime which bred them?" And no one without prophetic vision could have answered.

Never, in a word, was there an age in all that ancient time which, considered in itself, might not have seemed to finite mind all unworthy of an infinitely perfect God. But the solution of the mystery of each age was found just in this, that it was not the final age, but served only as a preparation for ages that were to follow, and eminently for this age of man in which we live. No difficulty now to us about the waste of life and beauty in those ancient days. No question now about the earth of that time as unworthy of the God of infinite perfection.

And even so is it now. This age is full of mystery; mystery deeper than ever, because *man* is here, a moral creature, and sin is here, and misery. And if this age were all—were no age yet to dawn for which this, like the other bygone ages, but prepares—then were the mystery insoluble indeed.

But we believe in the life of the age to come. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, and the appearing in the fulness of time of a new heaven

and a new earth, by reason of the glory of which this earth which now is shall not be remembered, neither come into mind. We learn from God's most blessed Word that it is that which hath been, that now is, and that shall be hereafter ; that this present age also but foreshadows and makes ready for the age of glory that is coming, when the sons of men who are here by the new birth made partakers of the life eternal, and with them the whole creation also, shall be together "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."¹⁴

And when we consider this, the mystery of the present state of things, if not removed, is lightened ; for in this faith and hope we can see how it may indeed be true that all things should be even now working together for good to them that love God,¹⁵ and how it may easily be that, just as out of the desolation and ruin of that age of ice and death which, as the rocks tell us the story, immediately preceded the appearing of man upon the planet, came the beauty of Eden and the habitable earth as formed for man's reception, so it may be that out of the moral wreck and ruin, and out of the fires which shall overwhelm the world as this age closes, shall emerge a new earth, as the Scripture promises ; an earth wherein shall dwell righteousness,¹⁶ an earth, as John saw it in vision, in which there shall be no more crying and no more sin, and no more sickness and no more dying ;¹⁷ an earth wherein at last "the mystery of God shall

¹⁴ Rom. viii. 18-23.

¹⁵ Rom. viii. 28.

¹⁶ 2 Pet. iii. 13.

¹⁷ Rev. xxi. 1-4.

have been finished,"¹⁸ an age in which all who attain to it, and to the resurrection, shall in the light of God at last see light. It is verily coming; and for the coming of that day "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."¹⁹ May the Lord Himself hasten the time! And may no one of us, through impenitence and unbelief, miss of being in that blessed number of whom it is written that they shall be the inheritors of those things!

¹⁸ Rev. x. 7.

¹⁹ Rom. viii. 22, 23.

II

“THAT WHICH HATH BEEN IS THAT WHICH SHALL BE: AND THAT WHICH HATH BEEN DONE IS THAT WHICH SHALL BE DONE.”—
EccL. i. 9 (R.V.)

(2)

IN the preceding discourse we have already seen enough to show us of how profound and far-reaching significance these words are. They teach us that the course of events is so regulated by God, that the past is ever predictive of the future. And so it comes to pass that, in a sense deep and true, history is also prophecy, though, like the written word of prophecy, it be often hard to understand and to interpret aright.

The truth of this will have been impressively shown by the illustrations which in the foregoing discourse we have taken from the history of the creative week. But from that same wondrous period of earth's history yet other illustrations of the truth of the text may be drawn, no less full alike of instruction and of warning.

Three great and deep laws of the Divine working in the creative days have been observed and formulated, and their mighty bearing upon thoughts of the present and future course of time has been elucidated. I have spoken of the law of *progress*, the law of *progress by ages*, and the law of *preparation*.

A fourth law of this same Divine working in the age-days of creation we may call the law of *anticipative forms*, or *prophetic types*. It has been formulated by Professor Agassiz in the following words :—

“ Earlier organic forms often seem to foreshadow and predict others that are to succeed them, as the winged and marine reptiles of the Mesozoic Age foreshadow the birds and cetaceans (that were to succeed them in the next age). There were reptiles before the Reptilian Age ; mammals before the Mammalian Age. These appear now like a prophecy in those earlier times of an order of things not possible with the earlier combinations then prevailing in the animal kingdom.”

That this really was the law of the Divine operation in the creative week is intimated even in Genesis, in that we are told that the order of vertebrates, presenting in their anatomical structure that type which was to be developed in the highest perfection in man, was introduced—a prophecy of what was coming—immediately before the appearance of man himself. And what in Genesis is *hinted* as the law comes out as such very clearly in the record of the rocks. Professor Dana has stated the facts as follows :—

“ The beginnings of the characteristics of an age are to be looked for in the midst of a preceding age, and the marks of the future coming out to view are prophetic of that future. . . . The age of mammals was foreshadowed by the appearance of mammals long before, in the course of the Reptilian Age : and the age of reptiles was prophesied in types that lived in the earlier Carboniferous Age. *Such is the system in all history.*”

Such, then, was the law, and such its operation in the creative week. Does this law also still hold

good? Does the text in this case also still apply? Let us see.

Scripture, as we have seen, predicts a coming age, as to follow this present age in which we live; an age in which the dominant type of life shall be that of resurrection manhood; a type of manhood described by our Saviour in those memorable words wherein He said that those who should be "counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels; and are sons of God, being the sons of the resurrection." Men perfectly sinless, incapable of dying, and sons of God—such is the description of the order of manhood which characterizes the age that is to come.

But now recall the scientific law enunciated by Professor Dana—

"The beginning of the characteristics of an age is to be looked for in the midst of a preceding age."

This is the law touching the ages that are past. Now recall the statement of the text—

"That which hath been is that which shall be."

And now again, combining these two, observe the consequence. If there is indeed to be, in an age that is to follow this, a type of manhood such as our Lord describes, then we ought to be able to discover sporadic instances of such a type of life even in this present age. And, moreover, should such instances anywhere appear in history, it is plain that the law would require us to regard them as veritable prophecies of an order of things which is coming. And thus we face the question,

“ Have there been any instances of such an exalted order of manhood in the present age of the natural man ? ” What an intensely interesting, what a momentous question, even from a scientific point of view, one might say ; and much more from the religious !

You will have anticipated the answer which must be given. If the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are to be regarded—I will not say as inspired—but even as trustworthy history, then this question must be answered by saying, “ *Yes ! such instances have appeared !* ” For we read of Enoch, who walked with God, and was translated, that he should not see death ; and of Elijah, who ascended bodily into the heavenly life without dying ! And then, last and most significant of all, we read of Jesus of Nazareth, a man who did no evil, was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners ; who was crucified, who died, and was buried ; who rose from the dead on the third day, and for the space of forty days appeared unto His disciples. During that period it is evident that He was endowed with a body of a higher order than this present body of ours. It came and went without any warning, apparently at His mere volition. It was a body to which, in all appearance, material objects and distance offered no impediment. And in that body, at last, He visibly ascended into heaven, announcing first that He would come again a second time into the world, and then introduce a new age, wherein all who had received Him by faith as their Redeemer and their Life should be raised into that

same exalted order of life into which He, as the Forerunner, had entered.

As Christians, then, we cannot but believe, when we observe the facts, that this great law of *prophetic types* which was manifest throughout the long creative week is still in force. There *has* been manifested in this age upon this earth, in the Person of the God Man, Jesus of Nazareth, a type of life transcending beyond comprehension embodied life as we know it in the manhood of the present age. It appeared in one who claimed to be, in a peculiar sense, the Son of God ; and who was "declared to be the Son of God, with power, by the resurrection from the dead," and has thus become, according to the Scripture, "the first-born from the dead," and the eldest "Son of the Resurrection." But "that which hath been is that which shall be," and the highest scientific authority has assured us that "the marks of the future coming out to view in any given age are prophetic of that future" and of the type of life which shall then become supreme. It thus appears that Christ was not merely a Prophet, but, more than that, Himself a Prophecy of an age and order of life hereafter to be revealed on earth.

For from these premisses it follows that we have not only Scriptural but also scientific grounds for anticipating, if the resurrection of Christ be granted, that the present age shall come to its end, like the other ages that have gone before ; and that it shall be succeeded by another age, wherein they shall reign, inheriting the earth, who shall attain to sonship with God and to the resurrection from the dead.

Moreover, if the argument hitherto be granted, these stories of translation and of resurrection, so far from being incredible, are what, according to the principle of *the uniformity of natural law*, we should only be led to expect. The doubt, too, which, in this connection, is entertained by some, on account of the fact that such instances are exceedingly rare, is shown to be unreasonable. If the principle of the uniformity of the natural order be conceded, instances of this sort *should* as a matter of fact *not* be frequent, but sporadic and occasional.

We see, thus, that the law of *prophetic types* holds good for this age also, and that so, in this matter as well, the law enunciated in the text is verified: "That which hath been is that which shall be."

Does the creative week furnish any further illustrations of the text? No one can read the record in the book of Genesis without seeing there very clearly written a law of *creative interventions*.

The intimation is that each successive creative day was introduced by a special forth-putting of the Divine volition. We are not told, indeed, how that volition was exercised; we are taught that it was not in each case after the same manner. But, allowing our ignorance as to the manner, it remains that *creative intervention* is in that record set forth as a fact. The world of one day was, no doubt, the foundation and preparation for the world of the next day—which, indeed, could not have been without the former. Yet, notwithstanding, the order and the life of no one

period did develop by exclusively natural processes into the order and the life of the next. There was *creative interposition*.

It is safe to say that the same general truth is more and more distinctly brought out, the more that geological and biological science advances. It is true that the record of the rocks has not yet been completely studied and that this record is at the best imperfect. But no less is it true, that up to the present time there has not been discovered a single fact, settled as a fact by the universal acceptance of competent judges, which should disprove the universality of this law of *creative interposition* through the geologic ages.

Even if we grant that the various races of being are connected by descent one from the other, it must not be forgotten that this does not prove *unbroken* evolution. Descent does not for a moment exclude creative interposition, any more than the descent of the incarnate Son of God, as to His human nature, from Adam and Eve, excludes the miraculous incarnation.

Notwithstanding the persistent assertions of some, the fact is, that the highest authorities *do not claim to have proved* such an evolution as excludes creative intervention. Speaking of the case of the introduction of man, Professor Virchow of Berlin tells us that the progress of investigation seems to remove us *further and further* from what he calls the "desired" goal of the proof of the natural evolution of man from the lower orders. Professor Dana says that the transitions between genera, species, tribes, etc., are "with rare exceptions abrupt." And

while he says truly that we must in this connection remember the imperfection of the geologic record, yet he adds that still there are breaks so remarkable as to make it probable that geology will have to look to some other cause for the abrupt appearance of new species than imperfection of the record. In particular he tells us, with emphasis, that "if links ever existed which should connect man with the lower animals by a merely natural bond, their annihilation without a relic is so extremely improbable that it may be deemed impossible."

In a word, then, while neither science nor Scripture requires us to assume that these creative interventions were *frequent*, yet equally neither Scripture nor science will allow us to exclude them. *There is not the slightest evidence* that the inorganic ever by a natural process became organic; or, in other words, that dead matter ever of itself became living. There is equally no evidence that life in its lowest manifestations, marked by mere spontaneity, ever developed of itself into the form of life which we see in man, marked by the moral sense and by the power of free choice.

Such is concurrently the teaching also of Holy Scripture. Revelation and science thus agree in declaring that existence of a given order has no power to lift itself into a higher order. They agree no less in teaching that such times of creative intervention as are here referred to have been occasional and rare, marking great crises of transition; and that, so far as we know, between these times things went on, as things now go on, under the operation of the forces of nature unbrokenly. The days of

creation had their mornings and their evenings. But after each evening came a morning, marked by a new display of creative power, introducing a new and a higher order.

And now, having recalled these facts, we return to the principle of the text. "That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done." Is it not so, according to the Scripture, as regards this last law also? For, as we have seen, the present age, distinguished by the presence and dominance of the natural, or animal man, is to have an end. And then is to follow another age, marked by the appearing of a new heaven and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness; an order of things to be inherited by those men who shall be "counted worthy to become the sons of God and the children of the resurrection."

And no less clear is the Scripture in teaching that in the introduction of that new age the law of *creative intervention* is still in force. It teaches that the present order cannot by any of the forces resident in it raise itself into the order of that age to come. Scripture thus indicates with utmost plainness that it is what has been done that shall be done again. It teaches as the first act of the creative power of God, that the new man is born again, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of the Holy Spirit.¹ This, however, is but the beginning. When the full morning of the new creation breaks, then, we are told, shall be a new display, and that on a most stupendous scale, of

¹ John i. 12, 13.

the creative power of God, bringing in new heavens and a new earth, and therewith the sons of the resurrection with their new bodies, their *spiritual* bodies, to inherit the glory. Very clear are the words of Isaiah, quoted by Peter as referring to this event: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind,"² language wherein the prophet uses the same unusual Hebrew word for "create"³ which is used in the first chapter of Genesis and in describing the creation of man.

And as the earthly order of the new age shall thus be introduced, according to the ancient law, by a creative intervention, so shall it also be with the introduction of the new resurrection men, of whom it is said that they "shall inherit these things." For the resurrection will not be simply the final outcome of a natural process. It will be the result of the direct forth-putting of the almighty power of God. For we are told that the Son of God, who, as the Eternal Wisdom,⁴ was in the beginning with God as the "Master-Workman," when in the beginning He laid the foundation of the earth, and who was manifested in humiliation for our redemption, shall yet again appear; and "all that are in their graves shall come forth!" And so "that which hath been done" once and again in the creative week "is that which shall be done" when the almighty God shall bring in a new age, a new heavens and a new earth, and "new men in Christ Jesus" to inherit these things. "He

² Is. lxx. 17.

³ Heb. *bā á*.

⁴ Prov. viii. 22-31 (R.V.).

that sitteth upon the throne saith, Behold, I make *all things new!*”

I will add but one more illustration of the text. Not indeed in this case in Genesis, but very clearly in the rocks is revealed another law of the Divine administration during the process of that great week of creation. It may be called the law of *exterminations*.

In this phrase I refer to the observed fact that, from time to time during the creative ages, at the close of one age or period after another, there used to occur more or less extensive *exterminations* of various races and types of life. Let me give you the exact facts in the words of Professor Dana. He says—

“At the close of every period in the Palaeozoic Age there was an extermination of a large number of species living at the time; at the close of every epoch (or subdivision of the period) one less general.”

In particular he again tells us—

“At the close of the Cretaceous there was an extermination remarkable for its extent and thoroughness; a vast majority of the *species* and nearly all the *genera* disappeared.

The same thing occurred again at the close of the Tertiary Period, and again in the Quaternary.

The causes of these various exterminations were different in different cases. Often they were due to the elevation or submergence of extensive areas of the earth's surface; sometimes to the more sudden and rapid action of earthquakes; sometimes, within more narrow limits, they were due to fiery eruptions from the interior of the globe; while, yet again, they were the consequence of changes of climate more or less extensive, from

causes which I need not now detail. The only point which at present we need to note is this: that there are forces even now slumbering in the earth which have been able, especially at great critical epochs in the progress of the creative ages, to effect the total extermination of whole orders of life.

The way for the inbringing of a new and higher order of life was often prepared by the extermination of various *species* and *genera* unsuited to the new conditions about to be introduced. This, then, was included in the plan of God as to the progress of the creative work, that the transition from one age to another should be marked by a more or less general extermination of life. Even lesser divisions of the great days, as Professor Dana has told us, were sometimes marked in like manner!

And now, once again, we come back to our text, and are led to the now familiar words, that "that which hath been done is that which shall be done; and that which hath been is that which is to be." Does the principle, already seen to be so far-reaching, and of such universal application in the cases of the other great laws which we have noted, hold good with regard to this *law of exterminations* also?

One is immediately, with this question, reminded of the Deluge, as a world catastrophe, attested both by Scripture and by the unanimous and universal traditions of all races of men; a catastrophe which sharply divided what we might call "the first watch" of the night-time of this age, from the watches that were to follow. All agree that this catastrophe issued in the extinction of

nearly every individual of the human race on the face of the earth, and of immense numbers of the land animals with them. The record in Genesis mentions two causes of the Deluge: a great rain and—doubtless much the more important of the two causes—“the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep.” The Deluge thereby indicates the operation of great cosmical forces in the hand of God, precisely after the manner in which we know that similar submergences, by the sinking of continents or the elevation of the bottom of the sea, had previously taken place before men appeared upon the earth. In whatever way the result was effected, the fact stands out clear, that the Deluge was a very solemn and awful illustration of the great law that *extermination of species*, total or partial, marks the transition from one epoch to another. The Flood, in particular, was the dividing line between two sharply contrasted dispensations. A lesser crisis, moreover, is also observed in the change from the Jewish to the Christian dispensation, with a great attendant destruction of the Jews in A.D. 70. These may be regarded as answering to the various local extirpations that occurred within the main periods of the great geologic ages, as above referred to.

There is, then, direct evidence that the law of *exterminations*, as introductory to new epochs, was still in force after the present age began, up to the time of the Deluge. Of how intense interest becomes now the question which rises in our hearts, as we remember the law laid down in the text, certified in the rocks, and in this last case attested also

by the Scriptures of God, as well as by the traditions of all nations: shall the law be applied yet again in the future? Or is this one law to form the single exception in the array of facts which confront us, all bearing witness to the validity of the great scientific principle of the uniformity of natural law?

We cannot but remember that the Holy Word tells us that the present age is to end, and that another age is to follow. According to this law of exterminations, we should expect that there should be another great extermination in the future, when the present age shall give place to the next. Do the Scriptures also indicate this? Yes, for we are told that "the heavens and earth which are now are reserved unto fire for a day" which shall be a day "of the perdition of ungodly men."⁵ It is said that in that day the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man, the Lord and Head of the Creation of God, "shall be revealed . . . in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel."⁶ Yes, it was He Himself, the meek and lowly Jesus, of whom it was said that in the time of His first earthly existence He would not break a bruised reed, who said that "in the end of the age" He would "gather out" of His earthly kingdom "all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and cast them into a furnace of fire"; and that then, and only then, "shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Then will be introduced a new and higher cosmical order. Creatures unfitted for the

⁵ 2 Pet. iii. 7.

⁶ 1 Thess. i. 7, 8.

new environment will, as in the geologic ages was the rule invariable—perish. That law of evolution expressed in our day as the law of the Survival of the Fittest will have the force that it has always had.

Need I point to the application of this in a practical way ?

Not always shall this earth be as it is now, an abode of sin and pain and death. The morning cometh ; a new age is hastening on ; and he that overcometh shall inherit it. But the new order of things will not come in softly, sweetly, imperceptibly, by slow degrees. It will break upon the world with thunder and earthquake and confusion of devastating fire ; not as a gradual evolution, but as a catastrophe—sudden, awful, overwhelming.

Ah, well did the prophet ask, “ Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire ? ” Who, indeed ? Truly it will be as in the Deluge in Noah’s time ! Nothing availed then, but to be *in the ark*. Not a solitary soul passed over into the new world the other side of the flood, except that soul had previously believed the testimony of God, as given through Noah, and had acted accordingly. And, strange to say, such persons, all told, numbered only seven, Noah himself making the eighth saved.

So it shall be again. Between the present age and the age to come there is to be a flood—the next time not of water, but of all-devouring fire ! Again, as long ago, in Noah’s day, God, in His infinite mercy to sinful men, gives us urgent warning of the great day of fiery judgment which is coming. As before, also, He tells us that He has made a sure provision, whereby whosoever will

may make sure of passing safely through the terrors of that day, and of coming out unscathed into the light and life and glory of the new age and the new earth which shall follow.

Not now, indeed, is a Noah to build an ark. An ark could save once, but it were of no avail the next time. The coming age is to be an age only for spiritual men, and the salvation from this present age into the age which is to come can be by no outward instrumentality, but through spiritual means only. *Atonement* through blood, already offered by the Son of God as the Head of the new creation, and now to be accepted in faith ; *regeneration* unto the life eternal by the Holy Spirit ; these are the conditions through which alone any one of us shall experience that resurrection unto life, the conditions by which only we can inherit the kingdom of glory in the age which is to come.

I might add to these laws yet others, still further illustrating the great truth set forth in the text. But these will suffice to show how mightily the facts bear *against* the common notion that because of this law of uniformity, a law which truly is so evident, much of the Scripture revelation is incredible. The truth lies rather in precisely the opposite direction. Grant this law of uniformity, recall the laws of the Divine procedure in the past, and then many of the greatest and most momentous facts and events and doctrines of which the Scriptures tell us will appear only to be new manifestations of ancient laws of God's procedure established long ago, when in the beginning He laid the foundation of the earth.

Let us now, then, recall the general line of our argument in this discourse, and sum up the conclusions to which we have been led.

We have seen, in the history of the "week" of creation, a law of *progress* from the lower to the higher. First in order came that which was inorganic, then the organic; first the vegetable, then the animal; first the spontaneous and irrational, then that which is rational and free. I turn to Scripture, and am simply told that the law of progress still holds; that whereas first, as now, we see that which is natural, or animal, afterward shall be that which is spiritual. So, looking still at this law, I am constrained also to say that, if there is a God, the progress cannot end till there shall be no room beyond for a higher order in connection with this earthly creation; until, that is, a being shall be produced which shall perfectly reveal God, in all His Divine perfection. Short of that it is inconceivable that the love and holiness of God could rest. And so when I turn to Scripture I am in no wise surprised when I am there told of a God Man, "the image of the invisible God,"⁷ who has been manifested already in the flesh; nor am I surprised when I am told that He is the Head and the Progenitor of a new order of manhood, being in fact Himself a Second Adam. For this is only what, in the light of the principle and of the facts before us, I have been led to expect.

Again, there has been a law of *progress by ages*. And so, since that which hath been shall be. I am prepared to hear what the Scriptures tell

⁷ Col. i. 15.

us, that this present age shall end, and that to it a new age shall then succeed, wherein the new order of spiritual men shall reign in glory.

So, too, there has been a law of *preparation* in one age for the age following. But that which hath been shall be ; and therefore I am not surprised when I hear the Scripture constantly urging that the present age has its chief significance in this, that it is a preparation for the age which is to come.

There has been a law of *anticipative* or *prophetic types*. That is to say, the dominant life of any one age, thus far, has always been heralded by sporadic appearances of that type of life, or at least of forms approximating to that type, in the age preceding. And so when Scripture teaches the coming of an age which shall be inherited by a new order of heavenly manhood, "perfectly renewed into the image of Him that created" us, it is just what I should expect that there should be cases like that of Enoch, or Elijah, and above all, of Christ. If the Scripture testimony as to the coming age be true, then, since that which hath been done is that which shall be done, it were only to be expected that the present age would not pass without the occasional appearance of specimen types of the more exalted form of life that is to dominate the future.

But there has also been manifest a law of *creative interventions*, forming living organism out of dead inorganic matter, superadding to the vegetable the animal, and to the animal the rational soul endowed with free-will and moral character. But that which hath been is that which shall be : law, in other words, is uniform. And so are we

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led to the further conclusion that if a new order of manhood is to be revealed, then what the Scripture teaches as to regeneration, which is the birth of the new life, and as to resurrection, which is its full revealing, as being both alike due to the creative power of God, is only what on the scientific ground of the uniformity of law I should anticipate.

Last of all, we have seen that there has been manifest a law of *exterminations*. Species and types of being not suited to the environment of a new age disappear when the time of the new age comes. But again I remember that it is written, that that which hath been done is that which shall be done : and so when I read in Holy Scripture that unspiritual men shall yet be destroyed out of the earth, and in the perfected new earth have no part or inheritance, this again—terrible though it may be, and utterly unpopular—is only what I see that we have to expect *upon scientific grounds*. For the *conditions* of the new world of the age to come will be so different from those of the present, that flesh and blood will not be able⁸ to inherit it. Regeneration and resurrection are, in the nature of the case, absolute prerequisites.

May the Lord give us, in answer to our earnest prayer, His regenerating grace, that so we may become united to His Blessed Son, the Second Adam, and that so, when He shall appear, we also may appear with Him in glory !

⁸ 1 Cor. xv. 50: "Flesh and blood *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God."

III

“BELOVED, NOW ARE WE THE SONS OF GOD ; AND IT DOTHTH NOT YET APPEAR WHAT WE SHALL BE ; BUT WE KNOW THAT WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM, FOR WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS.”—I JOHN iii. 2.

I READ the text according to the revised version, which, in my judgment, more correctly gives the sense of the original :—

“Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him as He is.”

Wonderful words, which to read with faith and understanding makes the heart to swell with unutterable emotion ! They bring before us, Christian friends, first, two statements as to our present condition ; and second, two statements as to our future attainment. The statements regarding our present condition are, first, that now, at this present time, *we are* children of God ; and second, that what is involved in this fact of our sonship *has never yet appeared*. The statements as to our future are these : that whenever He (or, as some translate, *whenever it*) shall be manifested, we shall be *like God*—that to become like God is the destiny of the child of God ; and secondly, that this likeness to God shall be brought about through this circumstance, that we shall *see God as He is*.

First, then, there is this declaration as to the

present position of believers : “ Now are we children of God.” Observe that we are not at liberty to take the statement as absolutely universal. The doctrine which we sometimes hear, of a universal sonship of mankind, which without a new birth may claim all the promises of the Gospel, is not the teaching of God’s Word, but a fiction of the imagination. It is indeed true that there is a loose and general sense in which Paul could say that we all, by virtue of our nature as men, and with reference to our creation, are “ the offspring of God ” ; but that is not the sonship which is spoken of here. This latter is a sonship to God which has its beginning not in the natural birth, but in the new birth from the Holy Ghost ; a birth of the reality of which the only mark is that which is given by John in the immediately preceding context : “ Every one *that doeth righteousness* is born of God.” Mark the exact words : “ Every one that doeth righteousness ”—no one else. It is that same sonship of which we read in the first chapter of John’s Gospel, where we are told that “ as many as received Him ”—the Word, who is the Light and the Life of men—“ to them gave He power¹ to become the sons of God.” This is very plain. Not all men have this exalted privilege, but only those who have received in hearty faith Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and their Saviour.

Well may we pause here, each of us to ask of his own heart the question, “ Am I one of those who have, in obedience of faith, so received the Son of God ? ” If you have not so received Him, then be

¹ A. V. “ The right ” ; Gk. “ *δύναμις* .”

sure that you are not intended in these words, "Now are we the sons of God." And yet do not for this turn away the ear, as if you had therefore no concern to hear. For so it may be, that listening to these words of grace which are spoken of the sons of God, you may be filled with a strong desire that the blessed words may be true for you as well as for others.

But if, on the other hand, any of us can say, "I know that I have received, in whatsoever weakness, and with whatsoever fears and tremblings, Jesus as the Son of God and my Saviour, then let him listen, and doubt not that this word speaks of him and describes his present being. Let us all say it together, realizing, if we can so do in any measure, the full and blessed depth of its meaning: "*Now are we the children of God.*"

I need not say that we have here no rhetorical figure, no mere flourish of hyperbole, but a statement of what is true of every believer who has his faith in the Son, and seeks to live the life of righteousness. Neither do the words merely describe our external relation to God by a *figure of speech* derived from earthly relations. They do not mean simply that we hold the same place in God's love that children hold in a father's love. That is true, but more is true. We are not merely *like* children to God, but we *are* children of God. Let us stop and think what this means. What do we mean when we say of some one that he is the son of such a one? Simply this, that he is begotten by such a one, that he derived his natural life from that person, whom for this reason we call his father. It

is just so here. The words in this place express precisely what is elsewhere explicitly said, that "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is *born of God*"; that is, he has in his faith received a new life, a principle of life which is not in the natural man. Just as we say of a child, therefore, that he partakes of the nature of his father, so Peter tells us that by faith we are made *partakers of the Divine Nature*. This is what John means when he says, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." What a stupendous fact, if, then, indeed a fact! To think that in some of us here throbs the life of the Most High God, of God the Almighty, of God the most Holy, of God the All-wise and Eternal Creator! How grand, how uplifting the thought! Let us look up into the starry heavens, in their infinite and mysterious beauty and grandeur, and say, each to himself and herself, "He who made all these is *my Father*, and I through infinite grace am His child! Because I have believed on the Name of His Son Jesus Christ, I have His Word for it that I have received the right to be called a child of God! Now am I a child of God!"

This, then, is the first fact affirmed regarding the present condition of believers; but it is here strangely contrasted with a second fact also pertaining to our present state, a fact which at first thought seems inconsistent with the other. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." To not a few this seems a great difficulty. Here are many different people, externally, to the casual observer, quite alike in all respects, often even members of the same households. Yet we are told that of

these some are children of God and some are not children of God. Not only are they alike in personal appearance, but they are, really alike in personal character, so far as man can discern character. For there are some who with the young ruler can say of the commandments of God, "All these have I kept from my youth up"; and who in outward attractiveness of moral character are scarcely to be distinguished from very many who profess to be more than they, or who are more than they, even true Christians. And yet, according to this Word, there is such an immense difference between these and those: the one, the children of God, the others, in many ways so lovable and attractive, yet, according to their own confession, not born again, and so not the children of God. Between these two there must in reality be a great difference, if God's Word is true; but "it doth not yet appear."

Hence it is that to very many it is hard to believe that there is any sonship of men to God, other than that which is common to all men alike in virtue of their very origin and nature. Modern unbelief altogether denies this supernatural sonship. And on this ground even the Christian also allows himself to be troubled by the thought, Christian and non-Christian often being so much alike, to all external appearance. "A child of God!" Yet he sees so much in himself which is unlike God, and asks himself in sorrowful doubt, "Have I any right to say, 'Now am I a child of God'?"

Now observe that John admits the fact that we

have not yet attained the perfect likeness to God to which we shall attain. He says expressly, "*It doth not yet appear* what we shall be." We *shall* be like God at last; but there is nothing in the present appearance of the believer which manifests that mystery of glory which is germinant in his being. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be." For the present we have to take this on faith.

Moreover, the Apostle supports his wonderful statement by a remarkable analogy, given in the following words: "The world knoweth us not, even as it knew not the Father." The one fact depends on the other. For if the world knows not the *Father*, how can it be expected to be able to recognize likeness to Him, even when such likeness is a fact?

The same is true also of the Son of God. "He was in the world, and the world knew Him not."² Outwardly in so many ways He seemed like other men, that, notwithstanding His holy character and notwithstanding that He was the Son of God, the world yet knew Him not. The world took Him to be a man like other men, and no more. And so of Him, in the days of His humiliation, it could be truly said, "It doth not yet appear what this Man shall be."

To remember these things to which I have just been calling your attention will help us. And it will also be helpful to observe that the fact of which the Apostle speaks is wonderfully illustrated by the analogies of life everywhere. Of *every* form of being in its earlier stages it may be said with

² John i. 10.

truth, "It doth not yet appear what this shall be." These words in this connection formulate, in fact, *a law of nature*.

Even in inanimate nature the law holds good. When the earth in the early stages of its existence was yet a glowing ball of liquid fire, as it sped along its way among the planetary spaces, who could have imagined, or even dimly conceived, the possibilities of life and beauty which were there? Had the ancient earth possessed a voice, well might it then have said, and that right truly, "It doth not yet appear what I shall be."

And when the kingdom of life was introduced, in its lowest forms—seaweed, moss and lichen—who again could have guessed the wonderful destiny of plant-life? To whom could it have appeared that herein were the beginnings of inexhaustible forms of beauty and grandeur, from the exquisite wild-flower in the meadow to the towering cedar of Lebanon and the giant oak upon our mountain side? The whole world of plant-life in its beginnings could have said, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

And if any say that these illustrations are not good, believing that there was an intervention of creative power by which the newer, grander forms were brought in, we may leave such instances, and still find illustrations, the fitness of which *none* will dispute. Here is the eagle's egg in the nest: it doth not yet appear what this shall be! Or come later, and see in the same nest the helpless, callow eaglet: still is it true—it doth not yet appear what this shall be. It doth not yet appear how with

unblinking eye it shall soar on tireless wing heavenward and sunward, or with resistless power swoop from the height upon the prey! This indeed *shall be*, but it doth not yet appear.

Here is a caterpillar, crawling miserably in the dust. In this unsightly creature what possibility can there be of any beauty and of any higher activity? It doth not yet appear what this shall be! Yet here again come later, and see this same creature now encased in its leathery shroud. Even what life there was before has now, to all appearance, departed! Yet is it still true, that it doth not *yet* appear what this shall be. It is but a little later—weeks afterward, it may be—and there is the bright-winged butterfly, the very image of tireless life, activity and beauty, no longer crawling on the earth, or helplessly enshrouded in chrysalis, but living in the air and the sunlight, and flitting among the flowers; and now it hath at last appeared what that worm of earth should be!

These are illustrations; but they are more than illustrations. They are illustrations which are arguments. They prove the principle which underlies the Apostle's statement: namely, that it is impossible in the kingdom of life to argue from appearances in the present to a destiny in the future. In every case of life's beginnings and early stages it may truly be said, "It doth not yet appear what this shall be." He who should in any case, therefore, argue from a lowly beginning to a like lowly ending would often argue wrongly. Often and often the future would belie his conclusions and wonderfully transcend his expectations.

It may indeed be true, as it is true, that there is little to be seen of the Divine glory in even the brightest believer now. Yet this is no argument, either for himself or for others, against the reality of his sonship to God, so that he but bear the marks of sonship upon which the Apostle John insists—believing in the Son of God, and doing righteousness. In this case, despite any present appearances, each of us may with boldness say, “Now am I a child of God”; and without fear confess, “It doth not yet appear what I shall be.” This never does appear in the beginnings of life of any form.

And nature furnishes another illustration even more impressive and helpful to faith. It will be remembered that we remarked how often those who are not children of God seem very like others who are; so that herein arose the difficulty—can those who seem so much alike be in fact so very different, when the difference does not yet appear? But we can notice that this also is according to a universal law, and therefore need not disturb our faith. For not only is it true that in the beginnings of any living thing it doth not yet appear what that thing shall be, but it is also true, that *in the earliest stage of the existence of any living thing it is to all appearance just like every other living thing which is in that first stage*. In the beginning, in other words, all living things are alike. Everything that lives, as modern biology has taught us, begins its life as a formless, structureless substance, which (so far as microscopic or chemical analysis can tell us) is one and the same, whether it be the beginning of a worm, an eagle, a humming-bird,

or an elephant ! In other words, though in each case there *is* a difference, and a difference—it must be—most profound, yet in that first stage that difference is absolutely indiscernible. Exactly alike in appearance, and yet in many cases far different in reality : such, as a fact, are all beginnings of life. For one shall for ever crawl in the earth, and one shall rise on wings toward heaven, and one shall trample the forest in indomitable might ; and yet to present APPEARANCE the similarity is absolute and complete. This *bioplasm*, as the biologists call it, what *it* shall be doth not in *any* case appear !

There is here absolutely nothing discoverable which might give the most skilled biologist, possessing all the best appliances of modern art and bringing to bear on the problem all the accumulated knowledge of his science, the slightest hint as to what it is that he is dealing with—whether the beginning of a worm, or of an eagle, or of a snail, it may be, or a deer ! Could he, then, venture to predict the future of that bioplasm ? Only on one condition. Only one thing there is which could possibly enable him to speak with any confidence whatsoever, or with even the remotest chance that what he might say would be justified by the issue of the event. And that one thing is—knowledge as to the *origin* of what he has before him. For like begets its like : from the eagle comes the eagle, from the lion comes the lion, from the worm the worm ; and only from the *man* comes the man !

If, therefore, knowing this fact, the biologist shall say of such structureless living substance, “ This

shall yet develop into that which shall soar to heaven, and this other to what shall always crawl—a worm—in the earth,” and so on, it will be no objection that SENSE cannot discern the signs of such a transcendent difference. He will answer, that all was settled by the bioplasm’s origin. “Tell me whence that life came, and then—be present appearances what they may—I will tell its destiny.”

Now you will see how perfectly this fact in natural science illustrates the truth of the text. Here is the believer, and here is the unbeliever : the one born of the flesh, the other born of God ; the one having only the natural life of the natural man, the other, according to the infallible Word of the Son of God, born from above by the Holy Spirit of God Himself, and having therefore *the life of God*. So that I only know that this believer is in *reality a believer*—so that only he has that faith which evidences itself by righteous living—so that I only know—if know I may—that he is born of God, I need care little, though in everything ELSE he seem quite like the unbeliever, and though many unregenerate persons may appear quite like him. In the beginnings of life even the eagle and the worm appear alike ; it doth not yet appear what this or that shall be. Yet, none the less, the one shall never rise above the earth, while the other shall wing his way through the sky. And in many a case also the believer and the unbeliever, the man born only of the flesh and the man born of the Holy Spirit, may seem in this present primary stage of their life very much alike in many things—or even, it may be, in most things, so that it doth not yet appear

what each shall be. But, none the less, the one shall rise in incorruption to the heavenly glory, and the other, if he obtain not the new life from God, shall sink into the outer darkness.

So we grant the *apparent* difficulty expressed in these words; but are now ready to affirm, that in the light of God's revelation in nature, no less than in the light of His revelation in His Word, this apparent difficulty becomes in reality no difficulty at all; and so go on boldly with the apostle, nothing abashed by the lowliness of our present appearance—lowliness, be it, no less to ourselves than to the world at large—to declare through the Spirit of God the believer's future.

“It is not yet manifest what we shall be.” The text reads in this wise. But there are in it also, as we observed at the outset, positive statements as to our future. “We know that, when it *shall* be manifested,³ we shall be like Him.” This is the first of these statements: we shall be *like Him*. Like whom? Like to God, of whom the Apostle speaks. And how do we know this? By the fact that, if true believers in the Son of God, we have been born of God, and therefore have in us the life of God! Knowing this, we can safely predict the believer's destiny; and not only Scripture, but universal nature shall bear witness to our words. Recollect the law: like begets its like—law exceptionless, unvarying. That which comes of the

³ Or, “when He shall be manifested.” Either rendering is possible. The point of time referred to is the same in either case. “The manifestation of the sons of God” is contemporaneous with the second appearing, in glory, of the Son of God.

worm is born to the destiny of the worm ; that which came of the eagle shall yet be all that the eagle is. So also that which is born of the flesh has the destiny of the flesh before it ; and that which is born of God shall become like unto God, incorruptible. It doth not yet *appear* what we shall be ; yet we do know that when it *shall* appear we shall be like Him. Like Him ! It cannot be otherwise.

Born of God—that is the beginning ! Like to God—that is the ending ! Dare we even try to open up the boundless possibilities that these words contain ? It is not, indeed, that we shall be *equal* to God ; that could not be. Yet, though not equal to God, we shall become *like* God. Like God !

Like God in strength ! We are weak now—oh, how painfully weak ! How we feel it in the daily conflict with sin ! Weak too in intellectual power ; so weak of vision, that even of this material universe, the uttermost outskirts of the Divine glory, even the wisest have but broken glimpses ! But we **SHALL BE** like God in power !

And in wisdom, too ! We shall be like to God in wisdom ! The secrets of the world, the mysteries of Providence which baffle and perplex and distress us now, they shall all be opened up. For the Lord said, “ What I do thou knowest not now, but *thou shalt know* hereafter ! ” And the Apostle Paul declares that whereas now we see in a mirror, darkly, then we shall see face to face ; now we know *in part*, but then we shall know—oh, wondrous, unfathomable words !—we shall know *even as we are known* ! We shall be like to God in wisdom !

And in purity and holiness! Ah, this is what, if we are truly born of God, we long for most of all! We could be content to be weak, if we might yet be holy. We could be content to be ignorant, if we might yet be holy. But oh, the glory of it! We shall *not* be weak, and we shall *not* be always ignorant and foolish and short-sighted; and we shall be *holy*! For the glory of the Godhead is above all else in this, that God is holy; and we shall be like Him, and so we too, in many things now so unlike Him, shall yet be holy, as He is holy!

And we are told by the text, finally, that this perfect likeness to God, who is our Father, is to be brought about—how? It shall be brought to pass in this way, that *we shall see Him as He is*! In the glory of that beatific vision of the Father sin shall vanish, and impurity shall disappear; and—but what more can be said? “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Dear Christian friends, need I add to this exposition more than the words which follow in the epistle? You remember those words—words which are at once an exhortation to sonship and a test of sonship. Let us heed them, and live accordingly, seeing that otherwise we have not the slightest reason to believe that we are children of God: “Every man that hath this hope set on Him”—this hope of the child that he grow up to be like his father—“Every man that hath this hope set on Him”—this hope of becoming like to the Most High and Holy God the Father—“*purifieth himself* even as He”—the Father—“is pure.”

But some of you who are here are not the children

of God, and you know it. Has it not already occurred to you that, if all that has been said be true, as you will not deny that it is true, then the words may no less truly be said of you than of the child of God, "It doth not yet appear what you shall be"? You think perhaps that there is so little difference between you and many Christians that it cannot be a very serious matter. But you must see that no argument could well be more delusive.

That you shall yet be separated from even him who is now the weakest and most imperfect Christian by impassable abysses of being—this, I confess, "doth not yet appear." And yet, except we are prepared to reject, not merely the teaching of Holy Scripture, but that of all nature as well, so it verily shall be; and any degree of present likeness between you and some true Christians cannot in the least argue against this. For in you, as in the child of God, we see as yet only the beginnings of life: in you the beginnings of the life of the flesh, as in him the beginnings of the life of God—the beginnings only. But wait and see whereunto each shall finally develop, the life of the flesh and the life of God! Do you not see that, however it doth not yet appear what each shall be, yet in the necessity of the case the end of one must be very unlike that of the other? Surely in this matter not only the written Word, but nature too, is luminous with solemn warning. He who by the new birth of the Holy Spirit has been made partaker of the life of the incorruptible God must by the very necessity of the new and Divine nature become finally like in character unto the incorruptible God.

And by the same law, he in whom is only the natural life of the flesh, which is corruption, except he betimes obtain from God the grace of the new life, must sink into those depths of corruption to which it is inevitable that the fleshly nature must descend—

“ Into that deep abyss,
That fathomless abyss,
From which no plummet or rope
Ever drew up the silver sand of hope.”

IV

“IT IS SOWN A NATURAL BODY; IT IS RAISED A SPIRITUAL BODY.”—I COR. XV. 44.

THE Greek words which are here rendered “natural” and “spiritual”¹ are respectively derived from two other words which are commonly translated “soul” and “spirit.”² The word “natural” is thus connected with a noun which in our New Testament has always been rendered “soul” or “life,” and the word “spiritual” with a word which is always rendered “spirit.”

To understand what these words “natural” and “spiritual” mean in this place, we need to understand what in the Scriptures is denoted by the two words “soul” and “spirit,” with which they are so closely connected. Sometimes, indeed, these two words seem to be used indifferently one for the other, in cases where this looser usage can give rise to no misunderstanding. In other cases, however, the two words “soul” and “spirit” are plainly distinguished one from the other, just as in this verse the adjectives derived from them are contrasted. The most notable example of this, perhaps, is found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the discriminating and penetrating power of the Word of God is illustrated by the fact that it “is able to pierce even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.” So also Paul, writing to the Thesalonians, says, “I pray God your whole spirit,

¹ psychicos; pneumatics. ² psyche; pneuma.

and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this last passage, as well as in the other, a distinction is plainly taught between the soul and the spirit. If we suppose otherwise, we are making the apostle multiply words without meaning. As the soul is different from the body on the one hand, so it is different from the spirit on the other. By the word "soul," when thus used in contrast with spirit, is intended that immaterial principle of life which man has in common with the lower animals. For according to the Bible as well as according to our own observation, the lower animals as well as man have souls.

But as the word "soul" in Scripture phraseology specially denotes that principle of life, instinct and intelligence, which man has in common with the beasts, so the word "spirit" strictly denotes that higher nature which we have, and which the beasts have not, by which man is allied to God, who is Himself spirit, and who formed man after His likeness. Thus we find that the word rendered "soul" is never applied to God. God is called a "Spirit," the "Father of spirits," never the "Father of souls." In a word, then, God, according to the Bible, is a Spirit only; the lower animals have souls only; man has both soul and spirit, a soul which allies him with the lower creation and a spirit which allies him with God.

It will now be easy, I hope, to understand in a general way what Paul means when, using the adjective derived from the noun "soul," he says of this present body, "it is sown a natural body." He cannot, of course, mean that it is a body which is

made of the animal soul, or immaterial life-principle, which is in us. He can only mean to describe this present body as one which is formed by, adapted to, and limited by the capacities of this animal life which we have in common with the lower animal creation. In the same sense, for example, a horse might be said in Pauline phraseology to have a "natural" or "soul" body. Thus while man differs from a beast in having a spirit, which the beast has not, yet, as to his body, we all know that he is like a beast—is, in short, an animal. His body is formed on the same general plan, is governed by the same general laws, and is capable of the same functions as those of the other mammalia. The elements which compose his body and the organs of his body are all in a general way the same as those of other animals. The vital processes of respiration, digestion, and assimilation are the same in a man as in a horse. In short, man has, undeniably, an "animal" body; and this phrase "animal" body, which is that given in the Latin version of the Epistle to the Corinthians, is perhaps the one which best of all explains what the apostle here intends. That which is sown is an "animal" body: that is to say, a body formed by the principle of animal life, controlled by it, and adapted to its uses. Such is the body which, when dead, we lay in the grave.

But "it is raised a spiritual body." What this phrase, too, means will now be clear. It is evident that it must be understood after the exact analogy of the other phrase, "a natural body." As those words do not mean a body which is formed out of

the soul, or principle of animal life, so the phrase "spiritual body" cannot mean, as so many have imagined it to mean, a body which is formed out of spirit, which is immaterial, ethereal, and in that sense spiritual. As the phrase "a natural body" means a body like ours, formed by the energy of the principle of animal life and with special reference to its nature and necessities, so must the phrase "a spiritual body," which describes the resurrection body, denote a body which shall be formed by the energy of the immortal *spirit*, a body specially adapted to the cravings and necessities of the spirit, as this present body is to those of the animal life; a body which shall be an organism fitted to be the perfect and glorious instrument for the holy activities of the man formed by grace into the perfect image of his Lord and Redeemer.

Thus, while the text implies the identity, in a certain high sense, of the resurrection body with that which is sown in the grave, it teaches, with emphasis, that there shall be a great difference. The difference will not consist in this, that while one is of matter, the other shall not be of matter; but in this, that just as our present body, the body that is sown in the grave, consists of matter organized in such a way as to be the fit and adequate instrument of the principle of animal life, so the resurrection body shall consist of matter organized, in a way extremely different, of which we can now form no conception, but which shall constitute it the fit and adequate instrument of the principle of spiritual life.

Very suggestive here are the analogies of nature.

First, in the order both of geology and of revelation, came inorganic matter, with rare and beautiful forms in crystal and in gem. Next came the lower forms of organic life, moss, grass and tree, wherein matter blossomed out into forms of beauty, and showed powers that no crystal had betrayed. Then came another age, and the forms of animal life appeared, and with them for the first time consciousness, and the power of free movement. Animal life, in turn, presented higher and higher forms, until at last, at the climax of this earthly development, appeared man, the highest type, as to his body, of the animal kingdom. But we saw on another occasion that according to the Scripture that which hath been is that which shall be. The analogy of nature, then, indicates that the end has not yet been reached. "First that which is natural," says the Scripture, "then that which is spiritual." Even as in the fleet bird of the air matter is seen in a higher and nobler form, and with loftier possibilities of activity, than in the moss of the forest, or even the oak, so shall the spiritual body of the resurrection present us with powers and possibilities of organization as far beyond those of the present body as the present body is beyond and above the forms of life which we see in the vegetable kingdom.

This, then, is the first thing which the Scriptures teach us as to the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection body, which will be, in a deep and mysterious sense, the same as that which was sown, will, in another sense and equally true, be not that which was sown, but something vastly higher, an

organization of another and far more exalted order. In what respects shall it be different? For the answer to this question speculation can avail us nothing: we can turn only to the Scriptures.

The first statement which we find in the Scriptures bearing on this is found in the reason which is given for the change which shall pass upon the living at the second coming of our Lord. The reason for this is found in the fact that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither can corruption inherit incorruption." When we read again these words, in the light of what we have been considering, we are at once reminded of the direct assertion of our Lord touching the body which He received in resurrection, that it was a body of flesh and bones. "A spirit," He said, "hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Throwing together the light which we receive from these two passages, we seem to learn that while the body of the resurrection shall be a body of flesh and bones, it shall yet not be like this present body, a body of flesh and blood.

If we ask for further light, we are reminded by the apostle that flesh, even as we know it, is of different kinds; and bodies, even as we know them, are of different kinds. "There is one kind of flesh of man, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds; so also there are bodies celestial and there are bodies terrestrial. . . . So also," he adds, "is the resurrection of the dead." The body to be inherited will be a body of flesh, but not of the same kind of flesh as that which we now have. It shall not be "flesh and blood;" it shall be

differently organized in this respect. This, he intimates, must necessarily be, because "corruption cannot inherit incorruption." The office of the blood in this present body is simply to convey to the various tissues of the body, ever corrupting and wasting away, the elements supplied by food for their continual repair. But in a body made to inherit incorruption, a state of things in which there is no waste and no decay, it is plain that an organization of flesh and blood would be wholly out of place. And therefore it is that, while we read that the resurrection body will be a body of flesh and bones, like unto Christ's glorious body, it will not be a body organized like that body which we have now, with flesh and blood.

As in the resurrection there is no need of an organization arranged for the supply of waste, because there is no longer death, no longer corruption and decay as regards the individual; so neither will those relations continue which are intended by God for the reproduction of the race. As the individual, so the whole body of redeemed humanity will in the resurrection stand complete in eternal life. And so it is that we hear the Saviour saying, "In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage." The type shall give place to the antitype. The family shall give place to that which the family typified, the perfect fellowship of the household of God. Marriage shall be no more, but the better thing which marriage symbolized—

"Not spouse, but what is signified by spouse!
Not consort, but what consort typifies!"

The real significance of all these descriptions of the nature of the spiritual body is wrapped up in that word "incorruptible." An incorruptible body ! That implies a great deal ; for the truth is that most, if not all, of the bodily pain and suffering which we experience is due to the fact that this present body is *corruptible*. For what is hunger, and what is thirst, but nature's warning that the body is wasting, and must have food and drink ? What are the sensations of weariness and fatigue, but indications that the vital energy has become in some degree exhausted ? But when the body shall be made incorruptible, there shall no longer be any waste that needs to be replenished. No exhaustion shall be possible to that resurrection body, but to its immortal life shall belong eternal power. Incorruptible ! Then we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, and weariness shall be a thing unknown. And there shall be no night there, because the corruptible nature which made sleep a necessity shall have been exchanged for a tireless body of incorruption, which shall feel no need of rest. Incorruptible ! Then there shall be no more sickness ; for sickness in all its various forms is but the power of corruption made manifest. "The inhabitant of the land shall no more say, 'I am sick.'" Incorruptible ! There shall be no more pain. And finally, there shall be no more death. All the avenues and byways of death shall have been closed up.

What a glorious contrast there will be between those new bodies and these sickly, aching, hungering, thirsting, often jaded and weary "bodies of

death," which we carry about with us here! A body which shall never be weary, never hunger, never thirst, never suffer pain, never be sick, never die, never be capable of dying! Oh, the joy of it! The aching head no more; the weary limbs no more; the clouding and darkening of disease no more; the infirmities of age no more! Sown in corruption, the body shall be raised in *incorruption*!

And the apostle adds another contrast between our present body and the resurrection body. "It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power!" This resurrection body, in texture incorruptible, is also a powerful body. This *power* does not necessarily follow from the fact that the body is incorruptible. A body might be incorruptible, and yet its faculties and powers be of very limited range. But this glorious new body of the resurrection, we are told, is to be a powerful body. In contrast with the wonderful capacities which shall belong to it, our present body is weak, literally without strength. It shall be "raised in power," clothed with power, as with a vestment. It shall have the power to do what is now impossible. That which to this present body is miracle shall be to us in the resurrection natural.

This endowment of power might be in either one of two ways, or in both. Power might be given to the new body in a wonderful quickening and enhancing of the strength of those faculties which we now possess. Our sight, for example, is now of limited range. We can see distinctly only to a very short distance. If we would see farther, we must use a telescope; but even here, too, we soon reach

the limit of our powers. We can see distinctly only objects of a certain size, and there is a whole universe which is invisible to us on account of its minuteness. We aid our feeble sight by microscope, but here too we soon find a limit beyond which our powers fail us. We can infer with the most perfect certainty existences so inconceivably minute that the most powerful microscope has never revealed them, nor is likely to ; and a whole universe of being lies immediately around us which is utterly invisible to us simply because of the inadequacy of our power of vision. So also is our hearing limited. We may use what seem at first to be contradictory terms and say with truth that there are sounds which are too high to be heard, and sounds which are too low to be heard. There are certain insects, even, which seem to surpass man in this respect, seeming to hear sounds where to us nothing is audible. Our present sight is weak ; our present hearing is weak. So it is, also, with all other functions of the brain. Take memory : how quickly we all forget ! But the fault is not with the mind ; the fault is with the brain, the mind's feeble and imperfect organ. We have abundant evidence, from sickness and from old age, that the vigour of memory is largely, though not entirely, dependent on the state of the brain. But the brain, like all our other bodily organs, is weak ; it is "of the earth, earthy." With imperfect memory comes, also, imperfect judgment. We often err in judgment because through failure of the memory we do not have the elements necessary to a valid judgment clearly before our mind. In

muscular power, too, man is very deficient, very weak. He can move but very slowly—the deer far outstrips him ; and at the best he soon wearies and falls exhausted.

Now suppose merely that all these faculties at present so weak were to be indefinitely increased in vigour, as, indeed, in an incorruptible body, must needs be : then what a marvellous change ! Universe upon universe thrown open to our penetrating vision ; and such power, perhaps, that we may be able to see into the very inner constitution of things, where now we can only blindly conjecture ! The activity of the soul, and its eager desires, shall be no longer restricted by a body of gross, corruptible flesh, which is ever tiring, and so quickly, with energy exhausted, refuses to obey the behest of the spirit. A worn and weary brain shall no more render such imperfect obedience to the will to remember ; or fail, because impaired through age or disease, to receive and retain the impressions conveyed to the soul. In short, even though that power which we are told shall belong to the resurrection body should consist only in the strengthening of the faculties which we already possess, what almost unimaginable possibilities arise before the mind ! Who is there that can conceive the grandeur and the glory of a life having such wonderful powers at its command ?

But it is conceivable that the greater power of the resurrection body should consist not only in the greater strength of the faculties which we now possess, but in the presence of additional faculties, of which we can now form no more con-

ception than a man blind from his birth could form of the natural faculty of sight or of the visible universe which that faculty reveals to others. And that this shall be true of the resurrection body is made probable by the whole analogy of nature. We know that with the rising gradations of the animal kingdom new powers appear. What a difference in respect of the multiplicity and variety of its powers between the oyster or barnacle and the fish : between the fish, again, and the eagle or horse ! What a vast difference between an orang-outang and a man, in variety of power and endowment ! Why should the analogy stop here ? Why should we not expect that the resurrection body will have powers of a yet higher order than any that we now possess ?

But we are not left to the conjectures that we can make from analogy. We are told that the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus is the pattern, the model of that which we shall receive. No one can read the narrative of the forty days' resurrection life of Christ without seeing that the analogy of nature was carried out, just as we should expect. In the body which Christ received after His glorious resurrection were powers and faculties of which we have no hint in our present mortal bodies. We observe, firstly, that He had the power of instant appearance and disappearance. Twice we read that He suddenly appeared in the midst of His disciples, although the doors were shut. And on the other hand we read that while He was talking to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus, He as suddenly vanished out of their sight. How

this was effected we are not told. The narrative suggests that Christ in His resurrection body had the faculty of instantaneous removal to a place far distant. This circumstance falls in, too, with the repeated statement in regard to His second coming to earth, that "as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

Here, then, we have in view a body of such a nature that it so infinitely transcends the body with which we are familiar as to be in absolute subjection to the obedience of the will; possessing a power of motion like to that of the heavenly creatures seen by Ezekiel, which, he says, "ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning." Such seems to have been the nature, in this respect, of the resurrection body of our Lord, and such, therefore, as Scripture teaches, the nature of every spiritual body of the resurrection. The spiritual body, then, is to be in a manner delivered from the impediments and restraints of space and distance.

This leads naturally to another point. The spiritual, resurrection body of our Lord was of such a nature that, unlike the natural, animal body, it was not confined to the limits of this earth. It had the marvellous power that enabled it, without any reference to the power of gravitation or the absence of atmosphere, to enter stellar regions, and to leave this earth at will. For Luke tells us that Christ rose, ascended into heaven; and that not as the bird rises, by flying, employing the resistance of the atmosphere, but, as it appears, simply in virtue of an act of will. Here is another

power of the spiritual body, of which we have no suggestion in the body which we have known. These present bodies in this respect are simply powerless. The man ambitious of intellectual achievement and discovery, who would fain scale the heavens to gather tidings of the sun, the moon and the stars, must needs content himself with standing on the low earth, and impotently gazing on those heavens whither the limitation of his bodily powers forbids him to ascend. But Christ's resurrection body had, in this respect also, power absolute to perform the desires of the will. And since our resurrection bodies are to be like His, we learn that a like amazing power shall reside in the resurrection bodies of believers. Nay, as to this we are most expressly told, that the bodies of those true believers who shall be found on earth when Jesus comes, being changed in the twinkling of an eye to bodies incorruptible (in all the meaning of this wonderful word) shall rise to meet Him, after the manner of Christ's own ascension; rise "to meet the Lord in the air."³ They shall have the very same power in this regard that Christ's resurrection body had.

In brief, all that we learn as to the nature of the spiritual body and all that is revealed regarding the resurrection body of the Lord, suggests the idea that the spiritual body will be eminently a body which shall be an absolutely perfect organ for a renewed and perfectly holy will; a body which shall be able perfectly to realize every wish which to all eternity can possibly arise in a perfectly holy will working in strict accord with the most holy Will of God.

³ 1 Thess. iv. 17.

What beyond all this blessed mystery may lie hidden in those words "a spiritual body," we know not. We know that the body, which is sown in weakness, shall be raised in power; that though it is sown in dishonour, it shall be raised in glory. And we know that when imagination has reached the limits of its power, all our most unspeakable dreams of the glory that shall be revealed in us will differ from the reality only in that they will fall far, far short of it. For when the tired fancy returns from her celestial flight, bewildered by the mere glimpse of glory which has been revealed to her, it still remains as true as ever, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

Is it any wonder that, as Paul tells us, the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for this revelation of glory? Thus it is also that, meditating on these things, we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, with irrepressible longing waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.⁴

And this redemption of the body, with all of glory that is wrapped up for us in that hope, is, let us remember, but the issue of a present life in Christ. It is the glorious fruit of the seed of grace which is implanted in the new birth, whose first tender leaf is faith, whose flowering is a holy life, and whose full fruitage is a resurrection unto life! Has the seed been planted in us? Oh, let us live

⁴ Rom. viii. 22, 23.

for the resurrection ! And keep the body holy ; for there is a mysterious connection between the body which is and that which shall be. The body, Paul says, even this present body, “ is not for impurity, but for the Lord ” : “ and God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power.”

And then remember the law under which the resurrection takes place : “ To every seed its own body.” The spiritual body will be the perfect expression of what the immortal principle in each man is. Wheat comes up wheat ; tares will come up tares. Even now it is true that the spirit that is in the body forms the body. Meanness, sensuality in the soul is invariably stamped in the face ; and holiness transforms the countenance of him who is of holy life. Yet now this is true imperfectly, but in the resurrection each man’s body shall be a perfect image of what he is. There is a resurrection which is not of life : a resurrection which is unto condemnation and eternal degradation.⁵ If we wish to inherit the body of glory, so that resurrection shall not be to us an infinite humiliation, when in the transparency of a new embodiment we shall appear to all *as we are*, then must we have the eternal life from Christ. That we, as those suffering saints of old, “ might obtain a *better resurrection*,”⁶ let this be our unfaltering aim. And so we may, my beloved brethren, seeing that all this wondrous glory is to be revealed in us, so may we be “ steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord !

⁵ Dan. xii. 2. Acts xxiv. 15.

⁶ Heb. xi. 35

V

‘WHY SHOULD IT BE THOUGHT A THING INCREDIBLE WITH YOU THAT GOD SHOULD RAISE THE DEAD?’—Acts xxvi. 8.

THESE words are from Paul’s defence of himself before King Agrippa. Festus, who clearly perceived the real issue between Paul and the Jews to centre on the disputed point of Christ’s resurrection, had informed Agrippa to that effect. This fact, disbelieved alike by Jew and Gentile, was disbelieved by each on different grounds. The orthodox Jew rejected it, not because he regarded the resurrection as itself incredible; for, as Paul said, they themselves allowed that there should be a resurrection of the dead: only that the despised Nazarene whom they had crucified should be the first that should rise from the dead, this was something that they could not believe. With the Gentile, whether with the Greek or the Roman, it was different. To him it was no offence that Jesus of Nazareth should be said to have risen from the dead, more than that the same should be asserted of any other man; but that this should be affirmed of *any* person seemed to him absurd, “a thing incredible.” To this sentiment Paul addressed himself in the words of the text. “You believe it *incredible* that God should raise the dead; and you regard it as evidence of unsound mind,

that any man of intelligence and learning should soberly affirm that this had happened. Why now incredible? Why incredible?" Such was Paul's attitude toward his hearer as he proceeded to reason on the matter.

Now he who insists on the intrinsic incredibility of a resurrection from the dead can only do so on the broader principle that all alleged supernatural events are themselves incredible. The resurrection is a typical miracle; he who denies its possibility can do so only on the assumption that the miracle always must be regarded as in and of itself incredible. And it was precisely on this ground that the story of Christ's resurrection, and by consequence the whole story of His redemptive work were by the philosophers in those days everywhere rejected with undisguised contempt. That story professed to be a narrative of supernatural events, and that was enough to stamp it at once as false, and to overbalance any apparent weight of testimony by which it might be accompanied.

I hardly need to remind intelligent persons that a large part of the intellectual and scientific world to-day looks at the matter in exactly the same way. That God should have raised the dead, that He did raise the crucified Jesus, in their opinion is utterly incredible; and no less incredible all the miracles imputed to Jesus Christ. With all such it is either unconsciously, or else, as with many, consciously and avowedly held as a fundamental canon of historical criticism, by which the verity of all professed history must be tested, that the miraculous is impossible, and that therefore all

stories of miracle, whether said to have been wrought by Christ, or said to have been wrought by the Buddha, are alike to be rejected as unworthy of credence. And the audacity and dogmatism with which this is insisted upon by many, and coolly taken for granted as settled by others, has had the unfortunate effect of weakening the faith of many who are not yet quite prepared to go the length of an outright rejection of the narratives of miracle in the Gospels. And so the remark has come to be made that the miracles of Christ, which used to be regarded as the chief supports of the Gospel, are now rather to be looked upon as the heaviest burden which it has to carry.

I therefore wish at this time, and by way of preface to what I may hereafter say as to the miracles of Christ, to show you why I believe not only that this supposed presumption against the occurrence of all or any such miraculous events as we find recorded in the Gospels does not exist, but that the *presumption* is in fact on the other side; so that, quite antecedently to the *knowledge* of any alleged facts of the kind, there is the strongest reason to *anticipate* a supernatural intervention in the affairs of men.

In the first place, the alleged presumption against the occurrence of a miracle cannot be maintained unless a man be prepared to go farther, as some do, and deny that there is an almighty free Will at the helm of the world. If all that exists is either matter or impersonal spirit, then, I concede, a miracle is incredible. But this cannot be taken for granted. I observe that a multitude

of the profoundest students of nature deny this. Such as a Tait, a Clerk-Maxwell, a Mivart—such even as a Darwin—stand on the other side of this question. A host of the highest authorities in physical science will tell us that when we should have weighed all the matter and measured all the force in the universe, if that were possible, we should not yet have reached the ultimate secret of things or the Cause of things as they are. The majority of the wisest men, even in our day, do still believe that matter is *not* all ; that spirit and personality are terms which represent realities.

Force itself, the most spiritual thing of which physical science can take cognizance, is not itself an ultimate fact. For what is the source of the force ? To say that force *produces* an effect does not account for that effect ; nor can I at all rest until I am driven by an inevitable logic to affirm the presence of a free Will working in nature.

For example, wherever I look I see motion. The sun, the moon and the stars are moving in heaven ; on earth the rivers are rushing to the sea, and the avalanche is tearing down the mountain side. And not only is there all around us motion visible to the eye, in masses of matter, but we have also learned in our day that every atom of matter is itself in incessant motion ; that in heat and in light and in electrical phenomena we have simply the manifestation of this molecular motion to the senses. Motion, motion everywhere ; that is the great fact, and it is a fact of immense significance.

Now whence comes this motion ? In the answer

to that question lies the secret of the universe. For one thing at least is certain : matter does not, and cannot, move itself. Try it. I lay this stone on the ground. Will it ever move? No ; it will stay just there to all eternity, except it be moved from without. And what is true of every mass of matter is equally true of every part of the mass. The atom cannot move except it be moved. You cannot indeed see the atom, but you know perfectly well that you could not pound that stone so fine that at last one of those minute particles should move of itself. We do indeed see matter moving other matter, but it had to be moved of itself first. No one can prove that matter ever has originated, or ever can originate, motion. Whenever we are able to track a motion up to its source, what do we see? At the far end we always find a *will*. I see a thousand balls in motion ; one ball moves its neighbour, and that the next one, and so on ; but go you back to the end of that row of balls, and you know that a hand, a hand moved by a *free will*, started that motion.

You see the argument now. Matter is everywhere in motion. That motion had its cause either in matter or outside of matter. But it cannot have had its origin in matter, else the physical doctrine of inertia, as one of the fundamental, and in fact one of the defining characteristics of matter, is false, and a stone, for example, *may* move of itself. The motion which we everywhere see had, therefore, its origin *outside of matter* ; it must have come from something which is not matter. But the only thing in the universe that we see to have

the power to originate motion is *Will*. Therefore I am sure that the cause of all these multiplex motions of the universe must be a will. And so I am compelled to believe that outside of the world of matter, and outside of and above humanity, moving all that moves, is a *Will*! Could our weak sight but reach to the far end of things, be sure that we would always find a will there. Mark it well! Just as surely as you will find a human hand at the far end of your line of balls, just so surely behind all these motions of the universe shall you find a will.

And not only so; but when I see that all these infinitely complex motions which I behold in the universe, with all their amazing intricacy, are yet so *arranged* as to present not confusion, but a most perfect and beneficent harmony, then I know that that Will which moves all things is not a *blind* energy, but a Will that sees—a Will that knows. It is not, then, a mere dead force, moving things from the inner necessity of its nature, but it is *free*!

But what has now become of those laws of nature of which so much is said; those laws which are, as we are told by superficial thinkers, so fixed that a miracle is impossible, and that God Himself—if there be left any place for a God—is bound and restricted in His mode of action by these same laws? The laws of nature? What are they but simply the revelation of *the manner in which* the Supreme Will which is behind the universe *chooses to exercise* that eternal freedom which is His?

To sum up this part of our argument then:—

When I look out upon the system of law in the universe, of which so much is made in this question of miracles, I find that the principles of sound reason will not allow me to stop short with law or force. I am absolutely compelled to believe in an almighty, intelligent Will, upholding all things by the word of His might, the primal fount of all energy, and the source of all power. Behind these rushing galaxies of worlds in the firmament above me, I perceive not dimly the resistless force of an almighty Will. In the genial sunlight, in the thrill of pleasant warmth, I see simply the manifestation of the kindly energy of an all-wise Will, in which we live, and move, and have our being. But if the moving power in the universe be a free Will, at once immanent in the world and yet separate from it, and if the laws of the universe are nothing more or less than the expression of the mode in which that free Will for reasons sufficient to itself at present chooses to act, then it is plain that those laws cannot *bind* God, or in any wise restrict that *freedom* of which they are only the visible expression. And, still further, if all the orderly movements of the universe are thus to be referred to a free Will, then my challenge is for any man to prove that *free Will shall always act in the self-same way*. No man can have the right to say this. No man knows enough to say this, or can know enough. You do not know how the free will of your nearest friend will lead him to act. Before you or I may have any right to affirm that the Divine Freedom never has expressed itself, and never can express itself, in any

other way than that which is represented in the present system of natural law, we must *find out God*, aye, and find Him out to perfection too. You must gauge His eternity. You must with the plummet of your reason fathom the depths of the Divine Wisdom. You must be able to chart out all the Divine purposes from eternity to eternity. Then, and then only, will I admit that any man on earth has a right to affirm that neither in the ages that are gone has there ever existed, nor in the ages to come can there ever hereafter exist, any reason why the Divine Freedom should be exercised in any manner different from that in which it is exercised now. Until, then, man has *found out the Almighty to perfection*, to affirm that a miracle never has been, nor ever can be, and on that ground to doubt the Gospel history, is simply to make a vain pretence to that perfect knowledge of God, and is thus a most inexplicable—an altogether sublime impertinence.

But some one will say, nevertheless: "*Experience* is against the miracle." We are asked, with great earnestness, oftentimes: "As a matter of fact, do we not see that God always does exercise His Freedom in the same way, never deviating from the order of established law? And is not experience, then, against the probability of a miracle, that is, of a supernatural revelation?"

To which I answer, "*Whose* experience?" *You and I* have not seen any deviation from the order in which the Divine Free Will operates in nature—that is true. Nay, more than that; I will admit—what, please observe, all will not

admit—that *no one now living* has ever seen anything which could not justly be referred to the operation of the system of natural law under which we live. Is this even an argument? If we grant that God has acted in the same way for forty or fifty years, does that prove, or raise any serious presumption, that He always has acted and always will act in that selfsame way? What are forty or what are fifty years in the course of those eternal ages in which the Divine Will has been working out His purposes in the universe, that from data covering so narrow time we should draw inferences as to what God must or must not do in all time past and future?

“No,” you say, “but we appeal to the experience of *the ages*, to the experience of the human race. Surely from observation covering centuries we may justly infer *something* as to the probable mode in which God acts!” Precisely so; to the experience of mankind let the appeal be made. And whence will you gather the facts of that experience? Whence but from the recorded history of mankind? Ask history then; let the appeal be to the experience of bygone ages, as therein recorded. And what answer do you receive? Is it that experience has been uniform on this matter, or is it the exact reverse? Is it not the notorious and most familiar fact that history is full of stories of miracle? No doubt in many cases these alleged wonders will not bear examination—no one is now affirming that they will; but what right does this give any one to set aside without discrimination *every* statement of the kind as

false? The stubborn fact remains that thus far history *refuses* to testify that experience of this matter has been absolutely uniform. If multitudes do testify that they have never personally witnessed any deviation from the usual order of nature, it is also true that multitudes, oftentimes at imminent risk of life, are found to declare that their experience has been different in that regard.

“But,” you say, “you will admit that at any rate the experience of *the great majority* has been that the order of nature is unvarying?” Undoubtedly. But, pray, are questions of this sort to be settled by a vote, and their truth or falsehood determined by majorities? There are several things in the universe as yet which are not settled by universal suffrage, and questions of fact are among them. If ten good men and true swear that they saw a robbery committed, their testimony cannot be out-voted by ten thousand men who were not on the spot and who shall swear (albeit quite truly) that they did not see it.

But observe the effrontery of our modern destructive criticism. All records of human experience which affirm the miraculous are coolly set aside as unworthy of credence. And why, forsooth? Because *à priori* the *dictum* has gone forth from these scholars that “experience is uniform; and therefore any allegation of the miraculous in history cannot be regarded as true history.” This is no exaggeration of the way in which men do argue and by bald assertion impose upon themselves and others. Thus, for example, a prominent French Protestant minister declares :

“There are no miracles; God does not change the order which He has established”—as if it were not the very question before the world to-day: “What *is* that order which God has established? And why is it not possible that *the miraculous may be a part of that order?*” I deny, on the principles of sound reason, that I am bound to accept this mere bold assertion as an argument of the very point at issue; the point, namely, that the experience of the race has been absolutely unvarying in this matter, so as to throw all the presumption now against the occurrence of the miracle and against the truth of the Gospel history. And I further proceed to urge that, whatever doubt might attach to the testimony of *one* or *two*, it is vastly more probable that the Free Will which rules the world *should* occasionally have varied the mode of His acting, than that the whole number of those who in various ages testify that they have witnessed unquestionable variations, not to be explained by natural laws, should without exception be either deceivers or deceived.

But again we are told that “this involves the denial of the reign of law,” and degrades our conception of God, in that it makes God to rule the world not by law but by caprice. “Does not this great principle of the majesty and supremacy of the system of law on which God rules the world raise an overwhelming presumption against the occurrence of a miracle and the delivery of a supernatural revelation?”

As to these premisses there can be no doubt. God does not govern the universe in a way arbitrary

and capricious. The domain of law is doubtless even far *more* extensive than we can as yet prove. Atoms and worlds, suns and souls are alike governed—if by a Free Will, yet not by a fitful caprice, but by *law*. But before we argue from this that therefore no miracle can be, and that consequently there stands a presumption against a supernatural revelation, and in particular against the reality of the miracles imputed to Christ, let us proceed scientifically, and be sure that we have all the facts before us. Is physical and natural law all that is comprehended in that system of law according to which God rules the universe? Does not law also touch souls? Is there not a *moral* law as well as a physical law? Has not the spiritual world, also, its law of gravitation, drawing the finite to the Infinite, the creature to the Creator? And of this spiritual and moral universe, again, who knows the extent or limits? Who knows with what countless multitudes of various intelligences—"principalities and powers"—it may be thronged? Who shall dare to affirm that they also do not, like man, in their various spheres exercise dominion over the subject realm of matter? Should we not expect, just so far as the spiritual has to do with the material and earthly, to see these spiritual powers take hold of the lower laws of physical nature—not, indeed, to violate them, but to modify and control; nay even, if you please, sometimes to countervail their operation? Why not? Why may they not be subjected to the higher law of the spiritual? All the analogies of nature point that way. For example, I see

the invisible power of vegetable and animal life take hold of the elements of matter, which, left to themselves, combine only according to the law of a certain definite and well-known proportion, and, ignoring those laws, unite those elements in various combinations utterly beyond the power of any chemist to effect. Yet, who has ever thought of stigmatizing this familiar process as a violation of natural law? "Why, then, should it be thought a thing incredible" that when these laws of *natural* life, in their turn, come in contact with the yet mightier force of *spiritual* life, then the lower system of law should be ignored, or so modified in its operation as to produce effects altogether different?

And thus it is that so soon as I become aware of the existence of a spiritual world, I am fully prepared to see the world of physical nature affected by it, so that effects shall be produced which "the laws of nature" will not account for. I *expect* from time to time to see the working of an unseen hand in nature; and a miracle does not surprise me. I should only be surprised *if there were none*; surprised indeed if, just where I should expect to see the analogies of lower life carried out to their utmost limit, there all these analogies should fail me. Should we then see anywhere the revelation of the Hand of God in nature, as a mighty spiritual force taking hold of these laws of nature and moulding them so as to carry out the higher law and meet the exigencies of His moral government, how should we have any reason to speak of this as derogating from the supremacy of law any more than when the powers of natural life

take hold of matter with such wonderful results, or than when the free will of man makes the electric energy to do a work—a work not indeed *contrary* to its nature, but none the less a work which of itself it never would have done? And would any one speak of *this* as a violation of natural law? It will be quite time enough to raise this cry about the supremacy of law when any of our philosophers shall have become so far acquainted with the whole system of the Divine government as to prove to us that a miracle, and also a supernatural revelation under certain moral conditions, cannot be according to the law of the Divine Empire. Meantime all the analogies of nature raise the presumption that there shall be, now and then at least, indications of a power in nature which is not *of* nature, but *above* it, shown therefore in a way which we call “miracle.”

I am prepared to go further, and to maintain that there is even scientific ground for the anticipation of occasional supernatural interpositions in nature. That ground is found in the fact that, so far as nature responds to the inquiry of science, it is to say that *there have been* such interventions in bygone ages.

There is no evidence that any combination of chemical elements or forces—(and this is notwithstanding the loose and inaccurate and scientifically ungrounded statements to the contrary which we sometimes hear popularly made)—there is no evidence, I say, that any such chemical combination ever produced even the lowest form of life. When life, then, appeared for the first time

in this universe, there was at that time a miracle. There is equally not the slightest evidence—(speaking within the strict range of scientific fact)—that ever animal intelligence developed into a human soul—into reason, free will, moral sense. When these appeared there must have been a miracle. And the authority for saying this is not my own assertion; it is not the affirmation of the Bible or of any “Confession of Faith”; it is the deliberate judgment of such men as Professor Virchow, of Berlin, not to mention the name of Mr. Tyndall, and the names of others of more or less note. Science leaves us but one way of accounting for the appearance of these successive forms of existence, and that is to assign as their cause *immediate creation*: Long after the harmonious working of these laws of nature had been established, again and again in those geologic ages did God come forth into the unpeopled solitudes of this earth, and work the miracle of miracles in filling them with new forms of life from His creative Hand. And I maintain that this at once throws the *scientific presumption* as to the probability of a miracle and supernatural revelation *on the side of that revelation*.

What possible reason can be given why God, having thus worked from time to time through those countless ages, should suddenly stop on man’s account, and never, in the sight of any of His suffering children, straining their weary eyes toward His invisible glory, give one token which should be manifest to all, of His ever-living personal and almighty Godhead? Will He stop

for ever, and hide Himself eternally, on our account ? Nay ; now that man is here, is it not more than ever to be expected that He will from time to time come forth from behind the veil of nature to walk in ways of miracle before us ?

I beseech you now to look at man's condition and tell me if man's condition is not such as to raise almost to a certainty the *presumption* now established, that a merciful God *will* come in a manner supernatural to his help ! For man is a sinner, a breaker of law. And not only this : for herein is the desperation of our case, that to sin is our nature ; so that, as we all know, to do wrong is easy, and to do right costs us the mighty effort. Is not this clear ? Is it not true that our estate is thus humiliating and degraded ? Conscience does itself convict us all. Is not that true ? Do we need evidence further than this of the depth of that moral evil in which humanity is sunk ? Look over the world, and see how of its fifteen hundred millions by far the greater part are sunken in a moral filth and corruption of which we in Christian lands can form no conception even approaching one that is adequate. Consider how in our own more favoured land the masses are still in earthliness and sensuality only less than that of abject pagans ! Look even at the better class of men, and see how of these the larger number are visibly servants of sin ; goaded by ambition, worried by fears, eager after gold, envious, proud, selfish and self-seeking. Yet these are all men made in God's image, heirs of an immortality, called to an everlasting kingdom !

Is there power in man to remedy this evil? Is there power for this in nature? Does nature tell us how a just God can pardon sinners without the infringement of eternal law and justice? Does nature hint, or has science yet discovered any panacea which shall break the power of evil in a human soul? Can we do this ourselves? Can any other man, however good and strong, do it for us? Man has tried, and tried for many thousand years, and it stands to-day before heaven and earth that he has *failed*. A hundred philosophies, a hundred schemes of social reform, have been tried and found wanting. The Hand upon the wall has written "TEKEL" upon them all. There is as yet no sign that the virus of sin has lost aught of its malignity. From generation to generation it has descended, an inveterate leprosy, infecting every man, every woman, and every little child. If in the case of any individual or nation its potency has at any time seemed to be a little lessened, yet has it never been destroyed, but has ever shortly reappeared with a tenfold virulence.

Reason, then, has failed. The reason of the ancient world found no higher expression than in the "Republic" of Plato, with its system of legalized harlotry, while it left the masses of even the most cultivated cities in such a moral pollution that the name "Corinthian" is to this day a name of shame. And in our modern time the boasted "Reign of Reason" is, significantly, known to history as the "Reign of Terror." Has any one a doubt as to man's power in this matter? What

is your personal experience? For these things never so come home to us as when we look at them in the light of our own inward experience. Who among us has not been tempted? Who among us has not fallen? What is your candid opinion of your own personal strength? Are you never conscious of lusts within, though outwardly restrained, still struggling for the mastery, and tormenting you with the humiliating consciousness of their existence? Ambition, envy, love of gold—are these strangers to our hearts? Is it not, then, the consciousness of each one of us that we have not the strength to eradicate the evil that is in us?

Science—education—is just now held to be the great hope of the world. But is it not mockery to offer this as a remedy? Science is good, and so is water, but will water save a man who is dying of hunger? Science! But are the prospects flattering? Where are the symptoms that this dreadful disorder has spent its greatest fury, and nearly run its course? Where do they appear? In New York, in Washington, in London, in Pittsburg? Are they to be found in this—that every nation in Europe is to-day armed for battle as a measure of public safety? On the one hand everywhere we hear the hungry growl of a turbulent democracy, and on the other, too often, oppression or tyranny, or bad faith in high places; while the wisest and best of rulers, with all the power which science places at their command, find themselves often hardly able to repress riot, murder and revolution. Is this, then, the fruit of our

thousands of years of experiment? Still it is true, as in the first generation of men, that—

“In all the circuit of the sun there lies
No habitation free from sin,
And all its nameless miseries.”

I hold that *it stands proven* that if ever humanity is saved it cannot be in any way of nature; it must be in a manner supernatural. Nature? *Nature* for us means DEATH! Nature's remorseless sequence of cause and effect *must* in some way be broken by the intervention of a supernatural Cause, or we are lost!

Yet God is merciful; and while He is most just in leaving us to the ways in which we delight, and just in rewarding us according to our works, yet is there not the strongest reason to believe that He will devise some means for our salvation? Seeing that nature furnishes no cure, is it not most reasonable to expect that God, out of the treasury of His boundless grace and power, *will* bring a remedy in a manner which shall be supernatural? Or will He surely leave us? No! no! From all I see of the woes and helpless miseries of men, from all that reason can teach me of the character of God, as One who must be infinitely merciful and good, I *must* expect to see Him come forth into ways of miracle for man's redemption. And when from the mute rocks I learn that, before ever such dire necessities as these have arisen, God's own immediate hand *has* ere now appeared in power upon the earth; that in such times past He did not deem the supernatural a violation of the high order of His universe, but did come forth in might and work

great wonders, then is my expectation quickened tenfold. And now that the cry of so sore need has gone up to His high throne, I do look to see His hand set aside the veil of natural law, and Himself come forth in nature—Lord of nature and of nature's laws—for man's deliverance. All the presumption that man's necessities and helpless misery, all the presumption that the infinite power and love of God can afford—all, all is for the miracle, and none against it. The history of the world, with its stories of miracle, may be a mystery now ; but it would be a mystery tenfold deeper, if in all its pages there had been no hint of any supernatural intervention which had looked toward man's redemption.

This question is not one for flippant speculation. It is the great question of all the ages. Practically, it is simply this : Is there any help for man in God ? Man has tried in ways of nature to save himself, and has failed. Have we any good reason to look for supernatural help from God ? Or—terrible thought—has He given over the keys of our prison-house into the hand of those inexorable laws of nature, and so shut us all up to everlasting despair ? God forbid ! Against such a gospel of death, in which some so strangely glory, let the mind and heart of every man protest, and to that protest let every creature say "AMEN."

In conclusion, let me very briefly indicate certain consequences from the argument which has had our attention.

First of all observe that the account of supernatural events in the Scripture history does not,

if our argument be sound, lessen in any degree their credibility; but that, on the contrary, seeing that it *professes to be* a history of God's ways for the salvation of men, its supernatural element vastly increases the claim of the Bible to our attention and belief. When thus I find it written in the Pentateuch that God did of old work great miracles by the hand of Moses, I do not in this find any presumption against the truth of that book, but the contrary. It is only what I should expect to find in any book professing to deal with the question of a sinner's redemption.

And, in particular, when in the four gospels I find it written that a little more than eighteen hundred years ago a series of most stupendous miracles were wrought on earth by One who actually *claimed to be the Eternal Creator* incarnate in human nature, who also said that He wrought those miracles in order to this very thing, that men might know and believe upon Him as the Son of the Eternal Father, and believing have life through His Name, all these statements—even that most amazing one, of His resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven—raises no presumption against the truth of the narrative, but, under the conditions, just the contrary. Nay; that Jesus, being what He claimed to be, and coming for such a work, should have wrought no miracle, *this* had been indeed incredible, and would have furnished just reason to reject His claim to be the Physician of sinners.

In the second place, seeing that this is so, the man who, in the face of such a presumption, and

with the great problems of sin and eternity confessedly unsolved, passes by the Gospel history with indifference, and refuses to take time for the most solemn and impartial attention to the claims of Jesus, is simply trifling with his soul. He is acting contrary to the dictates of all sound reason, and even of worldly prudence. If such a man is lost eternally, he will have only himself to thank who thus neglected the great salvation so mightily confirmed by the marvellous power of God.

Let us, then, be merciful to our own souls. Let us not, by hastily rejecting or by persistently doubting the supernatural facts of the Gospel, put from us thereby the only hope either of our own personal salvation or of the regeneration of our race. And if, nevertheless, any man will yet insist upon proclaiming himself as under law alone, let it never be forgotten that to the transgressor and law-breaker natural law tells only of retribution—retribution as fixed and as inevitable as the courses of the stars in heaven.

Finally, if any of us shall, by the plausible theories and ingenious speculations of much that is sometimes called "science," ever be tempted to doubt the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, let us bear in mind, as full of solemn personal warning, those words of Jesus: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." Amen.

VI

“LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO? THOU HAST THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE.”—JOHN vi. 68.

THE occasion upon which these words were uttered gives to them peculiar significance. Jesus had been declaring to the Jews some of the highest mysteries of faith. Transcending, as these did, the utmost reach of human reason, not only the unfriendly Jews, but many even of the disciples of Jesus were staggered as they listened. This eating of the flesh of the Son of Man, as the condition of eternal life—they could not understand it. “This is a hard saying,” they said; “who can hear it?” But the Lord did not attempt to explain these mysteries. He only reaffirmed them, in terms, if possible, stronger than before. As the result of all, we read that “from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.” The doctrine was too hard for them; they could not receive it, or receive Him who declared it. Reason thus sat in judgment on the Son of God and rejected Him for His hard sayings. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, “Will ye also go away?” And Simon Peter, replying as usual for the rest, answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? *Thou* hast the words of eternal life; and we believe, and are sure, that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

The words of the text, in the light of the occasion on which they were uttered, are full of instruction for the present time. As the opposition to the teaching of Christ increased in bitterness and intensity with His advancing ministry, and in proportion to His success, so is it also as this generation goes on, and as the ministry of Christ to the world through His Church draws toward its close. The Cross is no less an offence now than at the first; the mystery of godliness is a mystery still, and the "hard sayings" of our Lord are as hard as ever. Reason, as perhaps in no preceding age, revolts against the written Word. Men of the highest ability and most extensive attainments, representatives of almost every science—physicians, geologists, historians, and critics, each under the banner of some brilliant theory—assail the citadel of our faith, and labour to undermine, if possible, the very foundations of our trust in a personal God. And the result is the same as when our Lord was on the earth. Weak disciples, knowing only the name, but not the power of Christ, fall away. They have not the knowledge with which they might meet the arguments with which their faith is assailed, nor have they the inward grace of the Holy Spirit wherewith they might otherwise withstand the impetuous onset of the legions of unbelief.

In a time like this, these words of our adorable Saviour come to each one of us who profess to believe, with a pathos inexpressibly tender: "Will ye also go away?" Oh, may we ever have the grace and the holy wisdom to answer from our inmost heart with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall

we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Let us consider for a while these words of faith and wisdom.

Observe, first of all, that the Apostles did not think it necessary to be able to understand and explain the "hard sayings" of the Lord before they could believe Him and receive them as the truth. They seem to have felt that, although the sayings were hard to believe, it was harder yet to believe that the Holy Jesus was a mere enthusiast or an impostor; that He was anything less or anything else than what He claimed to be—the Son of the living God. They perceived that there were in forsaking Him yet greater difficulties than in holding on to Him. With Him many things might indeed be dark and beyond the comprehension of reason, but *without* Him the world seemed darker yet. That was true then, and for them; it is as true as ever to-day, and for us. The difficulties which confront us if we receive Jesus of Nazareth as the Divine Redeemer of men are not to be compared with those which at once beset us if we reject Him. If because of the difficulties which encompass the doctrine of Christ we reject the Christ, whither shall we turn, or to whom shall we go, that our difficulties may be made the less? This thought, which, as you see, is the thought of the text, I propose to set forth and emphasize with a few illustrations.

In the first place, this is often true with regard to the *difficulties of an intellectual nature* which often hinder faith. As regards these, I affirm that the

difficulties of unbelief are yet greater than the difficulties of faith.

For example, many have a vague impression, which, if pressed for facts, they might find it very hard to justify, that the researches and discoveries of recent years in the region of physical science have brought to light facts which are utterly irreconcilable with a belief in the Divine and infallible authority of the Holy Scripture, which our Lord so clearly endorsed, and that it has thus become exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, any longer to accept His claims to be the incarnate Son of God and the appointed Saviour of men.

But I take the opposite ground. I affirm that, whatever difficulties may be presented to our understanding by any real or supposed discoveries of modern science, I am not rid of these, but am immediately confronted with difficulties vastly greater, if for such a reason I give up Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

My first contention lies in this: that, in so far as modern science presents anything to be believed which is in reality incompatible with the truth of the Christian religion, those scientific doctrines are *matters not of fact, but of theory and opinion merely*: not facts, but hypotheses assumed in order to account for facts. Such *hypotheses* are, without doubt, in some instances irreconcilable with the truth of Christianity. But if it be asked as to scientifically proved facts, I challenge any man to name a single fact, proved and accepted as a fact by the consensus of the scientific world, which stands in manifest and irreconcilable contradiction to the

teachings of the Old Testament or to the teachings of the New Testament in any point whatever. Not one such fact can be named—not even one. As for the theories or hypotheses in question—*ipsis inimicis judicandis*—scientific unbelievers themselves being judges, they are yet far from being verified. At the most they are held only as possible or probable explanations of certain observed facts. And in not a few instances it is affirmed by many who are more competent to judge than you and I, that even as explanations they do not explain much that needs to be explained, and that they therefore cannot be the whole truth.

But, this apart, I maintain that in many cases these anti-Christian theories, even from an intellectual point of view, are *intrinsically harder to believe* than anything in the Bible. Take, for example, the now fashionable doctrine of evolution as opposed to the Scripture doctrine of Creation. It is admitted, of course, by all intelligent Christian men that there is a theory of development in the physical and physiological worlds, which, whether it be proved or not, is in no case in any conflict with the proved statements of the Scripture. Of that I do not need now to speak. I speak at the present time of that theory in its atheistic or materialistic form. In that form this doctrine, which many urge us to receive as more reasonable than the teaching of Moses, amounts to this: It is assumed that all existence, all forms of matter, all forces and energies, even life, and consciousness, and will, and personality, have been gradually developed in the course of incalculable ages out of

an original material something (commonly assumed to have been a fiery cloud of incandescent gas), in which all that now is lay hidden in the germ, like an oak in an acorn, waiting to be evolved! All that is has been evolved by a law of physical necessity; and God, if He exist, is proved to be so far forth a superfluity. All this, we are told, is *demonstrated* by science, or will be shortly! Whence it follows, of course, that the Scripture doctrine of creation must be rejected as an antiquated myth, no longer worthy of belief by intelligent men.

Now I affirm that, so far from such a theory freeing us from the old difficulty as to the origin of things, it greatly increases it. For the question is not now as to the origin of species in one way or another, but as to the origin of life and mind. As to these I affirm that there is at least far less difficulty in believing that God created life, and created it in a way unknown to us, than in attempting to believe that life and soul and will and love have all been developed by chemical and electrical action out of an incandescent nebula. Think for a moment what it is that some would ask us to believe! Let your chemist's retort be expanded to the vastness of the universe, put therein for chemicals all the elements of nature, and let the mixture glow with a heat greater than that of ten thousand suns, as the theory demands, for myriads of ages; then, as the final result of all, you are supposed at last to get out of this fiery furnace, when cooled down, not merely suns and planets, rocks, minerals, and mountains, which were conceivable enough, but trees and flowers, human wills, a mother's love, a

Shakespeare and his dramas, a "Paradise Lost," and—surely transcending all—the Evolutionary Philosophy, explaining the whole process!

Well, there may be difficulty in believing that God created all things by Jesus Christ; that He formed man after His own image, and breathed into him the breath of life; but I submit to you all, as reasonable men, that it is vastly easier to believe this than to accept this theory, which is by not a few regarded in our day as the grandest *conclusion* of modern science. And when I am asked to let Christ go, because He held up Moses, and taught a different doctrine, then on grounds of simple reason I hold on to Jesus Christ. If he is to be called credulous who believes in a creation by a personal God (as some will have it that he is to be called), what shall we call the man who can reject the doctrine of the creation of all things by God and immediately take in this theory of the creation of all things both by and out of dead matter?

Take another illustration. Jesus Christ undoubtedly taught that there is such a thing as spirit, separate and distinct from matter; a soul distinct from the body, which continues to live after the body dies. He had the words of eternal life. But many again inform us that science tells a different story; that just as light and heat are known to be caused by amazingly rapid vibrations of atoms of some form of matter, so thought is simply the result of certain wonderful vibrations in the matter of the brain; that just as heat may be transformed into electricity, so it may be transformed into thought; that in reality our thinking

wholly depends, at the last, on our eating, to keep up the heat ; that consequently there is really no thinking soul apart from the body or distinct from the body ; so that when this wonderful thinking machine called the body shall run down, then thought and will and consciousness shall come to an end with it ; that therefore the thinking can no more be conceived of as separate from and enduring after the death of the body, than you can think of preserving the motion of a clock after the clock is taken to pieces ! We are asked with all confidence if we can conceive of a man thinking without a brain ; and, if not, how we can continue to cherish the fancy taught by Christ—so pleasing, no doubt, but so unscientific—that a man lives after his body dies, and that his spirit is in fact immortal ! But here again, when asked to give up Christ to accept this cheerless theory, I find, as before, tremendous difficulties, far outweighing those which encompass the doctrine taught by Jesus Christ.

In the first place there is the difficulty that, whereas I have in the case of Christ very weighty reason for accepting His testimony as that of One who, being well evidenced as not of this world but from above, must doubtless have known what the real facts of the case are, this beautiful theory, on the other hand, which thus identifies thought with light and heat and the rest, as one of the physical forces connected with matter, however charming and attractive it may be to some, is *not yet proved*. I see much cogent proof of the Divine mission and authority of Jesus Christ, which leads me to believe what He said, but proof for this fine theory I see

none at all, nor do the sober-minded, even among those who hold it, claim for it *demonstration*.

And not only so, but, as an eminent thinker has well observed, this theory *never can be proved*. Men have invented instruments to indicate precisely how much electrical energy may, under certain conditions, be generated by a certain change of temperature, or how much heat will be produced by every blow, for example, of a certain trip-hammer. Here, undoubtedly, we are in the region of weight and measure and of exact demonstration. We can prove the essential identity of the force in each case, and we can show that the one is the exact equivalent of the other. But has any man ever invented—does any man believe that any man ever will be able to devise—an instrument which shall determine the value in “heat units” of a human thought, which shall tell us, for example, how much electrical force was represented by the oration of Paul before Agrippa; or measure the love of a mother for her son, or the sorrow of an orphaned child, by the degrees of a Fahrenheit’s thermometer? But if it is thus impossible to catch or retain the thought or emotion so as by any device to measure or weigh or compare it with any ordinary physical standard, then how is it possible to demonstrate that it belongs to the order of things physical and material at all? Does not this impossibility rather go to prove that in the case of thought and feeling and will we are dealing with something which is not at all of things physical?

Hard to believe Christ, because of such discoveries as these? Rather do I affirm that it is a thousand

times harder to accept a doctrine involving such tremendous results, not only without any actual proof, but even, as is plain, without even the remotest possibility of ever having any proof! No! It will be quite time enough to talk about giving up Jesus Christ when anything contradictory of His doctrine has once been fairly brought to demonstration. Till then, when Jesus asks, "Will ye also go away with the multitude, turned aside by the mysteries of My doctrine, or seduced by the sophistries of a vain philosophy?" we may well reply, "Lord, to *whom* shall we go? To which of these contending and contradicting teachers shall we turn for light?" And when then I recollect all the varied evidence by which the testimony of Christ is confirmed, and contrast it with the uncertain foundation, ever shifting, on which such materialist philosophers strive to raise their hostile theories, I feel that the difficulties of believing in Christ (which difficulties I will be the last to deny) are not for a moment to be compared with those of disbelief; and I cannot, as a rational man, leave my goodly house upon the rock for the hut upon the ever-shifting sand. "Truly, I am not credulous enough," as the French *savant* said, "to be an unbeliever."

But others find *difficulties of a purely moral sort* in accepting Christ and His Gospel. Let us, no less briefly, glance at some of these. I admit that there are difficulties here also, but I shall hope to be able to show you that the moral difficulties, if we reject Christ, are, as in the former case, vastly greater than those faced by us if we receive Him.

In the first place, strong objection is often made to the teaching of Christ as to sin and suffering. Christ represents men as sold under sin, as condemned already, as so corrupt that a new birth by supernatural power is the absolute prerequisite of salvation. Yet the whole Bible teaches that this world was made by a God who is infinitely good, holy, and almighty. How is it possible that such a Being should either have made, or permit to exist, such a world as this? And how can we receive the teachings of Christ on this whole subject? "This is a hard saying! Who can hear it?"

Here is, of course, a great difficulty; and one that I shall not attempt to under-rate. But observe that Christ did not *make* the difficulty. Had there been no Christ and no Gospel, that dark question would still have faced us. The sin is here, Christ or no Christ; and the suffering, and the visible condemnation and helplessness and woe are here, Christ or no Christ. We need no revelation to tell us of these things. All that Christ did was to set forth in clear terms facts that He found already existing in the world. If He did not attempt to reconcile the existence of the facts with the existence and power of God, He at least added nothing to the old difficulty. It is not reasonable, therefore, to reject Christ on any such grounds as these.

But I go further. Christ not only did not first bring in this great moral difficulty; but He alone first taught how to diminish, or did Himself do aught to diminish its force. For He taught that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him

should not perish"; that He had come into the world to destroy the works of the Devil and to make an end of sin. Observe, then, how the case stands. If I reject Christ, I am, so far as reason informs me, shut in to this one tremendous and appalling difficulty, that God should have set up a system which He must have foreseen would involve in its working untold sin and misery, without a hint that ever it would be for any one any better. But if I accept Christ, while the difficulty is by no means wholly removed, there appears at least a remedy for the evil. It is still a mystery why God should have permitted sin, or ever made a world into which sin should come; but the mystery is at least not so great as it would be if God had not revealed an effectual remedy for the sin. For this reason there is certainly less moral difficulty in receiving Christ than in rejecting Him.

¶ But it is rejoined to this, that the Atonement itself, by which, according to Christ, deliverance from sin is procured, is itself incredible, and really adds to the difficulty. It is hard to believe, we are sometimes told, if not impossible, that a just God should make an arrangement by which the innocent should suffer for the guilty, the just for the unjust. It is true that here again is mystery. But I still maintain that it is not so hard to believe in the Atonement as it is to attempt to believe in either of the only other possible alternatives, that God has made no arrangement at all to save men, or that He saves unrighteously. It is easier to believe that God saves men by substitution than that He does not save men at all, or only by feebly

setting aside His law. It is easier, I say, to believe that God saves men through an atonement, voluntarily offered through love by the innocent, than to believe that, weakly indulgent, He saves men at the expense of His righteousness, or that, stern and pitiless, He saves none at all, but visits vengeance on all without distinction, to the everlasting clouding of the effulgence of His mercy. Thus, again, though the mystery be unfathomable and the moral difficulty insoluble, of an atonement by substitution, I cannot on this account forsake Christ, but rather find in this the great reason for holding to Him. In that Christ, as Incarnate Deity, loved man and died to save him, He at least diminished in our sight the mystery of moral evil, even if He did not remove it. Clouds and darkness are still the habitation of God's throne, but there is a rainbow round about the throne; and so I know that the sun of the Divine righteousness and mercy shineth still with fleckless brightness, though as yet I see it not face to face, but only as reflected on those gloomy clouds of wrath which overhang the Cross of Jesus our Lord!

But we need by no means remain on the defensive in this discussion. *I charge unbelief with raising certain stupendous difficulties peculiar to itself*, which I will venture to pronounce insoluble.

In the first place, if modern unbelief be in the right, then Christ Himself is to be accounted for on that basis. Whence came that obscure Carpenter who has transformed half the world? He was a Jew—yet not a development of Judaism, for He was to so great a degree in contradiction to

the Judaism of His day, that He was put to death because of His disagreement with the popular belief. Still less was He a product of the godless Gentile civilization of His time, for He was no less in antagonism to that. Whence His holiness, in such contrast with the universal sinfulness of man? How explain the fact of those astounding claims to Divinity and to Lordship over the consciences of men—claims which no other religious leader has ever dared to make, or, making, has been able to maintain? Yet Jesus not only made such claims, but has secured for those claims the credence and for Himself the trust of millions of the race from that day to this. I insist upon it, that *Christ cannot be accounted for* on any mere development theory. That unique and sublime character, that sermon on the Mount, those tender last words, “Let not your heart be troubled”—were all these, as men of much repute would fain persuade us, merely the product and result of certain extraordinary chemical activities in a human brain? Do you not all see that the difficulty of believing Christ to be all that He claimed to be is not for one moment to be compared with the stupendous difficulty which we encounter if we attempt to account for Him on materialistic grounds, or on any ground whatever but the absolute truth of His mission and the Divinity of His Person?

And then again, granting the utmost weight to all that unbelieving philosophers claim for their own conclusions as opposed to Christianity, what is then to be done with that wonderful body of historic evidence by which the great facts of Christ's

life, death, and resurrection are attested? Take, for example, that one central and vital fact of His resurrection from the dead. The testimony of that fact comes from many men; men whose trustworthiness in other matters has never been successfully impugned; men whose testimony in this particular matter meant for them—not worldly gain, but every worldly loss, sufferings, and often a bloody death; men whose testimony in every essential particular of this very matter stands not only uncontradicted, but in many instances confirmed, by either the admissions or the still more significant silences of their enemies. In a word, I am bold to say that there is not a single fact in history which has ever been supported by more weighty and decisive evidence than this fact of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. And it is a fact which, if admitted, brings with it the truth of the whole doctrine concerning His Person and mission and all things else which ever Jesus preached. Now I ask you, in the very name of reason, and only claiming that acceptance be made of the ordinary criteria of historical evidence, how the finding of some old bones in some primitive cave, however ancient, can prove all that testimony false. For the question is, precisely, the question of *the veracity of those witnesses*. And, with all the respect which I feel—yes, and the enthusiasm I feel—for geological and anthropological science, I ask, how can the old bones possibly bear on that question? I will admit, if you like, that your skeleton is immensely old, or that your bit of pottery or flint is of exceedingly great antiquity. That question

has absolutely nothing to do with the question of the truthfulness and credibility of those witnesses. How, in the world, can the finding of any ancient remains, or the induction of any scientific hypothesis or so-called conclusion upon that discovery, serve as justification, in the case before us, for our setting aside all the canons of evidence by which we commonly judge of testimony, and for concluding in our haste that all these men—Peter, and Paul, and James, and John—either lied, or were fools; that clear-headed and logical Paul, who wrote the epistle which the philosopher Coleridge called the most profound piece of logical philosophical discussion in existence, either bore false witness for thirty-three years to his own ruin, or else went stark crazy? So, if a man insist that I shall explain, if I hold on to Christ, how a certain piece of brick came to be several hundred feet underground, I will insist in my turn that he shall meet my difficulty also; that he shall show by the acknowledged canons of evidence that the gospels and epistles are all fabrications, or that the apostles bore false witness of Christ, and that Christ was an impostor; or else throw away his bit of old brick or bone, and penitently accept Christ as His Redeemer and Lord. Difficult to explain the facts of science if the Bible be true? Well, it may be; though men like Newton, Herschel, Tait, Stewart, Dana, Faraday, and Lord Kelvin have not seemed to find it so. But, in any case, the difficulty does not bear comparison with this other difficulty of explaining how, if Christianity be false, the apostles and the early Christians came to act for a hundred

years in defiance of all the laws which in all ages and lands have been used to regulate human action ; or how, if the Gospel histories were false in essential particulars, their authors were able, under the greatest conceivable disadvantage, to persuade millions, who must have known better, to accept them as true against the evidence of their own experience and observation and to confess a risen Christ even before the stake and facing the hungry lions !

And I must urge yet another difficulty, no less insurmountable than the foregoing. From the point of view of the unbeliever, the history of Christianity is an utterly insoluble enigma. Christianity has long ceased to be a *new* thing. All theories apart, it stands as incontrovertible history that the religion of Christ has transformed half the world. Just so far as the Gospel of Christ has been received and believed, it has wrought good and only good ; and that in a degree which appears nowhere else in the history of mankind. It has elevated woman ; it has ennobled man ; it has developed human intellect, and it has purified the affections ; it has produced in rich abundance the noblest fruits of righteousness and peace and unselfish love, alike from the dry wastes of philosophical infidelity and the malarious marshes of materialism and sensuality. This is undeniable history. The contrast with the practical working of atheism and materialism is familiar to every educated person, and I need not remind you of it. Let the "Reign of Terror" bear witness on that subject. And yet, if the *Christ* of the Gospels be rejected, it follows that, in spite of all, Christianity

is a cheat and an imposture. For Christianity is Christ. Nay, for certain reasons it is the worst of all impostures. For the claims which Christ made have never been equalled by any human being. Never did man speak like this Man. If His transcendent claims were false, then He was not only an impostor, but the very prince of impostors. He was solitary and peculiar among men in the audacious blasphemy of His pretensions. I therefore insist that the man who rejects Christianity because of its difficulties shall explain for me this difficulty. I demand that he explain how it is that, while atheism and pantheism have already wrought moral ruin in the communities where they have been generally adopted, yet, on the other hand, the highest morality, the loftiest character, and the most exalted virtue that the world has ever seen have proceeded from the deepest and most shameless imposture of all that history records. How is this possible—that out of a root either of blasphemy or of insanity should have sprung in rich profusion all the goodly fruits of honour, purity, love and sobriety which have distinguished in the highest degree precisely those whose faith in Christ has been the most profound? Does any one talk of moral difficulties in accepting Christ and His Gospel? Where is there any to compare with this difficulty, which makes life itself a shame and a cheat, which subverts all the principles of morals by which we regulate our lives? The best fruit from the worst tree? Impossible! Is the ripened fruit of imposture truth? Or of an insane enthusiasm a holy sobriety? Impossible! Impossible!

A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. Falsehood never generated truth, or darkness light.

I find, indeed, moral difficulties in accepting Christ—difficulties which I cannot explain. But, rejecting Him to be rid of these, I only exchange these for others far greater and more insurmountable. I find it easier to account for the fact of the mysteries by the feebleness of human reason—easier far to believe that even wise and honest men may sometimes have misinterpreted facts, and drawn wrong conclusions—than to believe that Jesus was either a half-delirious enthusiast or an impostor, and His Gospel, by necessary consequence, the supreme delusion and sham of history.

And, finally, recurring to the very words of the text, the question remains: if we reject Christ because of His hard sayings, to whom shall we go? It is not well to leave one house till we are sure of another. It were sad, indeed, to wander evermore in the darkness and gloom without, in search of a home nowhere to be found, and unable, perhaps, in the night to find your way back to the old roof. If, then, the words of eternal life are not with Christ, whither—to whom—shall we turn to hear them? Who shall tell us how sin shall be forgiven? We are sinners. The storm of retribution is gathering—the first drops of wrath are already falling; is there any shelter where we may escape what is plainly coming? Ah, the modern gospel of evolution loudly thunders, “No! He that soweth the wind shall reap the whirlwind!” Instead of an election of grace, and a foreordination based on the infinite love and wisdom and righteous-

ness of a personal God and Father, it shows us all creation, the strong and the weak alike, the righteous and the unrighteous, all driven on by a pitiless law of physical necessity to an inevitable doom, when all the systems which make up the universe shall have gravitated to their final centre, and the light of all life shall go out in ultimate darkness and the blackness of a death without forgiveness ! Shall we for *this* leave Jesus ?

Even in this present life what shall we gain ? Who among all the apostles of modern unbelief will comfort us in sickness and in sorrow, in bereavement and in anguish, if we leave Jesus ? I am soon myself to die. Who among them all will stand at my bedside and say, " I am the Resurrection and the Life " ? To whom, in short, shall we turn for strength, for consolation, for satisfaction in all the infinite yearnings of our souls, if we leave Jesus ? Can the spirit's thirst be allayed by the prescriptions of philosophy ? Can the hunger of the soul after everlasting life be appeased by dry husks of scientific theories ? Where, *where* shall we obtain the living water, and the bread which endureth unto life eternal, except at the table of our Father in heaven ? And by whom, O CHRIST, shall we come unto the Father, but by THEE, who with the Holy Ghost art most high in the glory of the Father for evermore !

But some of you may be saying, " Why all these words to us ? We believe ; we are not infidels ! " Do you then believe ? Why then do you not act ? Is Christ from heaven ? Why then do you not obey Him ? So many there are who dare not

charge Christ or His apostles with imposture—Christ, they tell us, was no doubt the Son of God and Saviour of men—and yet there is no profession of Christ ; there is not the living of a Christian life. I ask you, with all earnestness, why do you not render Christ the full allegiance of your hearts and lives ? To stand in the very presence, as it were, of that glorious Person, to admit His every claim concerning Himself and His atoning work, and yet to refuse Him the most inward love and loyalty of your souls and grateful service of your lives—truly, this is amazing infatuation, and must needs end in hopeless ruin.

But many of you have thus laid hold on Christ as the Son of God and your personal Lord and Redeemer. What then ? What, indeed, *but* to hold fast to Him ? Though often, it may be, bewildered by the Babel clamour of contending philosophies, and beset oft-times by countless doubts and perplexities, as we move on through the darkness of “ this present evil age,” let us hold to the Lord Jesus Christ ! For in Christ, in Christ’s Cross, and in Christ’s ultimate glory is the solution of all that is hard to understand, whether in our individual experiences or in the world without. And if not now and here, yet without doubt hereafter, in the age to come, for each one of us who believes upon the Son of God shall His every promise be fulfilled, and in His Light we shall see LIGHT !

VII

“OUR REDEEMER FROM EVERLASTING IS THY NAME.”—ISAIAH lxiii. 16.

THE word “Redeemer” is one of the most familiar titles of Christ. The word itself is not, indeed, applied to Him in the New Testament, except in the eleventh chapter of Romans,¹ where the word “Deliverer” stands for the Hebrew word of our text; but the related words “redeem” and “redemption” are in the epistles repeatedly used of our Saviour’s work.

Thus we are told that Christ was Himself made under law, “that He might *redeem* them that were under the Law;”² and that He has in fact *redeemed* believers from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for them.³ So again we read that He “gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity,”⁴ and that we are “justified through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus.”⁵ And thus it is, again, that we are said to “have *redemption* through His blood,”⁶ and to be now sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the earnest of the inheritance of “the redemption of the purchased possession.”⁷ And so it is that Christ is made

¹ Vs. 26.

⁴ Tit. ii. 14.

⁷ Eph. i. 14.

² Gal. iv. 5.

⁵ Rom. iii. 24.

³ Gal. iii. 13.

⁶ Col. i. 14.

unto all that believe "Wisdom from God, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and *Redemption*,"⁸ so that we may at last receive the promise of "eternal *redemption*."⁹ These passages, to which other might be added, will recall to our minds how very common is the use of these terms in reference to the work of our Saviour.

In the Old Testament we find not merely these words but the word "Redeemer" itself repeatedly applied to the Lord as in covenant for the salvation of His people. The earliest instance occurs in the sublime passage in the Book of Job, where Job, out of the depths of his misery, gives voice to that magnificent shout of assurance, "I know that my *Redeemer* liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth!"¹⁰ So also David, in the nineteenth Psalm, calls upon Jehovah as his "Strength"—his "Rock"—and his "*Redeemer*."¹¹ And Asaph tells us how Israel, chastised, "remembered that the Most High God was their *Redeemer*."¹² It is Isaiah, however, the evangelical prophet, the prophet of so peculiar insight into Messiah's saving work, who more than any other writer of the Holy Scriptures applied this name to the covenanting Jehovah. Thirteen places, of the eighteen where the word is applied to the Lord in the Scriptures, are found in the writings of this prince of the prophets.

There must be a special reason for the selection of this term as descriptive of the Messiah's office. To many, no doubt, the word suggests no more

⁸ 1 Cor. i. 30.

⁹ Heb. ix. 12.

¹⁰ Job xix. 25.

¹¹ Ps. xix. 14.

¹² Ps. lxxviii. 35.

than the word "Saviour"; and, so far as a merely saving understanding of the matter is concerned, the one might as well be used as the other—they might be regarded as exact equivalents. Others, again, see that there is more in the word "Redeemer" than in the word "Saviour," inasmuch as it at least suggests the idea of a salvation which is secured by being *purchased* for us.

This is far nearer to expressing the full content of the conception than that which makes it merely equivalent to "Saviour;" but not even yet is the full content of the word exhausted. The word has its roots in the Old Testament Theocratic Law, and in that only shall we find the full explication of the wonderful significance of the term. In the interpretation of the Scripture it is too often forgotten that we are not at liberty to take words other than in their historical sense. With too much reason an eminent divine of our day, Dr. Adolph Saphir, complains of the prevalence of this erroneous method in much interpretation. He says truly:

"The facts and doctrines of the evangelists and apostles are Jewish. Not otherwise can they be truly understood. . . . Our theology—even that of believers—is far too abstract, unhistorical: looking at doctrines logically instead of viewing them in connection with the history of the kingdom and the Church."

Weighty words are these, and they apply in this case. If we wish to learn the full content of these terms "Redeemer," "redemption," as descriptive of Christ's salvation, we must go back to their earliest use in the Old Testament revelation. For

Isaiah, we must not forget, was a Jew, and his prophecy in the first instance was delivered to Jews. And when he used this word "Redeemer," and told the Jews that "Goel" or "Redeemer" was Jehovah's name from of old, the ideas which both he and his hearers would attach to the word would be the ideas which were attached to it in its common use in their law.

The law as to the *goel*, or redeemer, is found in the first place in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus. The verses which bear upon the explanation of our text include first—the twenty-fifth, which has to do with the law for the redemption of the ancestral inheritance, and reads :

"In all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land. If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold."

In the case of Boaz and Ruth we have a beautiful illustration of the actual working of this law.

Again in the passage including the verses from the forty-seventh to the forty-ninth, we find the case of a man who might through poverty have been sold, or have sold himself, into bondage to a stranger, and we are told, as the law for the redemption of persons :

"If a stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger . . . after that he is sold he may be redeemed again ; one of his brethren may redeem him . . . any that is nigh of kin unto him may redeem him."

And yet another duty belonged to the redeemer, which is concealed from the English reader by the

substitution of the word "avenger" for "redeemer" in the English version. The law is given in the thirty-fifth chapter of Numbers, where from the sixteenth to the nineteenth verses we have the law concerning murder, to the effect that the man who kills another, with evidence of a deliberate intent, "shall surely be put to death." And then follow these words :

"The avenger (Heb. "redeemer") of blood shall himself put the manslayer to death."

The law concerning the redeemer thus involved these particulars as belonging to his office :

Firstly, the redeemer must be *near of kin*. A stranger, not of kin, could not redeem. The right first of all fell on the brother, and primarily, it is said, on the first-born, who to enable him for the performance of such duties was by the law gifted with a double portion of the father's inheritance.¹³

The *duties* of the kinsman-redeemer, in the second place, were three. If any of his brethren had through poverty been dispossessed of his inheritance, the redeemer was to buy it back with a price, and reinstate his poor brother therein. If, worse yet, any of his poor brethren had through stress of poverty sold himself into slavery, the kinsman-redeemer was to buy him out of his slavery by giving a price to the master, and set him free again.¹⁴ If, finally, any of his brethren should be maliciously slain, it was his duty to "redeem his brother's blood," as the phrase was ; to redeem his brother's blood by slaying the murderer.

¹³ Deut. xxi. 17.

¹⁴ Lev. xxv. 25, 48. 49.

In the third place it is to be noted, that, while the last of these duties was merely a matter of power, it was different when it came to the redemption of persons or property. These the redeemer could not take from their possessor by mere force and restore them : he must redeem the person or the inheritance of his brother by *the payment of a price* ; a matter concerning which very particular directions were given in the Book of Leviticus.

Such, then, according to the Mosaic law, was the redeemer, such were his duties, and such was the manner in which he was to perform them. And now, in the light of this history, we come back to the text, “ ‘Our Redeemer’ from everlasting is Thy name ! ” Do not the words now become luminous ? Do you not see what Isaiah must have been thinking of, and what his Jewish hearers must have thought of when he said “ O Lord . . . ‘Our Redeemer’ from everlasting is Thy name ? ” How the old law of the Kinsman-Redeemer must have come to his mind, his double work of grace and judgment ! And what a stupendous announcement it must have seemed, that Jehovah Himself, the God of Israel, was Israel’s *Goel*, the *Redeemer* of His people ! Wonderful, wonderful word of grace ! How much, how very much it contains ! Let us notice some of the marvellous things that are now here revealed to us.

In the first place, the word plainly contains *a prediction of the Incarnation* ; for to Hebrew thought there was no such thing known as that a redeemer should be other than a kinsman. The very word used involves the latter notion as well

as the former, and the law constantly insisted on this. Hence, when the prophet taught that Jehovah would Himself undertake the duty of Redeemer, the word implied—whether the prophet and his hearers could at that day fully conceive the meaning of it or not—that Jehovah Himself would appear in fashion as a man. Simply as Jehovah He could not, according to the law, be Redeemer. The redeemer and the redeemed must be of one blood: that was the law! The Jewish writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, you will remember, lays the greatest stress on the necessity that the son of God *as our Redeemer* should become a partaker of flesh and blood, like unto those whom He came to save.¹⁵ In this he does no more than expand the thought already in the Old Testament given to us in this one announcement of Isaiah.

But the words not only teach that the Redeemer of men would be at once Jehovah and yet our Kinsman according to the flesh: that he would be, in a word, both God and Man. They also teach the *voluntariness*, and thus the *grace* of the great salvation. For while the avenging of blood was a *command* laid on the next of kin, it was not so with the redemption of persons or possessions. The word is not “he shall,” but “he may.” The work was to be a voluntary work. He might refuse or decline if he chose; if he did so he incurred no penalty. So you will remember that in the Book of Ruth is mentioned a case in which the next of kin, who had the right to redeem, did decline to

¹⁵ Heb. ii. 14-17.

exercise that right.¹⁶ When the brother did, then, redeem his poor brother, it was always an act of pure voluntary kindness. And so it is also with Jehovah! All that Jehovah was to do as Kinsman-Redeemer, all that He did do—the assuming of the Kinsman nature, and the fulfilling of the duty of the first-born—was not of debt, but of grace, of pure and voluntary love. One can see now, too, the significance of the words in Proverbs: “A brother is born for adversity”; and “There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”¹⁷

Further, the text shows *what is included in Christ's work as Redeemer*. Christ's office in redemption, as we have seen above, must be three-fold: involving the redemption of our persons, the redemption of our inheritance, and the avenging of our blood upon the destroyer.

We are reminded, then, that Christ's work as Redeemer involves first of all the redemption of our *persons*. That the sinner is, by reason of his sin, fallen into bondage is one of the most familiar thoughts of Scripture. Isaiah already tells the sinners of his day that they had sold themselves, and that for nought.¹⁸ And the New Testament is full of the idea. The Scripture represents this bondage as fourfold. There is, first of all, *a bondage to the law*. “Be not entangled again,” Paul exhorts the Galatian believers, “with the yoke of bondage. . . . Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law.”¹⁹ And again: “We, when we were children, were in bondage. . . but when

¹⁶ Ruth iii. 12, 13; iv. 1-8.

¹⁸ Is. i. 1; lii. 3.

¹⁷ Prov. xvii. 13; xviii. 24.

¹⁹ Gal. v. 1; iii. 13.

the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son. . . . to redeem them that were under the law.”²⁰ From this first bondage, the bondage to the law, Christ as Kinsman-Redeemer frees us.

There is also *a bondage to sin*, in which we have been bound. “Whosoever committeth sin,” Christ said, “is the servant of sin.”²¹ We are in bondage to the power of sin, and from this Christ came to set us free. He “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity;”²² and we were “redeemed from our vain conversation, received by tradition from our fathers, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.”²³ But not only to the power of sin have we been in bondage, but also to its curse. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.”²⁴ And in Him “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins.”²⁵

Being, then, redeemed from the bondage to the curse of sin, we have also been redeemed by Christ from *the bondage to death* in which we were aforetime. For “by one man sin entered into the world, and *death by sin*; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. . . . Death reigned.”²⁶ But Christ has redeemed us from this bondage to death. “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they that receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in *life* by one, Jesus Christ.”²⁷ And He “hath abo-

²⁰ Gal. iv. 3-5.

²² Tit. ii. 14.

²⁴ Gal. iii. 13.

²⁶ Rom. v. 12-14.

²¹ Jno. viii. 34.

²³ 1 Pet. i. 18.

²⁵ Eph. i. 7.

²⁷ Rom. v. 17.

lished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”²⁸

But not only is there a bondage to the law, and a bondage to sin, and a bondage, in consequence of this, to death, but there is also *a bondage to Satan*, and from this bondage also Christ’s work as our Kinsman-Redeemer has freed us. He became partaker of our flesh and blood, “that He might taste death for every man; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”²⁹

From all this fourfold bondage Christ, the Son, the Elder Brother, our *Goel*, our great Kinsman-Redeemer has freed us. This was the first of the three great duties of the *goel*—to redeem the *person* of the brother who was in bondage. And thus Jehovah, as the Kinsman-Redeemer, redeems our persons!

With this the thought of many as to Christ’s redemptive work ends. But, as we have noticed, there was far more in the redeemer’s work than this. He was also to redeem his brother’s *inheritance*, and reinstate him in it. Had man, then—had we—an inheritance from which we have been dispossessed? Can we doubt it? We are told that God gave the earth to Adam, to Adam as representing his seed: that he gave him dominion over all the world as his kingdom, and deathless life as his portion. But he lost this glorious inheritance.

²⁸ 2 Tim. i. 10.

²⁹ Heb. ii. 14, 15.

And we—have we a hold yet in that inheritance which was ours in Adam? Is it still ours? Are we not, on the contrary, cast out? What was the sentence on Adam, and on Adam's seed? Was it not just this—Death: to be cast out of the goodly inheritance: to be dispossessed of that which had come to us from our Father? Yes. But there is more than that. The enemy who has dispossessed us now holds the inheritance that was ours. The estate, too, has been damaged: “cursed is the ground for thy sake”³⁰—so the judgment went. And “we know that the whole *creation* groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”³¹

Certainly there is, then, something still for a redeemer to do. Our persons are redeemed from that into which they were in bondage, but our inheritance is still in the hands of the alien. Is there any one equal to this great redemption? “Jehovah, our Redeemer from Everlasting is Thy name!” Christ will therefore also redeem the earth, our inheritance. What does this involve? It involves the casting of Satan out of the earth: the casting out of him who holds that which in the beginning was given to man. The usurping “prince of this world”³² must be cast out of the earth, which is not his. In the New Testament, therefore, the great Consummation is represented as marked by this very thing. For in the twentieth chapter of Revelation, where is recorded the vision of the end-time that was vouchsafed to the apostle John, we read of the final binding and casting-out of “the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and

³⁰ Gen. iii. 17.

³¹ Rom. viii. 22.

³² John xiv. 30.

Satan." He was first bound, and then cast into the lake of fire.³³

All this is implied in the word *Goel*, Redeemer. The very word, as applied to Jehovah, implies the redemption of the material earthly nature from the curse. Satan has been like a very bad tenant: the usurper has half ruined the property. When he is cast out, then the Kinsman-Redeemer will look after the estate. Hence it is written, in the sixty-fifth chapter of this same prophecy of Isaiah, that this Jehovah Redeemer will create a new earth, in which righteousness shall dwell. And for this same cause could Job also say, living long before Isaiah's day, wiser than many of his modern expositors, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."³⁴ And so also in the New Testament Paul declares with regard to the material earthly creation two things: that at present it is groaning and travailing in pain because of him who hath subjected it; but that it is yet in an estate of hope, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the *redemption* of the *body*.³⁵

And this leads one to say, again, that this word "Redeemer," illumined by that old Mosaic law, manifestly bears in its bosom *the promise of resurrection from the dead*. For the Levitical *goel* did not buy back the lost estate of his impoverished brother that he might himself enter into it and enjoy it. No: he bought it back for that poor brother. So it follows from this text that those

³³ Rev. xx. 2, 3, 10.

³⁴ Job xix. 25.

³⁵ Rom. viii. 19-23.

whom Jehovah Jesus redeems must be reinstated in the inheritance from which they have been cast out. What does this mean, do you ask? And how can this be? It will be plain, if you recollect how it is that we are *cast out* of this our earthly inheritance. Is it not by *death*? If so, then it follows that the redeemed ones can only be restored to their original inheritance by resurrection from the dead. Inasmuch, therefore, as the law of the redeemer involves the reinstatement of the dispossessed one in the forfeited inheritance, it follows, as we have said, that this text contains within itself a promise and prediction of resurrection from the dead. If Jehovah becomes to us a Kinsman-Redeemer, it is then necessarily involved in this, that He must be also “the *Resurrection and the Life!*”

Hence it is that you find the word “redemption” in the New Testament so often associated with resurrection and with that Second Advent which brings resurrection. Refer again to the eighth chapter of Romans, as to the expectation of this present groaning creation; and remember Job’s expectation of seeing his Redeemer—not in heaven, but standing in the latter day upon the earth, as its Lord, and Master of the repurchased inheritance. Hence again in Ephesians we read that the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers is only the firstfruits, the “*earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.*”³⁶ So note also our Saviour’s promise to His redeemed ones, that they shall inherit the earth,³⁷ and other like promises. And then remember how the last prophetic

³⁶ Eph. i. 11, 14.

³⁷ Matt. v. 5.

vision shows us the redeemed church not in heaven as is the thought of so many, but in the New Jerusalem in the *new earth*.³⁸

Before we now go on to consider the third of the three great offices of the "redeemer," let us pause to notice two other most vital thoughts embodied in this same word, as bearing on this former part of Christ's work. When it is said that from everlasting Jehovah is our *Goel*, our Redeemer, how beautifully this implies the gracious voluntariness of the Redeemer in His saving work! Remember the Old Testament law: not that the *goel must* redeem, but that he *may* redeem. If he do redeem, it is to the great praise of his loving-kindness, but if he do not redeem, it is not to his blame. Our Lord Himself, it will be remembered, calls attention to this when He says: "No man taketh My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself."³⁹

Then in the second place observe that, according to the Mosaic law, the redeemer could deliver the estate or the person of his poor brother only by paying a redemption price. You will all remember the concrete illustration of the working of this law in this respect also in the case of Boaz. I need not remind you that so it also is when Jehovah becomes our Redeemer. When Jesus said that He came to fulfil the ancient law, there can be no doubt that this was very prominently included in His thought. If Redeemer, He must needs in this respect also, as in all other particulars, fulfil the Mosaic law which prescribed the duties of the

³⁸ Rev. xxi. 1-3, 10.

³⁹ John x. 18.

Redeemer. And so He insisted, and used the word which, of all the words in the Greek language, expresses precisely this thought: "The Son of Man is come—to give His life as a *ransom* for many."⁴⁰ So also is the representation of all the apostles. That He might redeem us, He gave Himself for us; so that we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ,⁴¹ a most costly price, far, far more than any Israelite had ever before paid for the redemption of a poor enslaved brother!

And now we come to what was another, and the third, aspect of the redeemer's office, according to the law. The redeemer was, in virtue of his office, *the avenger of blood*. Christ, then, not although Redeemer, but because He is Redeemer, must be the Avenger of blood. The primary application of this none can mistake. The law was: "The murderer shall be put to death." Who, then, is the murderer in this case? Who, but he of whom the Lord declared that "he was a murderer from the beginning"?⁴² It is, therefore, just because Christ is *Redeemer* that He will yet destroy—as it is written that He shall destroy—him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil, and cast him into the lake of fire. To this thought of our Redeemer Christ as the Avenger of blood I will return presently, in conclusion.

Let us note, then, as we close, what the great facts are, according to the evangelic prophet Isaiah. Jehovah, the Creator of all the worlds, becomes our Kinsman-Redeemer, with all that that venerable word implies. And this is no late afterthought.

⁴⁰ Matt. xx, 28. ⁴¹ 1 Pet. i, 18, 19. ⁴² John viii. 44.

From everlasting "our Redeemer" is Thy name! He undertakes to redeem our persons, to redeem this earthly inheritance, and then to reinstate his redeemed brethren in it, as their eternal and inalienable heritage, through resurrection from the dead. And in all this He has acted not under any constraint, but most voluntarily, all of free grace; although so to do cost no less a price than the blood of His only begotten and co-eternal Son. Thus he "obtained for us eternal inheritance."

What, then, is there for us, dear friends, but to *accept* the proffered grace? And how are we to accept it? Learn from the case of poor Ruth. How did she secure the redemption of the old inheritance through Boaz? She simply went to him. She did not speak. All that she did was just to lie down at his feet; and in response to her mute appeal he at once undertook for her, and not only reinstated her by redeeming her property, but made her—the poor gleaner—his bride.

Will you have it to be thus for you? If you will not, then you must remember that just because Christ is Redeemer He is also Avenger of Blood. If you continue in your sin and unbelief, you are then on the side of the old murderer, and will have to meet the Redeemer when He comes to deal with him and with all who are on his side, as the Avenger. And may God forbid that, for Christ's own sake!

VIII

“ALL THINGS ARE NAKED AND OPEN UNTO THE EYES OF HIM WITH WHOM WE HAVE TO DO.”

—HEB. iv. 13.

IN these words we have a most impressive and suggestive description of God. He is “the One with whom we *have to do* ;” the one Being, that is, with whom, above all others, we have dealings ; with whom we come into the most intimate and unceasing contact. In theory, none will dispute that this is true, as regards our relations with God. And yet what a contrast here with the ordinary thinking of most men, even of many Christians ! How often we think of God as if He were One afar off, seated on the throne of the heavens, content—for the present, at least—to watch our doings from a distance ; or, again, as if our relation to Him, and His to us, were only vague and general, and not personal and special ; or as if we had to do with God only in the far gone past, as in some indirect way our Creator ; or as if we were only to have to do with Him in the future ; or as if, though we have to do with Him in the present life, yet this were only on rare occasions, in life’s great crises, such as compel us in spite of ourselves to say, “ This is the finger of God ! ”

Such are the ways in which most men think of God ; over against which stand the words of the

text, which declare that God is "*the One with whom we have to do:*" words teaching that each and every one of us, not in the past or in the future, or merely now and then, but in the living present, and that continuously, is *having to do* with God. All this is legitimately included in the grammatical sense of the words. God is the ONE with whom we have to do. This is the first thought which the text brings before us; and I wish to call your attention to what is contained in this thought.

Note, then, in the first place, that God is the One with whom we are constantly having to do, in what we call "Nature." I am bold, despite the materialism and pantheism of the day, to say that science is making this clearer and clearer every year. For there are two things which the modern advance of scientific thought has brought very distinctly before us. The first of these is the fact of the *unity* of all the forces of Nature. Our fathers used to suppose that light and heat and electricity and magnetism were all forces quite distinct and separate. We have learned that they are so only in appearance; that in reality all the physical forces are one: different manifestations of one force, which, moreover, is incapable of either increase or diminution, absolutely indestructible. The second fact, toward which all scientific investigation points, is no less remarkable and significant; namely, that Force—this one force which is manifested to our sense under all these different forms—is *spiritual*. It is not, and cannot be material, or of material origin. It is of the very nature of *matter*

that it is dead and inert ; the power, therefore, which flashes in the sunshine or warms us with the heat, or strikes us with the lightning, or crashes in the thunder, must have its source and origin in a Being immaterial and spiritual. So far Science can go, but no farther. Standing with dumb awe before the veil which hides from profane vision the unseen Holy, she trembles to utter the dread secret, the inner mystery of Nature. But who, or what, is the Being, the spiritual Being, from whom constantly flows forth this inexhaustible stream of power which continually thrills through the infinite spaces of the universe? Ah, brethren, you and I know! Who can that Being be, but God? For, in all this, science is but unconsciously iterating the testimony of Scripture, which constantly represents all the forces of nature as the manifested power of the sole and only God: as therefore really *one*, just because God is One; as therefore spiritual in their innermost nature, because the one God is a personal Spirit. For it is declared that in the thunder it is *God* that thundereth marvellously with His voice; that it is *God* who causeth His sun to shine and His rain to fall alike on the evil and on the good, and also in the desert places where no man dwelleth; that it is *God* who calleth forth the lightnings, that they may come and say "Behold us!" while He rides upon the wings of the wind, and makes the clouds His chariot, which He guideth hither and thither as He will!

Ah, the trouble is that we had read all this, and most of us had thought it was rhetoric—poetry!—

when all the while, as science is now teaching us, this glorious poetry was also simple prose, unadorned fact. It is, then, the power of God which awakens and maintains those mysterious pulsations of the ether which we call in their various manifestations, light, heat, electricity. It is His omnipresent power, which each one of us is feeling every moment as a constant presence which we can by no possibility escape, and which we veil to ourselves under the name of "the force of gravitation." It is that same omnipresent God, ever immanent in all material nature, who is ever working in the innermost constitution of all material things; here building up, there taking down; here constructing, there reconstructing. The new life of the Spring, when all the forces of vegetable life burst into leaf and bloom, the glory and fruitage of Summer, and the ripened fulness of the Autumn; in a word, all life and growth, and disintegration, and decay—all are, in one way or in another, the operation of the omnipresent power of God. We cannot stop short of this. To suppose that we have explained it by referring it to Nature, and spelling nature with a capital "N," is folly! It is none the less true, though in our dim-sighted ignorance we cannot say just where in the chain of causation we pass from creature to the Creator, that God is in it all; so that, as Paul long ago said, "All things are of God, and through God, and for God." And so we learn that it is God "with whom we have to do" in material nature, environing, conditioning on every side our bodily life. Science itself at last begins with bated breath to whisper the solemn

secret, the mystery which long ago the Holy Scripture had declared with outspoken plainness.

Let us then heed it well! Inasmuch as we are beings with bodily life, and inasmuch as through these our material bodies we stand in relation to the material world around us, thus and so we have every moment immediately to do with *God*. In the constant upholding and upbuilding of our bodies, we are in unremitting contact with the life-giving power of the God of life. When I rise and walk, it is really His power which holds me firm upon this whirling planet. When I lie down, and feel what I had called "the force of gravitation" holding me with gentle pressure on my bed, that which I am feeling is in truth the upholding power of the Everlasting Arms. In a word, behind my every pulse-beat throbs the Divine efficiency; so that it is no figure of speech, but a glowing reality, that "we live in God, and in God we move, and our being, also, we have in *God!*"

Does any one object that he is not conscious of this? Say rather, more truly, that you have always been conscious of this, and are now, as always. You have always been conscious, for one thing, of a power which is not self which is *holding your body in life*. Surely no one will say that it is the power of self that keeps the heart beating! And this power, which is not self, is also holding us, as in this body, to certain fixed relations to the material world around us, in which without any choice of our own, we find ourselves placed.

Of this power which is not self you *are* conscious; every man is conscious of it. Say only, therefore,

that it had never before occurred to you that this mysterious power which presses on you from every side, and which unalterably conditions and determines your being, a power which demonstrably is not self, is, in reality, none other than the living and almighty God! Yes, yes! Men call the power "Nature," and thereby they miss of perceiving the real fact that this power of which we speak, of which we are all conscious, is and can be no other than the omnipresent God, with whom thus every instant of our lives we have to do, although we recognize Him not.

Not conscious of having to do with God? No! Neither am I conscious that the atmosphere is pressing on me, with a weight which, if it were only on one side of me, would crush me; but it is none the less a fact. Just so is it with the God with whom in material Nature we ever have to do. Were there but one side of our nature on which we did *not* have to do with Him, the rest remaining as it is, we should at once awake to a sense of the tremendous weight of His presence, which would be crushing. But as the atmosphere presses upon us from every side, and thus holds us in conditions of life, although we feel it not, just so is it with the God "with whom we have to do," "in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways."

It is God with whom also we have to do in *providence*. Men also forget this; but none the less is it true. The Holy Word, will we but recall its teachings, is full of this thought. It tells us that the hairs of our head are all counted; that a numbering is made of all our tears; that not even a

sparrow falls to the ground without God—therefore much less any one of us. It teaches us that, while we may have our own plans for our lives, which we may carry out successfully, or may not ; yet above our petty, short-sighted, individual plans rules a higher, a Divine plan for our lives, with which whenever, through ignorance or sin, we come into collision, all our purposes are turned aside or wholly brought to nought. Nor is this merely a matter of the teaching of the Book ; for oh, how often does God force its truth upon the unwilling thought of men ! So in many of man's familiar words it has found expression—

“ There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”

Let us here bethink ourselves of our own experience, and so let this come home to us, that it is God with whom we are having to do in all the events of life. For here are facts which no one can dispute. In every plan we form, there is always an unknown factor which we cannot calculate. We always have to reckon upon a power which may come in, not merely to defeat our plan, but which, more wonderful still, working through and by means of our free choices, makes them to be the necessary and effectual means of something else ; of a change in our life of which we had never thought, or had thought of only to dread.

Now what is this unknown power which so marvellously combines and uses various free choices of our own or of other men, and even mere accidents, which we could never have anticipated, to bring to nought all our plans, confound all our

calculations, and, turning the whole current of our life in a new direction, often utterly transform our condition and our character? All are most familiar with such experiences as these; but not all have bethought themselves of what I would now with all earnestness impress upon you, that according to the Holy Scriptures this mysterious power, so manifestly working in our lives, is GOD, with whom we are thus having to do; who continually, within and without all our working, Himself now co-works, now counter-works; so that in all the everyday experiences of our lives we but see that word of Scripture fulfilled: "A man's heart deviseth his way, *but the Lord directeth his steps!*"

Thirdly, it is God with whom we have to do in our *consciousness of moral law*. In every heart is a mysterious power which commands and forbids; which approves and condemns with a judicial authority; which promises and threatens like a king. What is the power? Whence this inner voice? Can we explain it, as some attempt to explain it, as the result of *education* merely, or of habit, or of an evolution from racial experiences? Impossible! For all such explanations make this power to be a manifestation merely of self, while conscience cannot be merely the voice of self, since self is often in full rebellion against it. None of these theories can account for the element of *felt superior authority*; an authority which we feel to be almighty, so that it can carry out its will unfailingly; which even extends into the unseen future beyond death, and makes the sinner quake and tremble when he thinks of his misdeeds and then of that

unknown life beyond. How then shall we explain the voice of conscience? Ah, you anticipate the answer: it is GOD, who thus reveals Himself in our innermost being, as the One with whom we have to do in moral law.

So, then, whether we look within or without, that with which we have to do is everywhere God. It is the living, omnipresent and immanent God with whom we have to do in material nature. It is His power which enlightens us, and warms us and thrills us with the electric pulses of health. With His wind, as with the breath of His lips, He cools our heated brows. He upholds our steps in life; or, again, takes away our breath, so that in that very day our thoughts perish. And we have to do with Him in His providence; providing, controlling, directing, ruling, over-ruling. With every step He walks beside us—a Presence invisible, but no less real—so that at every turn we confront a veiled Godhead! And last of all, to complete our recapitulation, we have to do with God in all the inner life in the region of moral law as the Supreme Authority from which all law derives its ultimate sanction; so that it is God who whispers in every heart—will men but listen—“Do right, and thou shalt live; do wrong, and thou shalt suffer!”

That this God with whom we have to do is Holy—is absolutely Holy—is most certain: that He should not be such were simply inconceivable. An unholy God were a moral contradiction in terms. I do not argue this; we all believe it. I only mention it in passing the more to enforce the other of the two thoughts of the text. We have to do

with God : this God is in His Person the transcendent Holiness. So far the text has led us. But, further, before this God with whom in nature, in providence, and in moral law we have to do, "all things are naked and open!" The thought is amplified in the context : "He is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"—of the most secret and inner activities of our souls for good or evil.

"All things!" It could not be otherwise! If our relation to God is really so intimate as this; if on every side of our being we are constantly in contact with Him; if He is thus ever present to us, acting upon us, acting within us, commanding, forbidding, persuading, dissuading, promising, threatening; then beyond doubt He must needs know us through and through: He *must know all!*

"Naked and open!" Who would like to have all things within Him naked and open before the eyes of man, before even his dearest earthly friend? Yet all things are naked and open before the God with whom we all have to do! And if so, then no disguises avail. Silence may conceal much from our fellow men—may even deceive them wholly as to our real character: but the silence of our lips, or our abstinence from any act, cannot conceal aught that is in the heart from Him. And He is Holy, and we are not holy! We are *sinner*s! What then?

The God with whom we now have to do in nature, in providence and in moral law, is, by necessary consequence no less than by clear revelation, the God with whom we shall have to do in *judgment*.

And we are all moving on to His judgment-seat ; to the judgment, absolutely just and righteous, final and irreversible, of this God with whom, all this earthly life, we have to do ! And in that coming judgment the question will needs come up, not merely, how we treated our fellow-men, but above all, and most momentous of all, how, when in this world, we treated Him. The judgment will consider how we received His dealings, how we used His mercies and His faithful, loving Fatherly discipline. Alas ! Alas ! How can we all but tremble when we recall this, and then remember that before this God with whom we shall have to do in judgment *all things are naked and open*, even all the thoughts and intents of our hearts ? How can we but tremble with an irrepressible dread ? Nay, how shall we be saved from sheer despair ? How, indeed, except we remember, last of all, as also first of all, that this God, with whom we have to do in nature, in providence, and in moral law, and with whom we shall have to do in the final judgment, is also the One with whom we *may* have to do in mercy and grace and eternal redemption ? O, let us heed it well, that this God with whom we have to do is the God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for our redemption ; and who Himself is in that Son, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses ; so that it is impossible for any one who hears this Gospel to be lost except he wilfully put from him or heedlessly neglect the great salvation, the glorious propitiation, the proffered grace of pardon and holiness !

Some of you have heeded this, and rejoice that you have to do with such a God in atonement and redemption. What then? Thank Him then! Praise Him! Show your gratitude by holy living!

Others of you have thus far neglected to have to do with this God in redemption—have never accepted the offered pardon in penitence for sin, and loving self-surrender. But dare you go on in this way? For beyond doubt, whether you would have it so or not, this is the God with whom you *have to do*, every moment of your being, and evermore as now. Dare you then go on in this way, even until to-morrow? As you cannot flee from Him, will you not flee to Him, saying, like the prodigal, in the parable, in true penitence for the past, “Father! I have sinned, and am no more worthy—” and ere you shall have ended what you would say, shall the Father’s love receive you, cleanse you and pardon you, and hold you, once astray but now returned, as His beloved child. May this be so with some of you even this very night, for Jesus’ sake! Amen!

IX

“WHAT SHALL I DO THEN WITH JESUS, WHICH IS CALLED CHRIST ?”—MATT. xxvii. 22.

THE circumstances which led to this question will be at once remembered. Jesus stood before the judgment-seat of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate had referred before the Jews to the standing custom that on the feast-day some one of the prisoners who were in bonds should be freely pardoned and released to the people, and asked the assembled multitude whether he should now observe this custom by releasing a certain notable malefactor named Barabbas, or by releasing this Jesus : “Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you ?” And the people, induced by the chief priest and elders of the Jewish hierarchy, who would not have heard of allowing Jesus to escape their hands after they had at last, in spite of the people’s favour, effected his capture, answered with a clamorous shout : “Barabbas !” Then Pilate asked the question, the words of which we are to consider, “What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ ?”

On this I wish first to call your attention to the fact that it was *a very weighty question*. Even if one take what is the lowest possible view of the Person of Jesus, the view that Pilate took, this is true. The Man Jesus had been formally

and officially absolved from guilt. The declaration had been officially made: "I find no fault in this man." But while the question were thus serious even if that Jesus had been but a mere man, as the case really stood it was very far more deeply so. For this Man was not only Jesus; He was "Jesus which is called Christ." He had repeatedly said that He was *the Son of God*. Even a few moments before, on this very occasion, in the very presence of Pilate and of His Jewish accusers, He had declared this on oath, standing before the highest judicial authority in Israel. He thus claimed, and was understood by those that heard Him to claim, to stand in such a unique relation to the Father, that to have seen Him was equivalent to having seen the Father, that to hear Him was to hear the Father; so that, as the high priest had said, if this claim were not *true* Jesus was guilty of blasphemy.

But if Jesus was in the sense in which he claimed, the Son of God, then it followed inevitably that to reject that Man was to reject God the Father; and to heap indignity and ignominy on Him was to inflict on the Father Himself the uttermost dishonour of which even a created being was capable. It was, thus, utterly impossible that the gravest consequences should not follow, if they failed to treat Him with the highest veneration, honour and regard. It was indeed a very weighty question, that of Pilate's: "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?"

But observe, secondly, that this so weighty question of that day is no less a *present-day question*. Indeed, it is before the whole world to-day

as never before since Pilate's day : before every individual who hears the Gospel and fails to receive Jesus as Lord, Christ and Saviour. And before men now too, as to the Jews then, it commonly comes in the way of an alternative : "If ye will have Barabbas, then what sha'l I do with Jesus?" Barabbas may be released or Christ may be released ; but that both shall be released is impossible. You may choose one, or the other ; but not both.

Just so, also, in our day, does the alternative present itself before every one who receives not Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Men often say that they have not yet been able to make up their minds about Jesus. Or, if the truth must be told, they have set their heart upon having or keeping something which is absolutely incompatible with having Jesus as Lord and Saviour—incompatible with treating Him as He must be treated if His claim be true. It is, therefore, most evidently, a present-day question : if ye will not have Christ as Lord and Saviour, what then will ye do with Him ?

And you will observe that the question is *just as weighty* now as when put by Pilate ; for Jesus is in all respects the same to-day that He was then. Mark it well : the question is, "What will you do with, how will you treat, the Son of God?" Do you not see that this is a question which, in the nature of the case, must be exceedingly weighty ? You cannot have both Christ as Lord, and the world as your master ; and you choose to serve the world in some of its forms first ;—then what will you *do* with Jesus which is called Christ ?

The question may come home to us from the intellectual side. You may accept the testimony of the Scripture concerning Christ, or you may be an unbeliever—an agnostic, if you like—that is very fashionable just now. Suppose you commit yourself to the latter position :—very well ; what then will you *do* with this Jesus, which is called Christ ?

And the question as it bears on you, and as it forces itself upon you, if you put yourself in this class, has been *increasing in difficulty* since the day when Jesus walked among men, when Pilate put this question to the Jews. For Jesus has had a history, since the day that He left the earth ; which history, on the supposition that He was not what He said He was, has to be accounted for. You deny His claim to be more than man ? Then what will you do with the history of the world, of the Church, of the Jewish nation since Christ's day ? Will you venture to say that all the transformation which Christ has wrought in the world during the Christian centuries was the work either of an impostor or of one who through lack of mental balance imagined Himself to be what He was not—of one who was a mere sinful man like the rest of us, or, at most, only the best of men ? Will you venture to say, as many cultivated people are saying in our day, that Jesus was—honestly enough, no doubt—*mistaken* in His belief that He was equal with God the Father ; mistaken when He claimed for Himself, as He did, the same honour which men ought to give to God ? If so, then I ask, “ What will you do with Him ? How will you account for the

immeasurable and unparalleled after-results of that unmatched life? What will you *do* with this Jesus, which is called Christ?" And I earnestly insist that for you, and for all such as you, this is not only a present-day question, but a question which must be, essentially, of absolutely paramount weight; that no question can in this respect possibly compare with it. Are you inclined to give to some thing, some person, some philosophy or view of life, the precedence of Christ and His teachings? Very well: as a free man, you are "at liberty" so to do; but do not forget that the matter of your answer to this question is an incomparably serious matter. If this answer is the answer that you give, it follows that what you say is this: "Whereas Jesus claimed to be the Divine Son of God and Saviour of men, I reject Him. I deny this claim. I refuse to Him that place of supremacy in my heart and life which, as professing to be the Son of God and only Redeemer, He demands." "What, then, will you do with Jesus?" Ah yes: it is a very weighty question. It is the question of all questions for you.

Observe, moreover, that this is *a question which must be answered*. Many questions are not of this kind: they are of such a nature that I may decline to commit myself on either side. If I am asked, for instance, what I think of Napoleon, I may decline to answer; there is no inner, essential necessity for my "doing" something with Napoleon, as I am compelled to face and to answer the question what I will do with this Jesus. I have a right to refuse a reply: I am able, in

fact, to assume the attitude of perfect neutrality on questions such as this. Whether various claims made by Napoleon were just and true, or not, is a matter on which I do not need to commit myself in any way. With Christ, however, it is not so. Because of the *nature* of the claim which He made, it is not so. He claimed to be the personal Son of God, incarnate for my salvation. It is a claim which, if true, evidently requires my full surrender to Him; and *not to make* this full surrender is to *reject Him*. Mark this well. You are asked what you will do with Jesus which is called Christ. Will you deny His claim touching Himself, or will you take Him as your Lord and Redeemer, as with loving and yearning heart He longs to have you take Him? There is no possibility of a neutral position upon this subject. As a matter of fact, every one here *has* answered this question: it is as yet possible to reconsider the answer we have made, if we have answered amiss; but meanwhile *the answer is made*, and is recorded in heaven to confront us, when we stand before this very Christ as our Judge.

Now let me call your attention to some of the *answers* which this question is receiving from men.

Some men say, in the heart or by words, "*There are so many different opinions, I feel that I must wait for more light.*" This is the agnostic position; and few answers are more commonly heard in this day of ours. If this be your answer to the question of questions, I wish to ask you what you think the probability is, *that you will get more light*. You

have been waiting long ; what now do you expect ? Eighteen hundred years bear their accordant testimony to the truth of that saying of His, " I am the Light of the world ; " and " Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice. " How many more years would you have, could you live so long ? What is it that you wish ? You would not deliberately *prefer* to leave the world with this question in abeyance, rather than decided—and that for Christ. Down in your heart you feel that it is *safer* to leave the world having accepted Christ as the Son of God and your Saviour, than to leave it professing to be non-committal :—though, as I have pointed out to you, you are only deluding yourself with a vain show of words when you do profess to be non-committal, for that is just what you cannot possibly be. Grant, in any case, that you *have* doubts : the law of common-sense requires you to act upon the *probable*. This law, too, becomes the more imperative, the greater the issues. It is an utter fallacy to argue that *because the issue is so grave* therefore this principle does not here apply. Consider the case of a man suffering under a fatal disease. Suppose that he is not certain in his mind that anything will cure him ; or suppose him to be certain that either one of two things is a certain and sure remedy, but not to know which one it is. Would such a man argue : " I will postpone the matter : because I am not sure which is the right one, I will take neither remedy " ? Or will he say : " I will take the least probable, because I am not absolutely assured of the other " ? You will all admit that this would be the purest

folly, such as in worldly things we never see. Apply, then, the principle in this case. Consider all the manifold circumstances, and then ask yourself which is the more probable : that Christianity was a delusion or imposture, or that Christ was, in very truth, all that He said He was, Lord of creation and only Saviour of men.

But others pass beyond the agnostic position. What answers do some of these give to the great question ? I hear some say : "I will not take Christ as my Saviour, and see in His death an atonement for sin of mine ; but *I will take Him as my example.*" This answer sounds well ; and many who have given it are content with it, and because they have given it and say they are trying to imitate Christ in His purity and benevolence of life imagine that they are all right, and that there can now be no real issue between themselves and God concerning Jesus Christ. But so to imagine is a very great mistake, a very sad mistake. To take Christ as your example only, as you might take the great and good life of any other person in history, or as you might imitate all that is good and true in the character of your friend ; to take Christ as such, *and no more*, is to reject Him in the most central and momentous claim that He made, the one claim for which He was crucified, the claim that He was the Son of God, and had come into the world from the Father to save the world by giving His life a ransom for many. It is well to follow His example : none, indeed, can be reckoned Christians who do not seek to do this. But to stop with this is to take sides with those

who crucified Him. For what was the crucifixion but the barbaric and most cruel expression, after the manner of the age, of the denial of His claim to be *much more* than an Example? Had the sinlessness of His life been the extent of His claim, there is not the slightest reason to believe that the Jews would have crucified Him. To profess, then, to take Christ for an example, while refusing to own Him as Son of God and Saviour, is, under pretext of honouring Him, to dishonour Him; under pretext of crowning Him, to take the crown from His brow; under pretext of accepting Him, to reject Him with His crucifiers.

There is a great deal of this spirit, and a wide prevalence of this attitude regarding the Person of our adorable Lord in our day. It is at this very point, then, of our Lord's supreme claim touching Himself, that we who own Him Lord need specially to be on our guard against those tendencies in our own time which would dethrone Him, and make Him mere man. For if Christ was mere man, then this poor world is in the blackness of a darkness unpierced as yet by any ray of Divine light; Death is still king; and, as the apostle said, "Our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins."

Yet once again the question is sent back at men, and what other answers do I hear? I hear the voices of some who are saying, "Yes; I agree to all this. *I accept Jesus as Lord and also as Redeemer— BUT NOT NOW!*" Was there ever an answer so unreasonable, so ungrateful, and wicked as it is ungrateful and unreasonable? By such an avowal, if one is sincere in making it, he admits that Christ

was all that He said, even the Son of God from the bosom of the Father ; admits that He died for our salvation ; admits that therefore we are in need of being saved by Him ; and concludes, as a logical deduction from these premisses, not, as were most rational, to accept Him thankfully at once, but to "put it off"—to *intend* to accept Him "bye and bye." How not unreasonable, when by all sound reason the admissions made should lead to exactly the opposite conclusion ? But also wicked ! For if all this is true, He must be the best Friend that we have, and it becomes the grossest ingratitude to put off yielding to Him. Recognizing this, that you should still continue to go on grieving Him and persistently refusing Him as your heart's Ruler and King of your life, under the hope, at the last, when the best of life has been consumed and exhausted in the service of self, of then making a hasty arrangement by which you should obtain the benefit of His dying love, when it is too late to do anything for Him by which to show your gratitude—can anything be conceived of as more base and ignoble ? That any one can practically entertain such a thought ; nay, that many can actually live on this assumption and with this deliberate expectation—that that should be *your* attitude and *your* practice through life, or for a single hour of your life, should be to you such a revelation of the utter depths of moral abasement into which you have sunk as ought to be simply appalling, and should send you, in terror of the immediate wrath of God, a broken-hearted suppliant for pardon.

“What will you do with Jesus which is called Christ?” I hear another answer: “*I will receive Him*—receive Him at once as my Holy Example; receive Him at once also as my Lord and my Redeemer; receive Him, in a word, and accept Him, for all that He claimed to be; receive Him that He may do all that in His infinite love He has been asking to be allowed to do for me!”

Blessed answer! Millions on millions have made it; and the world has yet to hear of the first one who, having so answered, has ever repented of the answer made. It has heard of millions who have answered otherwise, and who have gone down to the grave in darkness and bitterness and the cheerless gloom of unavailing regret because of it. What is your answer—yours? What will *you* do with this Jesus, which is called the Christ of God?

I wish, last of all, to call your attention to one more point which the text suggests. It is this. Far more was involved in the answer which the Jews gave to that question of Pilate than those dreamed who answered it at the time. To Pilate, indeed, there was so much of light that he was profoundly troubled by the turn that things were taking. He felt it necessary, in a very formal way—though quite vainly—by publicly washing his hands, to disown his personal guilt of participation in the crime of rejecting Christ. Yet even Pilate could not have imagined all that lay wrapped up in that answer, “Crucify Him!” for those that returned it. Dimly it soon began to appear what this answer meant for the Jews; it began to appear in the lurid light of the burning of the

temple and of the Holy City. But its awful content has not even yet been exhausted. Even in our own day, what it meant for Israel is ever being revealed more and more fully. Its meaning is seen, its burden is felt with each agonizing cry that comes to our ears from the land of the Czar: a continuous, age-long exposition of those solemn words of the apostle Paul, that because of the rejection of their Messiah "wrath is come upon Israel to the uttermost." Who among those who joined in that rejection dreamed what was involved in what they then decided?

Not otherwise is it now, for the individual even as for the people—for the Gentile individual no less than for the Jewish nation. That the consequence of a rejection of Christ cannot be trifling, the history and the present experience of Israel should teach us all, in a lesson of most solemn warning. For our case differs from the case of Israel at that time, only in that we have far more light; and if for any reason whatsoever we fail of accepting Christ as Saviour with the full and perfect surrender of the heart and life to Him, it cannot but be far worse for us even than it has been for them.

Yet so it need not be. How it shall be with us is not a matter of *fate*, but of free decision in the light of the shining evidence and of the testimony of the Gospel. God give us grace to say, if never before, yet here and now, as the question comes,

WHAT WILL YE DO WITH JESUS?—

to answer, each for himself, each for herself,

I WILL, AND I DO, HEREWITH, ONCE FOR ALL,
TAKE THIS JESUS WHICH IS CALLED CHRIST
FOR ALL THAT HE WAS AND IS AND FOR ALL
THAT HE DID AND SUFFERED FOR SINNERS LIKE
ME, AS MY SAVIOUR, MY ATONING SACRIFICE,
AND MY LORD AND MASTER, TO ALL ETERNITY !

May God grant us all this grace, for Jesus' sake !
AMEN !

X

“VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, EXCEPT YE BE CONVERTED, AND BECOME AS LITTLE CHILDREN, YE SHALL NOT ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

“WHOSOEVER THEREFORE SHALL HUMBLE HIMSELF AS THIS LITTLE CHILD, THE SAME IS GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.”—
MATT. xviii. 3, 4.

FROM the parallel passage in Mark's Gospel, we may learn more fully of the occasion upon which these words were spoken by our Saviour. The disciples were full of anticipations of the speedy revelation of the expected kingdom of heaven, which as yet they conceived of under a very worldly form. Already they thought of Christ as sitting on the throne of David, with His ministers and counsellors of state, His armies and legions of soldiers with their various officers; and now the question had arisen among them which of themselves was likely to be the one who should obtain the highest office of all the offices at His disposal.

And this is the Lord's answer, full at once of instruction, of warning and of rebuke. It must be noted here that we are not by any means to attach the narrow technical sense to the words, “Except ye be converted,” as if there were a suggestion to be conveyed by these words that the disciples had never yet been truly converted. The words mean,

simply and only, "Except ye turn" (and so the revised version has it). Except, that is, they should turn from their spirit of ambition and rivalry for the highest places of honour in the Kingdom, they would not even be able to enter that Kingdom. The maintenance of this spirit, Christ says, is utterly inconsistent with the conditions of entering the Kingdom in any capacity, even the lowest, because it argues the existence of a pride, a self-confidence, and a consequent self-assertion, which is absolutely contradictory to, and exclusive of the spirit of total self-surrender of the will to do the Will of God. And to enforce this lesson He takes a child—"a little child," and sets him in the midst of them. To be humble like this little child, He says, is the condition of entrance into the Kingdom; and, once enrolled among its blessed citizens, the rank which any of you will occupy will be higher or lower according to the degree in which you possess the exact opposite of the spirit which this ambitious place-seeking shows.

How perfect this illustration is! It is not drawn from the habits and manners of any one people or of any one period of time. Its applicability is perfectly general and its appeal is universal to men of all times of the world's history and of all climes and regions. Children are everywhere, and the characteristics of the child-life and the child-nature are everywhere alike. And how completely the illustration does illustrate and illumine the lesson which our Lord desired to enforce upon His followers!

Let us notice some of the chief characteristics of a child, and seek to discover from this more particu-

larly the nature of that child-like temper of mind which our Master here insists upon as essential to an entrance into the Kingdom of God. We may see at once three such traits of child-character, Humility, Teachableness and Trustfulness. These, then, are qualities required of us in order that to us the entrance may be ministered into the heavenly Kingdom of our Lord.

There must be, first, genuine *Humility*, an honest and sincere consciousness and a practical admission of our innumerable deficiencies in everything—in strength, in wisdom, in goodness, in everything God-like and perfect, in everything that God might desire in us. And the spirit of Humility must be one of true Humility. Not in words only to admit our weakness and our helplessness and our need in all things—to say all that, because it is the proper thing to say ; but in very deep sincerity, and in the spirit of candid and honest heart-searching to confess our failing, and our lack, and our inability in all things—to be a child before God in the Humility of childhood.

There must be, therefore, secondly, and in consequence of the first, a spirit of *Teachableness*, of willingness to learn ; a desire and readiness to be taught and directed by superior wisdom, and to accept without any questioning what superior wisdom tells us ; to accept it even though to our own apprehension it may seem foolishness. We must be willing to be taught and led of God ; to allow His Will and the indications of His guiding Hand to be supreme and final in the ordering of all our ways, not venturing to set up our own mind and wisdom against the Mind and the Wisdom of God our Father. We must have the

teachableness, before God, of the little child before his earthly father.

And, finally, our spirit toward God must be a spirit of *Trustfulness*, just as the little child, who consciously stands in lack of the strength and the knowledge and the wisdom which are needed for the ordering of his life, looks to his father for that strength and wisdom. Just so must we, feeling deeply our own impotence and unwisdom, trust perfectly our Father God, trust Him perfectly and trust Him completely.

And now, having looked for a time at the qualities of childlikeness which, as we have been told by our Master, He would desire to find in us,—nay, which, He has also told us, must be regarded as essential even to entering the heavenly Kingdom which He has prepared for men,—let us observe a further fact, that this childlikeness of spirit in these respects is the necessary correlate of the other great truth of our faith, of the Fatherhood of God. There are many who talk glibly of God as the Father in heaven, who seem never to have reflected what kind of spirit, if this be true, the fact requires from us. Our mental and spiritual attitude toward God is to be ever and always, and in every respect, that of a little child. “Our Father, Who art in Heaven”—these are the first words of the prayer our Saviour taught us to use to God. At the very beginning they stand, as if to give us the right attitude of mind and heart in which we are to frame the remaining words, and the remaining petitions of our prayer. And we can never outgrow this attitude; even to old age it must be always thus. For while a child may grow

up to adult years, and go beyond his earthly parents in wisdom and in strength and in all the other qualities in which he was ever so ready, as a child, to admit his deficiency—though he may so pass beyond his parents, that to maintain in *all* respects the position of a little child toward them would be even out of place, yet this can never be so with God and our relation to Him. Never can we by any possible growth approach so nearly unto God's infinity in wisdom and strength, as to be justified in keeping toward Him any other than the one attitude, of *humility, teachableness and trust.*

Let us now seek to illustrate in various different phases of life and conduct, and of the relation of men to God, the childlike spirit which we have seen to be of such primary and universal importance according to the teaching of our Lord. Note first, that this child-spirit is, as the Saviour intimates, absolutely necessary *as regards the first reception of the Gospel.* The absence of this spirit, in fact, is the one reason why multitudes who otherwise might come into the light and joy of realized salvation through faith in Christ never do so. They are unable to humble themselves, to empty themselves of themselves, to take the position of a child before God. On the intellectual side, for example—consider how many there are who tell us that they cannot believe because of “difficulties” which they feel in regard to this or that truth of religion, the truth, for instance, of the Deity of Christ, and especially of His Atonement : and so they refuse to receive the Gospel until these difficulties are “cleared up”

to their satisfaction. But this is all wrong—wrong and sad. The little child has no such opinion of his knowledge. His spirit is that of the Psalmist in the one hundred and thirty-first Psalm. He does not exercise his intellect in great matters or in things too high for him. The teaching of Jesus *commands* your receiving of it, whether you can understand it or whether you cannot; whether it can be justified to your poor reason, or whether it cannot. There is nothing “unreasonable” in this demand. If one grant the authority of Christ as in *any* sense—even the thinnest and, in view of His own claims, the most inadequate—a teacher “sent from God,” it is only to be reasonably expected that in His teaching there will be many things “too high” for us; that when He tells us of the things of God, and unfolds to us the mysteries of the plans of God’s dealings with men and of His dealings with this world, there should be, in the very nature of the subject, many, many things which to comprehend and fully understand would be wholly beyond the reach of our finite intellect. How should He tell us of the eternal God, and we, nevertheless, expect the account He should give to be free of mystery to us? There must, in the nature of the case, be mystery here. But, on account of these things difficult and hard of understanding, to hesitate at receiving Him, to cast Him from us as our Saviour, is the expression of a pride of intellect, which cannot but be fatal to our salvation. We *must* take the position of the little child, who implicitly receives whatever his trusted father may tell him, however much many of those things may seem to his present knowledge—ay, even to his

present power of knowledge—utterly and wholly incredible.

The Lord here further teaches that not only is this becoming like a little child necessary, in order that we may enter the Kingdom of God, but that once within the Kingdom, the same spirit must ever be maintained ; and that the measure in which we possess it will be the measure of the blessing which we shall receive. He who shall best succeed in becoming like a little child, he shall be great in the Kingdom of heaven. This child-like spirit is diametrically opposed to that spirit of ambition which the disciples displayed, and which became the occasion of these warning words of the Saviour. It is thus opposed to that very common spirit among Christians in our own day, which leads those whom it possesses to seek after as high a place as possible in society, in the state, in the church. Though this is so exceedingly common, yet it is the exact opposite, according to Christ, of the spirit which constitutes one a child of the Kingdom of God. Ah, how often it is so, that in our pitiful, small ambitions we crowd and jostle others to get the front seats, the highest places ; while those who are our betters, more decent and more humble, are by our unseemly intrusiveness by us kept out ! It is fitting that the place of trust, the place of honour, the place of preferment should seek us, rather than we the place.

This spirit which the Saviour inculcates, however, is opposed not only to pride, but also to *anxiety* and *worry*. Even as regards spiritual things, as regards the great needs of the soul—pardon, sanctification,

and peace—we are not to worry. You will not misunderstand me; the opposite of worry is not indifference—very far from it! The opposite of worry is trust. The child has no worry as to whence the food and the clothing shall come, although well aware that he cannot himself provide them; but this is not because he is indifferent to these things, but because he feels that he absolutely *must* leave these things to his father, and that, because of the father's love, he *may* also safely leave them to him. And just so it is with us. Only we may the more wisely do this, by just so much as our heavenly Father is stronger, wiser and more loving than any earthly parents. This very thought also was set before us by the Lord Jesus Himself. Remember that word of His: "What man is there of you who, if his child ask of him bread, will give him a stone?" And then—"How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"

It is not otherwise as regards temporal things. Not only are we, as Christians, obliged—let us rather say, it is our high privilege—to cherish toward our heavenly Father this same child-like spirit in all the things of earth and the things of time. Why is this so? For two reasons: first, because of our *Ignorance*. We do not know what it is that is best for us, or what we ourselves are the best fit for, or what God is fitting us for in the age that is to come. Often do we, in our mere ignorance, place too high an estimate upon ourselves. Often, again, we are like the child, who cries for the bottle of poison, because its colour strikes his fancy; or who

is distressed when his father denies to him the razor, with its bright, beautiful gleam. Often we seek for that which, though good in itself, is not good for us *now*; or we grasp after what we are wholly incompetent to handle—like the child who will insist on driving the spirited horse all by himself.

The second of the two reasons why the child-like spirit befits us as regards our need of things for the body and for life is found in the fact of our real *weakness* and *incompetency* to do what is needed for ourselves, even when we know what that something is. When really so weak to master all the circumstances which encompass us, so powerless to work out our own highest good, what ought we to do—what truly *can* we do, but consent to become as little children in our Father's hands? Thus, and thus only, shall we shut out that fret and worry which keeps the soul so often from the peace it might enjoy, keeps it ever in a frothing sea of turmoil and unrest.

In conclusion, we may note three practical ways in which this truth may be regarded. We must observe that the attainment of this child-like spirit is represented by Christ as not merely desirable, but absolutely *essential to salvation*; and, further, that it is not only the only attitude which is safe, but the only mental condition in which we may hope to have settled and *abiding peace*. And as we close, let us mark the bearing of our Lord's teaching upon this occasion on the question of *the salvation of little children*. So often the possibility or reality of child-conversion is distrusted even by those who most earnestly desire it. But in the light of this

teaching of our Saviour, such doubt is quite wrong and possessing no justification in the truth of things. It is *easier* for a child to become a Christian than for one who is no longer a child ; not only because the habits of sin have not yet become settled in childhood, but also because the humility and teachableness and trustfulness which are the conditions of a true Christian faith are more easy and more natural to a child, simply because he *is* a child.

Let parents and teachers note this. Let also the little children note this. It was the very Saviour who said to us all, " Except ye turn, and *become* as little children, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of heaven," who also said, when certain would keep the children from Him, "*Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not ; for OF SUCH is the Kingdom of heaven.*"

XI

“FOR THE WRATH OF GOD IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN AGAINST ALL UNGODLINESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF MEN WHO HOLD THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.”—ROM. i. 18.

THE conjunction “for” connects these words with the verse immediately preceding. The text is thus presented as a confirmation of the statement of the foregoing verse, that the righteousness by which we are justified and saved, “the righteousness of God,” is in the Gospel revealed as of faith and to faith, in opposition to all fancied righteousness of human works. And that for us righteousness must come by faith, if it be gained at all, the apostle shows in our text by the fact that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. If human nature and human works are, as the apostle goes on to show, of such a sort that because of them the wrath of God burns steadily against them, then it is plain that it is useless to look for acceptance and salvation in that direction. Such is the connection of thought in which our text stands. We may learn from these words three very solemn facts: that there is in God such a feeling as *wrath*; that this fact is *revealed* from heaven; that this wrath is *directed against all ungodliness* and unrighteousness of men, who hold (that is, hinder or restrain) the truth by their unrighteousness.

It is a tremendous fact, that there *is* such a thing as *wrath* in *God* ! It is, I say, a tremendous fact, and a fact which fills me with fear ; and when I read and hear what is said concerning this wrath of God in His Word, I am amazed that we are not troubled more.

Brethren and friends, I need not say that the minister of Christ finds no comfort or satisfaction in bringing forward such a truth as this, excepting only the satisfaction which is ever found in loyal obedience to the Master, who has said, " Preach the preaching that I bid thee ! " For, assuredly, that there is wrath in God is a fact of which one can not seriously think without trembling. Nor can the preacher forget that, as regards the ill-desert which provokes this wrath of God, he is on the same plane with his hearers ; so that, if saved indeed from the wrath, he has been saved like all others by Sovereign Grace, and by Sovereign Grace alone. No, there is a peculiar joy in proclaiming pardon to the penitent, but there is no joy in proclaiming wrath to those that repent not. Yet I cannot be silent on this matter. I cannot be silent : because wrath is *revealed*, and it concerns men to know it. I cannot be silent : because so many do not believe that the wrath of God is revealed. I cannot be silent : because so many, hearing of little but grace, are thereby lulled into a vain security, and forget that there is a Law as well as a Gospel, and that God is Just as well as Merciful, and Holy as well as Kind. Thus multitudes in Christian congregations are found sleeping in fancied safety, who should indeed be fleeing with trembling from

the wrath to come. And when the Gospel of Grace has failed to awaken, we must needs sound the trumpet of *alarm*. Let us all give heed, then, to these solemn words of the apostle, and be sure that we understand them.

Let me first bring clearly before you what precisely is intended when the Scriptures, as here, ascribe *wrath* to God. We often hear men declaiming against the imputing of wrath to God. They tell us that it is all unworthy of Him. But such either misunderstand or misrepresent the truth, as though conceiving that anger or wrath in God were like unto much that is called anger among ourselves, which is a passion in its very nature vindictive and retaliatory; an anger which is awakened and sustained not so much by the sin which has been committed as by the sense of an injury which we have received. But need I say that the wrath of God is not a passion of such a sort? It is awakened in the Divine Mind, not by the sense of an injury—for who indeed could injure God?—but by the inherent heinousness of sin and rebellion. In the wrath of God, therefore, is absolutely nothing of the grossness of human passion or the spirit of retaliation. It is simply the emotion which is necessarily awakened in the bosom of the Infinite Holiness, Righteousness and Purity, by the sight of unholiness, and iniquity, and sin. Surely such emotion is not unworthy of God? Such a moral wrath as this is most honourable in man, and in its infinite and eternal intensity it is one of the glories of the Godhead.

For remember that even among ourselves there

is such a thing as *righteous anger*, an anger in which is no admixture of personal passion, or desire of retaliation; and there are many occasions when for a man *not* to feel an anger of this sort is an evidence not of nobility of mind, but of a spirit base and ignoble. Who, for example, that has read of the recent atrocities in Egypt, has not felt his bosom swell with a righteous and indignant anger? Was that an unworthy emotion? Or, to take an illustration nearer home, you may have chanced to see a man cruelly abusing his horse, or mercilessly beating a little child. What was your feeling then? Was it any sentiment which was not most worthy of you, as of any right-minded man? Does any one doubt that the feeling of anger and indignation which one owns on such occasions is in the highest degree honourable to him who feels it? Nay, the sensitiveness of a man in this matter, the degree of wrath of which he is capable on seeing or hearing of iniquity and cruelty, is a very fair measure of his moral development.

Now, precisely such a feeling as this is intended, when in the Bible we read, as here, that there is wrath in God, and that "He is angry with the wicked every day." It differs from the same emotion in ourselves, only in its immeasurably greater intensity, and in the range of its objects. It is far more intense because God is infinitely Holy, while we are at best but sinners; and just in proportion to His love of righteousness must be His hatred of all iniquity, and the intensity of His holy anger when He looks upon it.

Moreover, because of the bluntness of our moral

sensibilities it takes atrocious crimes to awaken in many men this emotion in its strength. So obtuse is the moral sense even of the best of us, that sin, especially that which is only sin against God, has very little power to rouse us to indignation when we see it. Indeed, is it not the humiliating fact, that many sins—that the most of sin—produces in us no such feeling at all? But God in this respect is different from us. As He is spotlessly and infinitely Holy, that emotion which in our sluggish natures rises only upon rare occasions and only against certain high crimes, with God abides continually and as a habit of the Divine Mind, whenever and wheresoever it beholds sin of whatsoever sort. It is excited in Him alike, though of course not with equal intensity, by any and every form of sin and law-breaking.

Now, does such a conception degrade our idea of God? Does it not rather exalt it? What would you think of a *man* who should be incapable of such a feeling as this? What would be your opinion of a man who could stand by and see a father abuse his own child or his wife, and feel no emotion of anger? And when men tell us that wrath is unworthy of God, and charge the minister of Christ with portraying a demon instead of God, I reply by asking him whether a God who should be *incapable* of this wrath, which is ever held so honourable in man, a God who could look upon sin, upon ingratitude, covetousness, oppression, cruelty, with no emotion of anger, would be a God whom any one could honour? Which gives us the higher and worthier conception of God: the humanitarian who denies that there can be wrath in God, or the

Psalmist, who tells us that God is angry with the wicked every day? Which conception is worthier God?

But in this sentiment of righteous anger another element enters beside that of mere displeasure and indignation at the wrong-doing. This we all know by our own experience. Our moral sense, animated by this righteous wrath, demands the *punishment* of the wrong-doer. Every man, who is worthy of the name of man, feels this. If we see or hear of a man cruelly abusing a little helpless child, we feel that he ought to be made to suffer for it. Moreover, it is important to observe that this feeling, with which we are all familiar, has nothing to do with the question of the *reformation* of the wrong-doer. We may sincerely desire his reformation, but this consideration has nothing to do with that feeling which makes every one of us say at once that men who, for instance, torture and abuse women or children ought to be made to suffer. Even if we could be assured that there was no hope of reforming such a person, we should still feel that he ought to suffer. Perhaps, sooner than allow such a person to escape the punishment which we feel that the crime deserves, we would inflict it ourselves. Nor would this imply that therefore we were moved by a feeling of malevolence. It might well express simply and only our sense of the demands of righteousness, and of indignation that these should be so disregarded. And such a feeling and desire, again, is not unworthy of a good man. It is a mark of a good man. It redounds only to the honour of him who feels it.

Now this analogy certainly holds good with regard to what we call the wrath of God. God's wrath must be something more than a mere passive feeling of displeasure; it is and must be an emotion which *demands that sin be punished*. Nor is this feeling in God inspired, as so many perversely insist that—if it exist—it must be inspired, by malignity toward the sinner, any more than a similar feeling in ourselves must be so prompted. It is inspired only by a holy hatred of sin and wrong. As such, it is so far from being inconsistent with love in God to the sinner, that it is perfectly compatible with the very highest degree of that love. It is so with ourselves; anger at sin and love to the sinner do not exclude each other. Why should it be otherwise in God? Can any one picture the grief and the righteous anger of Christian missionaries in India at the fearful massacres of the Sepoy Rebellion, and at the spirit of Hinduism and Mohammedanism which was thus revealed? And yet history shows us those same men, at that same time, labouring unsparingly for the reclamation and salvation of those very wretches whose unspeakable cruelties had filled their hearts to very bursting with the anger of a righteous indignation. Would any one say that the mind of God would be otherwise?

So clear is all this, so consonant with our experience and our moral sense, that, even were nature dumb and Scripture silent, we might still argue with full confidence, as in fact the great mass of mankind have always argued, that—if there be a God at all—He must, from the fact of His being infinitely per-

fect, be a God who is "angry with the wicked every day."

But we are not left to mere inferences on the subject. Nature is not dumb, nor is Scripture silent. As the apostle says, "The wrath of God is *revealed* from heaven." God has in no wise concealed the fact of this His wrath against sin, but has luminously revealed it.

The world of nature around us speaks on this matter in tones of awful significance. Nature indeed tells of the love and goodness of God ; fruitful seasons fill our hearts with joy and gladness ; bright flowers delight our eyes ; God's mercies, in a purely natural way, are new every morning. But is this all ? Has nature no sterner tones than the sweet singing of birds and the soft rustling of summer breezes ? The hungry roar of the all-engulfing and insatiate sea, the devastating tempest, the pestilence, the dearth, the famine—are these suggestive only of love, or rather of wrath ? Or, to go deeper into the constitution of things, can we shut our eyes to the fact that death is in the world : to the fact that, despite the sentimentality of some and the stoicism of others, death is to millions of humanity, beyond doubt, the one great dread of life ? And does this fact indicate only love in the world's God, or rather wrath, demanding and exacting penalty and retribution ?

Do you suggest to me that we here have only the operation of certain laws, and that we therefore cannot hence argue as to the temper of the Divine Mind ? I ask again, what *are* the laws of nature ? Whence came they ? Whence their

efficiency? Passing by all theories as to the precise relation of second causes to the Divine Will, is it not quite certain that this constitution of things—this arrangement of laws in which suffering and death are the universal and inevitable lot of moral agents—was established *by God*? And is there any doubt of the fact that God, establishing it, did so, foreseeing that this world would be a habitation for sinners; and that when He determined to make a world under such conditions He so arranged its laws that it should be for these sinners a world of suffering and death? What now can we infer from all this, as to the feeling of God toward sinners, if not that there is in God a Holy wrath, demanding and exacting retribution? Else why did God make such a world? Was it merely that through suffering the sinner might be reformed? If so, then His plan is a signal failure. For is it true that, speaking generally, and with reference to the vast majority of cases, suffering *sanctifies*? Does it not quite as often produce bitterness, or hardness of heart? Is it, for example, historically true that the apprehension of death, which is altogether universal, has had a sanctifying influence on the race? And is it conceivable that God should have arranged all these agencies, as the theory supposes, for the reformation and improvement of man, knowing quite all the time that, ordinarily, they would fail to bring about that end; nay, often even make men worse than they were before?

Let us honestly look—not at theories devised to lull uneasy consciences, but at facts; and we soon shall have to confess that if nature whispers the love

of God, she also testifies in thunder tones that God is *angry* with the wicked every day; so that the word of the apostle is literally true, that the wrath of God is *revealed* from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

But not only in nature is the wrath of God revealed. Man also has a conscience. By *conscience* we of course intend that faculty by which we apprehend the distinctions of moral good and evil, and recognize certain things as right and binding and other things as wrong. But there is more in conscience than a directing voice. Conscience directs; but conscience also warns. Each one of us knows, by a sad experience, the sense of pain, or at least of uneasiness and unrest and self-condemnation, which comes upon us when we have done wrong. Sometimes it is but a vague apprehension; sometimes it becomes a distinct and distressing conviction of trouble and woe and punishment to come for the evil we have done. Sometimes—alas, far too often—this voice of condemnation and of solemn warning is not heard or observed. So in the pressure of business and the noise and confusion of the mid-day street, the fire-alarm bell may peal unnoticed; but at midnight, as we lie in bed, it will sound out loud and clear. In like manner the solemn warning of evil which conscience gives, of evil to come because of our sin, is with multitudes unheeded; and the voice is drowned in the tumult of crowding earthly cares. But when sickness or adversity, or the stillness of the death-chamber in the shadow of the night has fallen upon the spirit, have you never then noticed how clear and distinct

the warning voice becomes, never to be stilled till we can show the atoning blood? Surely this is to most of us no unfamiliar experience! What does it mean? What can it be, but the very voice of God within the soul, in solemn accents reminding us again that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sin and unrighteousness! If this be not the meaning, if there be no such reality of a Divine Wrath against sin, then conscience is but a faculty of superstitious fear; then God who, by common admission, is Infinite Goodness, made us with a delusion to ourselves, in that He has created in us an imaginary voice to warn us of imaginary terrors, which have only the reality of a nightmare. Can we believe this?

The truth is, that wherever the religious consciousness of man has been left free to assert itself, it has proclaimed the reality of the wrath of God. This is not a phantom conjured up by a designing priesthood. Had this fear of wrath not been before the priesthood, the priest had found nothing upon which to work. Every religion in the world is but a testimony to this. For the fundamental idea in every system of religious service is *the deprecation of wrath*. It is this belief which lies at the root of every sacrificial ordinance in all religions. This is of the more notable significance in many cases (among the Hindus, for example) in that the idea of propitiation by sacrifice is directly counter to the prevalent philosophy and inconsistent with the accepted system of theology. But so clear is the perception of conscience that God *must* be angry with the wicked, and that the consequences of His

wrath are to be deprecated and, if possible, removed, that consistency with philosophic system has been sacrificed to the solemn voice of conscience, warning of wrath, convincing of sin, and calling for either punishment or atonement.

Brethren, all these facts have a meaning. They are of a most solemn significance. There is something more in the universality of these apprehensions than the phantasy of a superstitious imagination. The very truth is, that the wrath of God is *revealed from heaven*, and men see it. And as the sunlight will in a manner pierce even the filmy eyes of the blind and give to them a dim apprehension of the sun as it exists, so does the brightness of the wrath of the Holy Jehovah against all sin and unrighteousness in every land awaken in the darkened spiritual sight a dim perception of the insufferable intensity of its pure, burning flame.

But if the wrath of God is revealed by what we may through reason know of His very nature, by the very constitution of the world in which we live, and more distinctly still in many cases by the voice of conscience within us warning us of the dread reality, in the inspired Word of God Himself it is revealed in startling prominence and appalling clearness. The Bible is full of expressions in which there is nothing doubtful or ambiguous; expressions which admit no possibility of being toned down into the declaration of universal, indiscriminating, all-saving love. Hear how the Lord proclaimed His Own Name. "The Lord, the Lord God, . . . *that will by no means clear the guilty.*" Hear again what the Holy Ghost said by the mouth

of David and the prophets: "The Lord is angry with the wicked every day." . . . "The Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire." "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies." And the Bible is full of such expressions: not only the Old Testament, but the pages of the New as well. None are more terrible than many which fell from the lips of Jesus of Nazareth. "God will reward," said the apostle, "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." All men, without distinction, are declared to be "by nature the children of wrath." And the special terror attending the opening of one of the Seven Seals of Judgment is said to be the revelation of the *wrath of the Lamb*; yes, the *wrath* of Jesus the Saviour of men. Such words need no comment and no explanation. Even were nature wrapped in silence, and even though conscience were dead, in the Word of God, God's wrath is revealed from heaven so clearly and in light so vivid that we should tremble as we read.

There is then such a thing as the wrath of God. That wrath has been given the clearest and the most manifest revelation before all men. What is the object of this awful Divine wrath? What are its objects? The text tells. It is declared to be revealed "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Observe the phrase: there is no reference made to a distinction between ungodliness and righteousness of a greater and lesser degree.

We read "*all* ungodliness." Whether that ungodliness express itself in defiant blasphemy, or whether, as among us, the ungodliness be manifested in the habitual forgetfulness of God, the ignoring of God in our daily life which is so sadly characteristic of most men; there is no difference. The wrath of God is against *all* ungodliness. And it is against *all unrighteousness*: that is, not only against outright lawlessness and flagrant disregard of all law, human and Divine, but as well against the less obtrusive forms of unrighteousness; the little derelictions in daily life, all obliquities of practice, and all inward deviations from the law of perfect love and the path of absolute rectitude. However trifling such faults may seem to us—of however little consequence, it makes no difference: not only against *some* forms of unrighteousness, but against all unrighteousness, whether what we deem great or what we deem small, is the wrath of God revealed.

Who, then, of us can afford to disregard these solemn words? Who among us, however upright, can claim perfection? Who among us has not often in various decisions of life and in daily business ignored or forgotten God, and thereby shown ungodliness? What man is there of us—what man is there of all men—who has ever fulfilled, in thought and desire as well as in act, "the perfect law of righteousness"? And if to these questions the answer be what it must be, do you not see that, if words mean anything, except we have found for ourselves a Deliverer from the wrath, the wrath of God must be burning against *us*? Oh do not, I entreat you, delude yourself longer with the awfully

untrue and fatal notion that there is nothing in God but a mild love, which finds expression in an easy toleration of sin. In the sense explained, there *is* such a thing as the *wrath* of God ; and to shut our eyes to it, because the thought gives us pain is folly—to leave it out of the account in our reckoning for the future is nothing less than blank madness.

Yet we might well do so, were there no deliverance possible! Were this the awful fact, then might we well say, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow—*we die!*” Because there is wrath, there must be retribution, or else an atonement. Before the fearful issue of such an alternative must we face the blackness of despair, or is there the blessed propitiation? Ah, there is deliverance, a great deliverance! Jesus is He “who delivereth us from the wrath to come!” The atonement has been made! Jesus has died, the Just for the unjust! Behold THE LAMB OF GOD, that *taketh away* the sin of the world! “It is the blood”—the blood of the Lamb, the blood of Jesus Christ—“that maketh atonement for the soul.”

But though the atonement has been made, that alone will not save you. You must personally receive the atonement. By nature a child of wrath, *have* you by grace, through faith, received the blessed atonement? Oh, what a momentous question! There burns the wrath! It is revealed from heaven, that all who will may see it. Its clear, intense flame pierces the clouds of darkness which overhang this world; now suffusing them with a lurid light, now flashing like the lightning

with sudden stroke and the shock of instant retribution! Do not disregard it! Shut not your eyes to the truth! Never, never forget that if the wrath of God is revealed you have to face it! You must meet it with an accepted atonement, or you must receive yourself the consuming stroke! Atonement for sin, or Retribution for sin—which shall it be? God give us all His grace to make the wise, the right decision, for Christ's sake.—AMEN!

XII

“AS MANY WERE ASTONISHED AT THEE; HIS VISAGE WAS SO MARRED MORE THAN ANY MAN, AND HIS FORM THAN THE SONS OF MEN.”—Is. lii. 14.

EVEN Jews have been compelled to admit that these words, together with the chapter which follows, refer to the Messiah. It was, beyond question, Jesus Christ, the true Messiah, of whom the prophet here declares that so marred should be His visage—more than any man—that men should be astonished at Him.

“Astonished at Him!” The word “astonish” has lost much of its original force, and often now expresses a feeling of but little depth or consequence. But the original word in this connexion indicates no such light emotion. The image which the word contains is that of such a wonder as *strikes a man dumb*.

Wonder or astonishment at anything always implies that the object or event at which we wonder is more or less contrary to that which we naturally would have expected, or else beyond our comprehension. We are never astonished at what we naturally expect; we do not wonder at what is quite within the compass of our understanding. Many things there are, therefore, which at first

excite in us the greatest wonder and astonishment, but with regard to which, the more we know of them, the more our wonder diminishes, or when they are quite explained, our wonder ceases altogether. On the other hand, there are many objects at which, because we know so little of them, we wonder little at first, but in whose case the more we know them, the more they ever seem to be replete with mystery, and the more our wonder deepens and grows.

Of this latter sort is the object of astonishment which is mentioned in the text, the suffering Son of God. Multitudes in His day thought lightly of the mystery of His sufferings, and even when present at His death regarded it only a fit thing to jeer the Sufferer, with His seeming helplessness and powerless subjection to torture, agony and death. And even so is it with the most of men in Christian lands to-day. They do not wonder at Christ; they see no matter for astonishment in His agony and death; they regard it all as much a matter of course that His visage should be so marred more than any man, and His form than the sons of men. An idiot sees no matter of wonder in an eclipse of the sun, and many more there are who look on it only with a vacant curiosity. But to the astronomer, who knows something of what the eclipse means, and of the mysteries of the solar constitution which it reveals, the eclipse is a matter of the deepest wonder. Even so there are multitudes, described by the apostle as "men who have their understanding darkened," who are spiritually in such a state of idiocy that they can gaze on that

awful and mysterious Eclipse in which the shadow of death fell upon the Sun of Righteousness and the Bright and Morning Star withdrew His shining, and experience never a passing emotion of wonder or astonishment. But it is, for all that, none the less a matter for profound astonishment, and they who know most of the Son of God are astonished the most of all at the marring of His Visage.

Everything pertaining to our Lord is indeed matter for wonder and astonishment. The prophet predicted that when Christ should appear, His name should be called *Wonderful*; and in a passage which the apostle has taught us to apply to Christ, He is declared to be "for a *Wonder* and for a Sign from the Lord of Hosts." Accordingly, when He came into the world this prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. Wise and foolish, great and small, Jew and Roman alike beheld and heard Him with astonishment, wonder and amazement. Scarcely a page of this gospel but refers to this. There was wonder, first of all, at His birth. When He was twelve years of age the learned doctors in the temple were astonished at the understanding and the answers. And when His public ministry commenced, He spake with such authority that "they were astonished at His doctrine," and not only at the authority with which He spake, but at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. He healed the sick, He raised the dead, He stilled the raging storm; and again and again it is recorded that the multitudes marvelled, marvelled greatly, at His power. And, not to dwell upon this longer, the wonder reached its culminating

height when, to the amazement of His despairing followers, He brake the bonds of death ; and while they for very joy believed not yet, He showed them His once pierced Hands and Feet, and did eat before them.

But in the passage before us it is not His matchless wisdom, or the divine authority with which He spake, or even His gracious love and unimagined condescension ; nor is it even that mighty power of His, before which the warring winds were hushed to peace, and Satanic legions quailed and fled, and even Death hastened to unbar the fast-sealed tomb ; but—what ? *The marring of His visage.* “ Many were astonished at Thee : His visage was so marred ! ” Not His power, then, but His weakness ; not the blazing glories of the full-orbed Sun of Righteousness, but its mysterious and dark eclipse is herein held up to us as matter of astonishment !

It is suffering that mars the visage. Suffering mars the countenance sometimes almost beyond the possibility of recognition. And if the visage of the Son of God was marred more than any man, it was because He suffered more than any man.

In those sufferings there were indeed natural elements, such as are found more or less in the experience of all men. He was, like all, from time to time hungry and weary. He, like others, had no home ; as He pathetically said, “ Even the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His Head ! ” Then also He suffered much from *loneliness* of spirit. There is no loneliness like

that which is felt even in a multitude when we are conscious that in all its numbers there is no one that understands us. Loneliness like this has sometimes proved so great a sorrow that the reason has sunk beneath it. Jesus Christ experienced in the highest degree such loneliness. No one, of all those whom He met, either understood Him or was capable of understanding Him, His motives or His objects. His most blessed words were reckoned blasphemy; His holiest, most merciful works attributed to a league with Satan. Even among His apostles no one fully understood Him until after His resurrection. Peter, most zealous of all, was most earnest in dissuading Him from that which was the one great purpose of His life. This was the more sad, that no one ever needed sympathy more. Who, with all these other sorrows, was ever more than Christ the object of the concentrated hate of a nation; a hate which all His ministry followed Him, and never rested till it brought Him to the Cross?

Yet all these, I say, were elements of sorrow which others than Christ have also experienced. As to these, His case was peculiar only in that all these other common elements of sorrow met and centred in His experience. But there were other exceptional and peculiar causes of the marring of the Saviour's visage, and these are they to which we must chiefly attend.

And note this first: that all the sorrow and the agony from the beginning to the end were steadily foreseen by Him. Endeavour to think what that must have meant. How merciful is the Hand that

veils from us our future! Who of us would dare to lift the curtain that hangs between us and that which for us is to come? That approaching bereavement, that consuming grief—ah, it is well that I do not know it beforehand. Truly did Christ Jesus say, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof!” Yet Jesus, with a continual *daily* burden so heavy, had also, as foreseeing all, to carry every day and every hour all the foreseen sorrow of His life and agony of His death.

And then observe that to the depth of His sorrow and the intensity of His sufferings, in a certain way His very *sinlessness* must have contributed. For we ourselves know, in a poor, inadequate measure, how just in proportion as any one of us is pure, just in proportion as any one of us is holy, we suffer from the presence of, or our compelled association with impurity. How then must the Lord Jesus, in His absolute sensitive purity, have suffered through His constant association with the sin and unholiness of this world!

And this the more because, unlike ourselves, again, He saw men just as they were. Existence is tolerable simply because we know so little of the actual realities in the midst of which we live. Many cover themselves with a fair disguise of outward righteousness, and their exterior seems well to men, and no one dreams of the hideous moral leprosy which is thus concealed. The envy, the hate, the lust which rules in the darkness of many a human heart; the hypocrisy and the vain show in which, according to the Bible, the most of men beyond a doubt continually walk—in God’s mercy

we do not see all this as He sees it. If we so saw it all, we should pray to die. But Jesus saw it. "He knew what was in man." He saw through all disguise, and saw it constantly; saw the whole of that awful moral corruption around Him, and, because of His infinite purity, felt it as none of us could feel it even if we saw it. To live in closest contact with all this corruption felt and realized—all the sins and corruptions and filthinesses, as a great French preacher has said, not only of the multitudes around Him, but of all humanity from Adam to the end, flowing daily and hourly for thirty-three fearful years through the channel of His Divine Omniscience in upon His human soul, that Soul so pure and spotless as to be intolerant of the faintest distant shadow of impurity—ah, my brethren, here indeed we behold sorrows at which we may well be "astonished." Here we do begin to see, dimly indeed, and indistinctly, the nature and outline of that awful woe whose dark shadow falling on that Holy Visage marred it more than that of any man. Well did Handel put into the suffering Saviour's mouth those touching words from the Book of the Lamentations: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger."

And yet, dear brethren, it is with us that we know the power of God's grace. So that we have the consciousness of His presence and favour, some of us know how amazingly we are up-borne. Nay, we are enabled sometimes to shout with Paul,

“ I glory in tribulations also ! ” But herein was the last supreme woe that came upon the Saviour, that in His ultimate hour of anguish, when that conscious presence and felt love of the Eternal Father was most needed, then, of all times, in a manner unfathomably mysterious and incomprehensible, that presence and manifested love of the Father was withdrawn from the Man Christ Jesus ; and we hear the cry piercing through the awful darkness which in those hours rested upon that whole fated land : “ My God ! My God ! why hast *Thou* forsaken Me ? ”

Now were there nothing else, yet sufferings so intense and so peculiar should indeed excite us to astonishment ; but there is still a deeper mystery about the marring of the Visage of the Son of God. In this world everywhere else suffering is seen to coexist with sin, and the whole conscience of humanity bears witness that ultimately the suffering is because of the sin. And so, though not always, yet in the Providence of God sometimes it has come to pass that men of notorious crimes have ended their days in peculiar torment of agony. And this, when it occurs, is no matter of wonderment.

But here is the great mystery of the marring of Christ’s visage, that He who so suffered knew no sin. He who suffered anguish of soul and body beyond what any other man was ever in this life called to bear, He—not the worst of men, but by the admission even of His enemies and the consent of all the generations of mankind the *only perfect* Man the world has ever seen. The supreme wrath

of God strangely reserved for the only perfect man the world has ever known! Here is matter for astonishment indeed: the visage of the only Sinless Man so marred, more than any man!

The wonder yet increases when we remember what this sinless Man claimed for Himself to be. Hear Him: "I and the Father are One." Hear the confession of Peter, for which he received the blessing of his Master: "Thou art the Son of the Living God!" Not only, then, is it perfect sinlessness, but the supremest dignity, for which utter and peculiar anguish is reserved. That He, the only begotten from the bosom of the Father, the Father's Beloved Son, in whom the Father is well pleased—that He should appear in this world not, as we would have expected, in a countenance radiant with heaven's eternal and ineffable joy, and a form of majesty and glory surpassing power of utterance, but with a visage marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men—here is a mystery indeed.

His ineffable sorrow is again yet the more marvellous, that it did not come upon Him as under any inevitable necessity, a resistless compulsion that He could by no means escape. "I lay down My life," He said. "No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Under the free impulsion of His own unsearchable desire, He became "the Man of Sorrows."

But this is a matter of wonderment of that peculiar nature remarked at the beginning, that the astonishment is not only not removed, but

immeasurably increased, when the mystery is explained. There is one thing yet more a matter of astonishment than the marring of the visage of Jesus Christ, and that is, the *reason* of that marring. The sufferings are indeed wonderful beyond expression, but the reason of the sufferings is more wonderful still. And the same prophet who tells us of the marvellous marring, tells us in never-to-be-forgotten words, the reason of the marring also. "*Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.*" Here, then, is the reason, yet more astounding than the "marring": *He suffered for others*. All this peculiar and ineffable suffering was not for Himself, but for others. And for whom? Not for some high princes in the realms of heaven; not for angels. "For verily he laid not hold on angels, but on the seed of Abraham." Here is the final and supreme reason why we may well be astonished at the strange marring of the Saviour's Face, that it was marred *for men!* He suffered not for angels, but *for men!* He suffered not for righteous men, for such there were none; He suffered for sinners, even the chief of sinners, even the vilest, the most abandoned sinners—ah, dear friends, for *you* and for *me*. He suffered all this for you. His visage was more marred than any man, and all for me! Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonder of all wonders, that the Eternal Son, the Creator and Upholder of the worlds, should descend to earth, to bear the awful burden of Jehovah's Holy Wrath and

Judgment, to bear the hiding of the Holy Father's Face! But ah, that it should be for *us*! That for *us* He should give His back to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; for us hide not His once so radiant face from shame and spitting. For us, for us, until by reason of His grievous anguish "His visage was marred more than any man, and His Beauty than the sons of men."

And yet, astonishing as this is, there is one thing, there is yet one thing that is more astonishing still. Do you ask what this can be? It is this: that in every Christian congregation throughout the world there are many who profess to believe all this concerning the marring of Christ's visage, and yet remain totally unaffected by it. Astonishing, I say, beyond even this amazing marring of the visage of the Holy Saviour of men. Astonishing because so unreasonable, and because so unnatural. Is it strange that in God's Holy Word we should be taught that God's most peculiar wrath is reserved for those who reject Christ, and count the Blood of His covenant a common and profane thing? From that doom the Lord mercifully save us all!

XIII

“AND THE PEOPLE STOOD BEHOLDING.”—

LUKE **xxiii.** 35.

THE word in the Greek which is rendered here “beholding” denotes no ordinary and indifferent looking, no casual glance, but a look of fixed, intense and special interest. Well might they who stood around the cross of Jesus *thus* stand beholding! The rough Roman soldiers had stretched Him on the level cross, and had driven the cruel nails into the quivering hands and feet. And as they did so, the meek Sufferer had said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” And then they had lifted up the cross, and rudely had let it fall into the hole dug for its reception! And there now hung the Incarnate Son of God, crucified between two robbers! And the people stood beholding! It was an awful spectacle.

It was a diverse crowd that stood beholding, There were the soldiers, to whom had been assigned the horrid work of crucifixion: rough pagan soldiers of the Roman army. They had driven the nails, four of them; and now sitting down, as Matthew tells us, they watched Him there. Little recked they of the Sufferer! They were too well used to work so horrible, and they performed their cruel task, no doubt, with brutal insensibility.

Then, again, with these stood also the members of the Jewish Sanhedrim beholding. As the soldiers represented the rough, coarse, uncultured classes, so these represented the educated, the cultivated, even the religious class. Indeed, they were the most eminent among such ; they were the leaders in thought and religion. But their religion did not keep them from leading the rude soldiery in their coarse, cruel jeers and taunts. For it was the chief priest with the scribes, and the grey-bearded elders of the people, who mocking Jesus, said, "He saved others ; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on Him." And with them joined in the crowd that stood beholding, wagging their heads and saying, "Save Thyself ; and if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."

But in the multitude that stood beholding we read of others. There was a class of beholders represented by those women, of whom we read, that when they saw the miserable Sufferer sinking under the weight of the cross, as He bore it toward Calvary, they bewailed and lamented Him. This was well ; there was reason enough for this. Yet there is no cause to suppose that in this they were animated by any sentiment beyond that of mere pity. For Jesus else would not with so sad severity have given answer to their lamentations as He did.

Last of all, and by far the smallest company, was the company of a few trembling disciples ; heart-broken witnesses of the agony of Him who had become dearer to them than all else besides.

There was Mary the mother of Jesus, who now experienced in unutterable anguish the meaning of the prophetic words of Simeon when she had brought the Holy Babe into the temple: "He shall be for a sign which shall be spoken against. Yea, and a sword shall pierce thine own soul also." There was another Mary, the sister of the broken-hearted mother. And there, too, was Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus had cast the seven devils. And there—the only one mentioned besides the women—was John, the beloved disciple.

Of such was composed the crowd that watched that sight: a sight, at best, of unspeakable horror—the crucifixion, the intolerable torture of a poor, helpless human being; a sight as amazing as horrible to all who recognized in that dying form the dying Son of God, agonizing, dying, not for His own sins, but for the sins of men—for the sins even of many of that very jeering crowd around the cross! And so they watched Him there! Watched the rejected, dying Son of God!

But I am reminded that, in a deepest sense, that was a representative scene. A few hours, and the crucifixion was over: that is true. The lacerated form was taken from the cross and laid in the tomb of Joseph. It is also true—glory be to God!—that on the third day He rose gloriously from the dead and ascended far above all heavens, where now He lives in glorified Humanity, infinitely exalted above the reach of the impotent hate of His enemies, hidden too no less from the gaze even of His friends, for a little. This is true: all this is true. And yet in a sense also true, the cruci-

fixion of Christ continues, and the watch of the Crucified One continues, without interruption.

For what was the outward act of the crucifixion of the Son of God, but the extreme visible expression of Christ-rejecting unbelief? And if the glorious Victim is now far out of the reach of those who reject Him, the great fact which the crucifixion visibly expressed still continues, in all its awful and unqualified reality. The Christ who was crucified is still a Christ rejected! Is it not so? In all the world fourteen hundred and fifty millions of men; and of these the overwhelming majority, either with open avowal or in practical life, reject the Crucified One and say, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." Using the words of Paul to the Galatians, we may truly say, that Jesus Christ here in the full light of this nineteenth century, is "evidently set forth as crucified among us."

And, again, it is still as true as around that visible cross, that the *watch* of the Crucified One is kept up still. There has been in history many a horrible death, and there have been many saintly martyrs: but Jesus Christ is peculiar among them all in this one thing, that still, nineteen hundred years after that death, He holds the minds of all in one way or another riveted upon Himself! Impelled by some strange fascination, even the most outright unbelief turns anew toward that cross, and seeks to find for itself an excuse which shall justify its own rejection of the Sufferer. Yes, the watch around the cross continues still.

And among the millions to which the watching

crowd has now grown we can now, as at that time, distinguish four classes. That original crowd was strikingly representative: each of the four classes which we noticed there typified one of four classes of beholders at the cross of Christ to be found still to-day.

In the rough, ignorant, Roman soldiers we recognize a type of that large class who reject the Christ of God through ignorance and spiritual stolidity. There are millions on millions of such: who, like those soldiers, do not so much consciously hate Christ as they are profoundly *indifferent* to Him. They are living in Christian communities, and daily hear His Name, reminded that there is or there was a Christ: but they are so thoroughly sunken in spiritual insensibility, that they never stop to think whether after all there was anything in that sad scene which demands their thought. Like those soldiers, they do not bother themselves with religion; their concern is to get the most that they can out of this world. And just as the soldiers, with an awful coolness, sit down under the cross in the presence of the Divine Sufferer to make something out of the occasion by dividing among themselves His garments, so do such persons use everywhere the countless material and secular advantages which the influence of Christian faith has brought within the reach of every one who lives in a Christian land, in order to advance their own purely earthly plans and worldly ends. You recognize the picture; such are around us by the thousand. Coolly sitting down to their various earthly occupations in the safety and security

which the Gospel has brought, they literally make worldly gain out of the fruits of Christ's death, and in the hardness of their hearts, and the intensity of their engrossment with earthly things, reject the Christ of God with scarcely a serious thought!

The second class of those who watched the cross was composed of educated and religious persons. It was made up of the priests and scribes, and the bulk of the Pharisees and Sadducees. These fitly represent that large number of thinking people in Christendom who are greatly interested in religion; who are, like the Pharisees, even *intensely* religious; but who, going about to establish their own righteousness, cannot submit themselves to the righteousness of God; men who are so confident of their own excellent standing as moral—and even religious—men before God, that for a crucified Saviour they have as little place in their theology as in their inner experience. There are, again, those like the Sadducee party among the priests, who look upon the matter chiefly from an intellectual point of view; who tell us that there are insuperable difficulties connected with an atonement or a resurrection; that they want to see a *proved miracle*. "Let Him, for instance, come down from the cross, and we will believe on Him!" They even argue from the very fact of the general rejection of Christ, which is in a sense the continuation of His crucifixion in our day, and say, "If He was really the Christ of God, let Him come down from this nineteenth century cross. Let us have some convincing, overpowering proof, here in this nineteenth century, that Jesus was the Son

of God." And so they join in the cry, "Show us a sign from heaven, that we may believe! If Thou be the Christ, the Son of God, come down from the cross! If the Holy One delighteth in Him, let Him deliver Him—deliver Him from the burden of this almost universal rejection of to-day, and manifest thus the mind of God upon this question."

And then there is a third class of those who, contemplating Christ, yet reject Him; a class well typified by the crowd of weeping women, against whom, no less than against the rest who rejected Him, the Saviour pronounced that awful sentence which is written in this twenty-third chapter of Luke, and which was so terribly fulfilled before that generation had passed away. These, we may assume, were not bad persons. On the contrary, they were animated by sentiments of genuine pity and compassion for the Sufferer. But that was all. Beyond that sentimental pity, and perhaps wonder and admiration of His amazing, His inexplicable patience under such awful inflictions they had not gone. Of His Divine glory, as the Son of God, they had not a glimpse. Spiritually, they were just as blind as the coarse soldiers who drove the nails. Their rejection of the Crucified, if less morally offensive, was yet as real and as fatal as that of the jeering Pharisees and scribes.

They too have their representatives to-day, and not few. For how many there are—and most of all in the most Christian communities—who are not a little moved by what they read and hear about Christ; whose hearts swell with sorrow when they read of His sufferings; who profess, and

profess sincerely, a great admiration for His character—He was indeed, they assure us, a model Man : His like was never seen. But, as those women of old, they are not prepared to admit that, in the sense in which He claimed, He was the Son of God ; while as for His atonement, and the expiation for sin which it alone can bring, they feel the need of it no more than do the most. Practically, they are living just as they would have lived if there had never been a Christ. And this large class to-day also watches Christ, and that often with a great degree of very sincere interest. To all such apply the words which Jesus addressed to those weeping women : “ Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves !

And now we come to the fourth class. In it were very few : John, and Mary, and the Magdalene, and a few others. We know with what feelings they were watching Him. It was with feelings begotten of the most devoted love. He who hung there was dearer to them than all the world beside. They had learned to see in Him the Son of the living God, the Christ that should come into the world. And though that cross was for them a sore trial of their faith, yet even under that tremendous testing their feelings changed not. Yet they must have changed, had these devoted followers not believed that, despite present appearances, He was indeed all that they had taken Him to be. And so, broken-hearted, under the shadow of the cross, in faith and love undying, they watched Him still.

I need not say that these also typified a class

which has never ceased to have its representatives in all ages. It is true that, as in the crowd around the cross, they have never been in the majority, but, on the contrary, ever a very small minority. So they are to-day. The membership even of the "churches" is but a fraction of the population of the world, but those of this number who keep the true-hearted watch of faith and love to a crucified Saviour are much fewer still. As then, so still, the faith of such is sorely tried. Still is Christ rejected by the world. Still does there seem to be a contradiction between what faith believes that Jesus is and what He as yet to sight appears to be. For still iniquity triumphs, and the souls of this faithful few are tried to the uttermost by the earthly crowd who traffic in Christ's garments, making sordid gain out of His Holy Death; tried again, and even more, by the cavils and the scoffs of cultured and religious unbelief of the day, with its vast pretensions to superior learning and insight; tried scarcely less by the vaporous sentimentalism of others, who talk much and well of this Christ, even as they will also, in the next breath and with like words, of Mohammed, Confucius, and the unknown Buddha, and who yet never give this Christ the allegiance of personal faith and love. And so the years go by, and still these stand beholding, often with unutterable emotion, Christ rejected ever, ever crucified afresh. And still do these love on, and trust on. Like those faithful women and other disciples around the cross of old, they are still eager to serve this Christ, even when to the eye of sense He seems

to be a dead Christ ; while meantime, with the poor dying robber, in unwavering faith in His future triumph and glorious appearing in majesty, they pray, "Lord, remember us when Thou comest into Thy kingdom !"

And so, dear friends, the scene on Calvary proves to be a most marvellous and prophetic tableau of the history of the Christian centuries. And so even to-day also, in all the world uncounted millions stand beholding, with most diverse feelings, this chief Spectacle of all the ages—the blessed Son of God crucified afresh and anew rejected of men !

The lessons from all this are many. Let me indicate them very briefly for your meditation.

We learn that a man may reject Christ without knowing what he is doing. Let no one, therefore, be too ready to conclude that he is in none of the Christ-rejecting classes.

We learn that a man may be very intellectual, and highly cultivated, and yet contemplate Christ to no good. Such were the Sadducees around the cross.

We learn that a man may even be very religious, and yet contemplate Christ to no good. Such were the Pharisees, perhaps the *most hopeless* class of any around the cross.

We learn that a man may be very refined and humane, and be greatly moved by the sufferings of Christ—he may be, moreover, sincerely sorry to see Christ treated as He is by many—and yet there may no good come of it. Such were the most of that weeping crowd of women, and yet none the less judgment came.

We learn that the only contemplation of Christ which has in it the slightest saving virtue is such as that of John and the three Marys, namely, that contemplation which is begotten of truest faith and deepest, tenderest love—faith and love coupled with a penitence like that of the Magdalene, who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears.

We learn that the faith which thus in penitence and love contemplates Christ crucified shall yet gaze with rapture and with adoration upon Christ glorified. For it was Mary Magdalene who, when all the apostles except John had forsaken Christ and fled, watched by the cross, and owned Christ by her presence there ; and it is written that when Jesus was risen, early on the first day of the week, He appeared first of all unto this same Mary.

XIV

“WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE HIM.”—HEB. xi. 6.

FAITH may be defined, in a general way, as the reception of truth upon testimony. The peculiar characteristic of the faith of which the text speaks is that it rests upon the testimony of God, and, so far as regards ourselves, has to do with that testimony of God which is given in the written Word.

It is not, indeed, the bare intellectual reception of a creed, or assent to a system of theology. It is, to use Scripture terms, believing with the heart the record which God hath given of His Son, and the testimony of Jesus concerning spiritual things. Without such faith as this, of which the writer of this epistle has been speaking in the previous chapter, he tells us here that it is impossible that we should please God.

If there was need to say this when this epistle was written, there is yet more need now. For it is the fashion of the present day, above all others, to depreciate the importance of this faith, and distinctly to deny it the fundamental place here assigned it. It is imagined, and plainly said by many, that if a man's life be only right, what he believes or denies cannot be a matter of much consequence, nor can it possibly affect the question

of his acceptance with God. Thus, one man may believe that Jesus of Nazareth is truly a Divine Person, being the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person, while to another Jesus may be only a perfect Man—the very flower, indeed, of humanity, but no more. But, if the life be right, it is, in the thought of many a matter of little importance which of these two views be held. One, again, may see in the sufferings of Christ a true atonement for sin and a veritable ransom for sinners, and another may see in a dying Christ only a dying Martyr, the total value and significance of whose sufferings is found in the moral impression that they may make upon us.

But such a matter, we are told, is nothing that we ought to dogmatize about. We must, forsooth, be "charitable"; and where the conduct be right we must not insist that this or that belief is essential in order that the life may be well pleasing unto God. Indeed, if credence is to be awarded to some, who would fain be teachers of men, it would seem that one may follow Sakya Muni, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, or Jesus Christ, or even be a deist or an atheist, with indifference. For so that, with whatsoever creed, the man display a virtuous character, it will be of small consequence in the end whether that creed were true or false. In short, it is constantly pressed upon us, and that by many who think that they have some claim to be heard, that a man's belief or disbelief of a part or the whole of what is commonly recognized by Christians as the Word of God should not be

supposed to touch the question of his acceptance or rejection by God.

Against all such notions stand the words with which I have prefaced my discourse. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Not, indeed, that the implicit belief of all that may have been revealed in the Word of God is essential to salvation. The apostle Paul, for example, speaks of some, weak in faith, who were unable to receive the Divine testimony as to the common lawfulness of all manner of food—though for such weakness of faith he had all charity. When, however, the matter concerns aught that is essential to the Christian system, as the Being of God, or His being an Answerer of prayer, a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, we find nothing of that spurious charity, which makes the belief or rejection of the essential truth of God a matter of indifference. Then we hear: "Without *faith* it is impossible to please God." And I take this to be the great lesson taught us in these words: that *faith*, in the sense defined, is essential to our acceptance with God. We must not only *live* right, but *we must believe right*. We must believe God, before it is possible that we shall please Him.

This is plain from the very nature of the case. We ourselves, erring and fallible as we are, are sensitive to distrust of our word; and it is right that we should be. The man who sees his word disbelieved ought to feel it, if he does not. If a man refuse to believe our word, he thereby impugns either our knowledge or our integrity, and in either case we feel his distrust keenly; so keenly indeed,

that no service rendered us by a man can make up for his systematic distrust of our word. And if this be so even among men, who, whether from ignorance or from perversity, too often give each other reason for distrust, how idle to imagine that God alone should be indifferent whether or not His testimony be believed! And how vain to dream that men, for example, who refuse to believe that God is, or that He is the Rewarder of them who seek Him, should notwithstanding this be well pleasing in His sight! For, as the apostle John has argued, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar."

But what if this witness of God be not clearly understood as such? Can a man be blamed for rejecting a testimony from God, when he does not see that it has come from Him? Most surely not, if his refusal *be* from lack of evidence or lack of opportunity. Thus, the man who has never heard of Christ will never be condemned for not believing *the record touching Christ*. But, on the other hand, if God *has* revealed His Will to man, can we suppose that He has failed to accompany that word of revelation by evidence sufficient to convince every willing and unprejudiced mind that the word has in very truth come from Him, and is not an imposition or a fraud? To suppose that He has thus failed were an imputation either on His wisdom and power, or on His righteousness. For if He fail to give sufficient evidence of His revelation, because unable, then He hath come short in wisdom and in power. Or if, although able, He has yet

failed duly to authenticate the message, in which message He demands our faith, then—I speak with reverence—there is unrighteousness with God. As surely as God is merciful, and as surely as man's dismal moral failures prove the necessity of a revelation, so surely may man expect that God will reveal Himself. And as surely as God is infinite in wisdom and in power and in righteousness, so surely will He not reveal Himself in vain. The message, if it come, will be sealed with the great seal of the Kingdom of God. There is no alternative between no revelation at all and a revelation so far evidenced as such, that a failure to receive can be due only to spiritual blindness: and it is exactly against spiritual *blindness* that Scripture so often and so impressively warns us.

And when it comes to the question of faith in the Bible, it is worth remembering that, as a matter of fact, even the best of men believe with difficulty what they do not wish to believe. The bankrupt finds it hard to believe that he is ruined. The mother whose son has been lost at sea will often refuse to be convinced that he is really lost, by evidence so clear as to preclude all doubt in every mind but hers. And if things painful or alarming to the natural man are found in the revelation from God, is it not easy to perceive why so many fail to see that it has really come from Him? They fail to see that it has come from Him simply because they cannot bear to believe it true. But will that excuse a man for unbelief? And in the judicial eye of God, will that man stand acquitted on the charge of his lack of faith?

When this Word of light and life is brought before a man, and he fails to receive it as such, the fault is not in the Word ; nor is it that He who gave the Word has not confirmed it by every proof that in all reason and justice the intellect of man can demand—proofs which, let it never be forgotten, *have* in fact satisfied many of the profoundest intellects that the world has ever seen. The fault is not in the revelation, or in the God of the revelation, but in the man himself ; to whose natural pride of heart and fond hopes for the future the humbling and condemning Words of God are utterly repugnant.

Let us not deceive ourselves, therefore, with any of those vain excuses with which men everywhere seek to excuse, or at least extenuate, their lack of faith. It is written : “Without faith it is *impossible* to please God.” Let us not foolishly set limitations where God has set none. Though we may admit that circumstances may palliate the guilt of unbelief, yet as regards the question of acceptance or non-acceptance with God, they cannot touch it. The statement is absolute and unconditional : “Without faith it is impossible to please Him.”

This will yet more clearly appear when we consider the purport of that special testimony of God in which first, and above all else, our faith is required. God has in His Word testified to man of many things. He has shown us how the worlds were made by the Word of His Power ; He has revealed to us His own glorious attributes ; He has set forth for our warning the dire evil and malignity

of sin, and dreadful issues in the rapidly approaching future. And all this testimony we are bound to receive. But that upon which God has delivered His most weighty and urgent testimony, written so plain that he who runs may read, is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ His Son. He has witnessed of Him, that "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" that "this is the true God and eternal life." He has witnessed concerning His life and death, that all that He did was for sinners of mankind; that He came expressly "to seek and to save that which was lost," and "to give His life a Ransom for many"; so that in suffering and dying, He died not for Himself, but for us, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

Now it is plain enough, that, if such statements as these be true, it can by no possibility be a matter of indifference whether a man heartily believes and receives them or not. To doubt or deny the dignity and glory of Christ, as set forth in His Word, is then to dishonour Christ; and "he that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father who hath sent Him." Can we dream that, dishonouring the Father by refusing to believe in the Son, we shall be able, by our moralities and virtues of whatsoever sort, to please Him? And as to the saving work of Christ—surely it cannot be a matter of indifference what a man believes about that! If Christ be, as He claimed, the sole and only Saviour of men, and if there be no salvation apart from faith in His Blood, the faith in what the Scriptures teach about that saving work of His

must be—so far from a matter of indifference, a matter absolutely vital. For, observe, the purport of the testimony is this: that Jesus, the Son of God, has borne our sins in His body on the tree; and that, save His, there is no other name given under heaven whereby we may be saved.

Please God, without receiving this testimony! Put from us the one Reconciliation and Atonement; and then fancy we may please God, while yet unreconciled to God! How is it possible? For there must be reconciliation between us and God before we can begin to please Him; and if a man have not faith in the only divinely ordained Reconciliation, so far from pleasing God, he shuts the door upon any hope or possibility of pleasing Him.

Men may strenuously object to this demand of faith in the Person and Work of Christ as the condition of acceptable service to God, naming it unjust and arbitrary, and all that. But it is not arbitrary. It is not arbitrary to insist that in order to cross a surging torrent we shall exercise faith in the only guide who knows the ford. Nor in this are God's ways unequal, unjust. It is his ways, which are unequal, who refuses faith in a loving and mighty Saviour. For refusing to believe in Christ is not only making God a liar. It is more than that: it is radical rebellion. It is a simple refusal to accept God's most reasonable and easy terms, while insisting blindly on our own.

Can an obedience rendered under such conditions be acceptable to God? "Offer it to thy governor," said the prophet; "will *he* be pleased with thee or accept thy person?" And if not the human

governor, how much less Jehovah! Beyond all question, it is impossible to please God without faith.

Finally, let it be remembered that there is a necessary and vital connection between the faith and the life. In the common assertion that "it is of no consequence what a man believes, if his life be right" men quite ignore this. As a matter of undeniable and universal experience, the practical life and character of a man is *determined*, in all its grand outlines, by what he *believes*.

This is true even on the lower plane of this earthly life. If a man avowedly or practically believes the acquisition of wealth, or of honour, or of learning to be the supreme good for him, will not this affect his life and character? As surely as the inward principle of life in a seed determines and shapes the plant, after its own peculiar manner, so surely does belief or faith in all these things shape the life and character of men. Were any one to say of learning, for example, "So that a man becomes an eminent scholar, it is of no consequence whether or not he believe learning to be a worthy end of life," we should smile at the notion as absurd; and that simply because we know that no man who contemns learning *will be* an eminent scholar.

And just so is it in spiritual things. If there be two men, one of whom, for example, denies the existence of God, while the other is ever profoundly penetrated with the faith of a personal God ever at his side overshadowing him with His power, watching with intense and most loving concern his every act; it is utterly impossible but that

the life and character of the one man must be utterly different from that of the other. Even if the outward actions of both be the very same, the one man is working under motives so different from those of the other, that his is an entirely different *character*. And if the character of the one be pleasing to God, is it possible that the other too should please Him ?

The truth is, that this vital connection between the faith and the life is so very evident that all will acknowledge it *so long as it is not pressed home in its personal relations*. The connection, for example, between the infidelity of the eighteenth century as expounded by Voltaire and his school, and the fearful Revolution which shook France and all Europe at the close of the century, is so evident as to have been universally acknowledged. And if the prevailing faith or unbelief of a *nation* thus shapes its character and destiny, what shall we say as to the faith or unbelief of the individuals who make up the nation ? Will it not affect *their* character and determine *their* destiny ?

For this reason, therefore, it is, that without faith it is impossible to please God : that *the life is the fruit of the faith*. A merely moral life, indeed, may exist where there is no faith. For an outward morality may be grounded upon expediency, or be determined by the outward pressure of public opinion. But to please God, we must not only be outwardly moral, but inwardly holy. And a *holy* life must be rooted in belief of the truth of God. Reason itself should teach us that supreme love and devotion to God must be the ruling motive in any

life which shall please Him. But never yet has a sinful man been able thus to draw near to God in filial love, until he first by faith saw God drawing near to him and loving him.

And God's love in Christ! How are we ever to know it except we first believe—believe with the heart that He has so loved us as to give for our salvation His only begotten Son? Believing this, a man is changed and transformed. Believing that God has so loved him, he cannot but love God. Believing in that estimate of his sin and ill-desert which God expressed on Calvary, he learns to hate those sins which nailed the Lord of Glory to that cross, and to love the righteousness and holiness to which Christ would thus tenderly draw him. And so it is that faith works by love, purifying the heart and overcoming the world; so that, transformed by the renewing of our minds, we begin to please God. But without this faith there will be no love to God, no purifying of the heart or overcoming of the world. For the love of God must take the heart captive before the love of sin can be expelled. But there can be no love to God until we *believe* the good news of His Holy Love toward us.

This, then, is the Divine and necessary order. In order to pleasing God, the holy life; in order to a holy life, the love of God; in order to the love of God, *faith* in His revelation of Himself as the God of love, in Christ. This order is not arbitrary. It has its reason, not in the appointment of God, but in the nature of man. This order, therefore, can never be altered. Let us, for this reason, understand it well. We *must be holy* before we

can please God ; we must love God, and be at peace with Him, before we can be holy ; and we must with our hearts believe the Word of God's grace before we can begin to love Him.

The matter which is brought before us in the text is a matter of the greatest consequence to each one of us. It is the more so because, as already remarked, so many in our day err fatally just here. In plain words, they do not believe that "without faith it is impossible to please God." Possessed, perhaps, of quick religious sensibilities, or animated, it may be, by a high sense of honour in all their dealings with their fellowmen, they cannot imagine that, just because they cannot see their way clear to believe certain things, they will be rejected of God. They forget, or strangely fail to see, that any emotion, sentiment or principle, even of a deeply religious sort, which does not arise from God's truth, cannot be rated at the highest moral value. Or often these religious sentiments are even mistaken for faith. But they are not faith ; they give no reality to things unseen ; they do not deal with the testimony of God. The fancies with which many thus seek to solace themselves are no more like the substantial realities of faith than the fantastic visions of the distempered brain of the opium-eater are like the everlasting hills.

The momentous question, therefore, which the words expounded will raise in the mind of every thoughtful man, will be this : "Have I this faith ? Do I really receive the testimony of God ?" It may be that the question will raise in the minds of many of us many a painful doubt. For if we

really believed the testimony of God—if our faith were anything more than an indolent assent, a merely negative and useless thing—could we feel as we do and yet live as we do ?

If, for example, we really believed the Divine judgment concerning sin, its malign power and its damning issues, would it be possible for us to rest as easy as many of us do ? Rest easy, knowing that the evil virus was in ourselves, and in all our kin, and in all the multitudes around us, working out steadily and surely, except where counteracted by God's saving grace, its dreadful and fatal results ? Do we really, then, have faith in the testimony of God concerning sin ?

Or take God's testimony in another matter—the testimony of His justifying and redeeming grace. If we do believe this, surely we ought to be filled with a joy and an exultation beyond all words ; hope should ever reach forward in glad anticipation of those things unutterable which God hath prepared for them that love Him ; and we should ever joyfully confess, like those who of old received the promises, that we are strangers and pilgrims in the earth.

But is it so with all of us ? When those ancient worthy men, whose names are so honourably mentioned in the chapter whence our text is taken, believed God, their faith *meant something*. They *acted* as if they believed. Noah believed God, and began to build a ship on the dry land, far from any water which might float it. Abraham believed God, and left his home to be a stranger in a strange land. Moses believed God, and strangely chose

affliction and poverty, instead of the honour and the wealth of Pharaoh's court. If we believe, are we in some like manner *showing* our faith? If it is not so, ought we not to question whether we indeed *have* that faith which is necessary if we would please God? Questions such as this each of us must answer for himself. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God!" Have we, then, faith?

"Ah," many of us may say, "mine, if faith at all, is yet so weak! It is like the faith of that poor man of whom we read in the gospel that he could but cry out with tears, 'Lord, I believe! Help Thou mine unbelief!'" Yet if we can but say so much as this, let us be of good cheer. For it is written that even that weak and trembling faith met with a most full and gracious reward!

XV

“NOW THE KING SAT IN THE WINTER-HOUSE IN THE NINTH MONTH : AND THERE WAS A FIRE ON THE HEARTH BURNING BEFORE HIM. AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT WHEN JEHUDI HAD READ THREE OR FOUR LEAVES, HE CUT IT WITH THE PENKNIFE, AND CAST IT INTO THE FIRE THAT WAS ON THE HEARTH, UNTIL ALL THE ROLL WAS CONSUMED IN THE FIRE THAT WAS ON THE HEARTH. YET THEY WERE NOT AFRAID, NOR RENT THEIR GARMENTS, NEITHER THE KING, NOR ANY OF HIS SERVANTS THAT HEARD ALL THESE WORDS. NEVERTHELESS ELNATHAN AND DELAIAH AND GEMARIAH HAD MADE INTERCESSION TO THE KING THAT HE WOULD NOT BURN THE ROLL : BUT HE WOULD NOT HEAR THEM.”—*JER. xxxvi. 22-25.*

MANY would say, if suddenly asked, that the word “penknife” is not to be found in the Bible. But it is not only found in this passage, but is one of the central objects in a scene full of impressiveness and solemn warning. A luxurious young king has been listening to the reading of the manuscript of the prophecies of Jeremiah, his contemporary. After hearkening for a very little to the plain and faithful words of the prophet, he takes the roll, snatching it from the hands of the reader, cuts it up with his penknife, and throws it, piece by piece, into the fire.

I have said that this scene was a scene full of

moral impressiveness. It is also, in a manner, a typical scene, for it has been often repeated, in its most essential features, in the history of mankind. To appreciate this, however, we must first take a glance at the history of those times.

It was in the year 608 B.C. that the good king Josiah had fallen in battle, after a remarkable reign of thirty years; a reign which had been marked by a great religious movement among his people, in which movement the good king had led. Josiah had fallen in an endeavour to withstand and to arrest an expedition of the king of Egypt, Pharaoh Necho, against Babylon. The people had put on the throne Josiah's second son, Jehoahaz, who was twenty-three years of age, but he reigned for only three months. He was taken prisoner by Pharaoh, who then placed his older brother on the throne—the Jehoiakim of this story. Jehoiakim began his reign in a period pregnant with doom. The wrath of the Lord, for the sins of Manasseh, which had been held back for a time by the deep repentance and holy zeal of Josiah, his son, was now, according to the words of the prophets who had spoken as it had been given them to speak by Jehovah, to break forth finally upon the sinful kingdom of Judah.

It is a principle of God's working, a principle of His dealing with the sons of men, that He ever in one generation prepares for the next. During the reign of Josiah had been born in Babylon a man who was destined to be one of the most remarkable military conquerors and one of the most magnificent monarchs of that age, or indeed of

any other age, the great Nebuchadnezzar. Already under his father Nabopolassar the ancient power of Babylon, long inferior to Assyria, had been fast rising, like an ominous comet, to a conspicuous height in the eastern sky. Jehoiakim had not been long on the throne when Nineveh, the far-famed capital of Assyria, fell before the Babylonian armies, as had been predicted by the prophet Nahum. It has justly been called "a colossal event," when thus the power which for several hundred years had been supreme in the ancient world went down before Babylon. It was an event full of portent of evil for all the ancient world. This had occurred in the first year of Jehoiakim's reign (607 B.C.). It ought to have alarmed him. It probably did alarm him; but instead of cleaving the closer to the Lord, the God of Israel, who in ages past had been the people's stay; instead of seeking the help of Jehovah against advancing Babylon, he hastened to seek security by making an alliance with the Babylonian king, moved, perhaps, by fear of Egypt upon the south-west. By a formal treaty he became the tributary ally of the Babylonian king.

One or two years then passed over Judah in quiet, during which, as we learn from other parts of the Book of Jeremiah, the young king was going from bad to worse. Idolatry was reinstated, and as if the burdens of the people were not already sufficient, taxed as they were to raise the tribute which the king had agreed to pay to the Babylonian monarch, he needlessly added burden to burden by exactions to meet his lavish and luxurious

expenditures ; building his ceiled cedar houses and beautifying his palace ; crushing the people with ever-increasing taxation, and by the injustice of impressed and unpaid labour.

In the meantime the faithful Jeremiah, at the immediate risk of liberty and the imminent peril of his life, was testifying against the sins of the king and the idolatries of the people ; whose professions of repentance in the days of Josiah, when, under royal example, the worship of Jehovah was popular, were thus proved utterly hollow ; for, as the Lord declared to Jeremiah, they had not turned unto Him "with their whole heart," but "feignedly." A magnificent example of faithful, fearless preaching out of that seventh century before Christ has been preserved for us in the words of Jeremiah, recorded in the twenty-second chapter of the book of his prophecies, addressed to this luxurious, tyrannical young king—

"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by injustice ; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not his hire ; that saith, I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers ; and it is ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign because thou strivest to excel in cedar ? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice ? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy ; then it was well. Was not this to know Me ? saith the Lord. But *thine* eyes and *thine* heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. Therefore, thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah : They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, my brother ! or, Ah, sister ! They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, Lord ! or Ah, his glory ! He shall be buried with the

burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."

Such was Jeremiah's preaching in those evil days, and such were the words, among others, which, when the king would not hear them as he spoke by word of mouth, Jeremiah then caused to be written in a roll of a book, and had sent to the king into his private chambers.

But all availed nothing. Deceived into a false security by two or three years of comparative peace and by the flattering assurances of the time-serving, court-pleasing false prophets, the wicked king and his wicked people went on in their evil ways, utterly forgetful of the righteous example of the dead Josiah, and equally heedless of the lamentations, the entreaties, and the startling denunciations of the prophet of God.

In the meanwhile the king of Babylon, Nabopolassar, had sent his son, the young prince Nebuchadnezzar, to recover his southern provinces from Pharaoh of Egypt. But while the latter was away on this expedition his father suddenly died, at home in Babylon, and the young prince was unexpectedly called back to assume the government of the greatest empire of antiquity. For two or three years he was occupied with the various cares pertaining to the consolidation of his new power, and with frontier work in the east; and Jehoiakim, as false to man as he had been to God, took the opportunity to break his solemn pledges, to revolt, and throw off the Babylonian yoke. And now the predestined hour, long deferred by the love and patience of God, had at last struck.

Nebuchadnezzar with his armies came, as Habakkuk, writing of this period, graphically says, "swifter than the evening leopards"; his armies had overflowed into the territory about the Holy Land, and were converging on Jerusalem. Into the city of Jerusalem had crowded the panic-stricken population of the country round about, and the situation was one of the most extreme tension and excitement.

But the Lord will make by His prophet, even in this eleventh hour, one last attempt to bring the people and their king to repentance, if so be they may even yet be spared the impending judgment. He therefore directs the prophet to commit to writing all the prophecies which he had spoken from Him against Jehoiakim and against Judah. This having been done, the prophet, acting still under the guidance of a Divine inspiration, since he was not himself allowed to go to the temple, where the people and the princes would be chiefly gathered, directs the scribe Baruch to take this roll to the temple, and read it in the ears of all whom he might find there.

Let us pause here, that we may gather from this incident also, in passing, the soul-moving lesson which it is adapted to convey to us. It is nothing less than an opening of the heart of God. It were fatal for us to miss of receiving the full force of what we are here told by useless speculations and questionings about predestination and foreknowledge. The fact remains that, notwithstanding the Lord's foreknowledge and His predictions of the Babylonian overthrow, He declared

it to be His purpose to lead even yet, if possible, the guilty king and the guilty people to repentance, and, in case they would repent, to spare them from the impending doom. So much is the Lord in earnest for the salvation of men from the judgment due to them for their sins. He is even so still. Most touching and most impressive is that expression which again and again God uses concerning Himself in that book which He directed Jeremiah to write and to read to the people: "I have sent unto them my servants the prophets, *rising up early* and sending them!" You see the image. It is the anxious father whose son has gone astray. He cannot sleep the night for thinking of the wandering one. Again and again he rises up, early in the grey of morning, and sends to him a messenger, if so be he may draw him from the haunts of sin back to the peace, and purity, and love of his father's house. Such, my friends, is God. He will not give men over until He has exhausted, as it were, all means to bring them to repentance. And so when, after all, Judah miserably fell under the Babylonian judgment, and Jehoiakim's dead body was cast out into the street—"the burial of an ass," as the prophet had foretold—was it the fault of God? And if, in like manner, any of us, divinely warned, do perish notwithstanding, will it be God's fault, or will it be simply our own?

But this effort to bring Judah to repentance was the last. We come now to that scene in the palace which is brought before us in the text. To send and read the predictions he had written, Jeremiah

had wisely chosen a public fast-day, when king and people were all publicly professing repentance and supplicating God's mercy. Baruch takes the roll first to the room of Gemariah, who was an elderly man, a prince of the days of good king Josiah, a man, as the story shows, who had not yet lost the reverence for God's Word which that good king had taught him. Baruch reads the roll first to the princes whom he found assembled. It was a tremendous indictment, and a terrible denunciation of impending judgment. Gemariah had there a son, Micaiah. The young man hastens down to another room, where all the princes of Jehoiakim's court were gathered together, and tells them what he has just been hearing. They send him back again, telling him to bring Baruch with his roll, that they may hear for themselves. He goes ; brings Baruch with the roll. On hearing it read, the princes, not yet utterly hardened, were filled with consternation, and for a moment it seemed as if Jeremiah's plans might bear good fruit. That those princes were not themselves ill-disposed toward Jeremiah is shown by their suggestion to Baruch that he and the prophet should hide themselves. Their reason for this counsel is plain. They knew well the kind of man with whom, in the young king, they had to deal. Then they said : " We cannot keep this from the king," and so, leaving the roll, they go in and tell Jehoiakim. They find him sitting at his ease in the winter chamber of the palace, a comfortable room which he had built for himself in his ceiled cedar mansion. They tell him what they have

been hearing. Jehoiakim sends for the roll ; it is brought ; he commands it to be read. But when only two or three columns have been read to him, he takes it from the reader, and deliberately cuts it into pieces with his penknife, and throws it into the fire, so that all is destroyed. And that was the answer of Jehoiakim to the Lord and His prophet.

This was an act of peculiar and intolerable wickedness, burdened with every aggravation possible. It was committed in defiance of luminous evidence that the prophecies of Jeremiah were indeed the word of the living God. For Jeremiah had now been prophesying since the days of the king's father, and faithfully warning Judah of that judgment which God was preparing for them at the hand of the king of Babylon, a judgment which was surely to be inflicted upon them unless they speedily repented. However incredulous any one might at first have been, the predictions were now fast passing into fulfilment in the sight of all. Already the predicted conqueror with his countless legions was passing through the breadth of the afflicted land. It should have been evident to the dullest comprehension that except help appeared speedily, of which there was not a single sign in the horizon, Nebuchadnezzar with his engines of war would soon be thundering at the gates of Jerusalem. And yet, with the evidence of the truth and Divine authority of Jeremiah's predictions before his very eyes, Jehoiakim contemptuously cuts up the roll which contained his prophecies, and burns it in the fire ! It was an

unmitigated insult to Jehovah ; an open defiance of His Word, His Power, His Judgment !

The act of the king was the worse, in that the Word which he so treated was a word not only of threatened wrath and judgment, but also of tender entreaty and still proffered grace. No book of the Old Testament, indeed, equals the book of the prophecies of Jeremiah in this respect of the extreme tenderness of their expostulations. The roll which the king burnt contained, for example, such words as these : “ Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire ? Yet My people have forgotten Me, days without number. . . . They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him and become another man’s, shall he return unto her again ? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers. Yet again return unto Me, saith the Lord. Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my youth ? ” What tender words of long-suffering love and grace ! But Jehoiakim cut up the roll which contained these words, and threw it into the fire.

The act was the worse, that it was committed despite earnest remonstrance from some of those that stood by. For we read that the God-fearing Gemariah and two of his friends, who were like-minded, “ made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll ” ; but he would not hear them. He would not be hindered. Neither he nor the crowd of fawning courtiers who stood by were afraid—“ neither the king nor any of his servants that heard these words.” In defiance

of the remonstrance of these good men, he cut up the roll of the Word of God, and threw it into the fire.

And then, last of all, to make the deed as bad as possible, this was done on a public fast-day, when professedly the king and people were confessing their sins, and imploring the grace and help of God in the nation's extremity!

This act in the drama of Judah's overthrow then closes with an order from the king, to crown his wickedness, that for preparing this roll Jeremiah and Baruch shall be arrested and committed to prison. We must hasten over the sequel, how the Lord told Jeremiah, whom with Baruch He had hidden from the power of the king and from the latter's unjust command for their imprisonment, to take another roll, and have Baruch write in it again the words which the former roll had contained, and other words which He spoke like to them. And now it is easy to observe that this destruction of the roll of the book of Jeremiah was not only very wicked, but no less *foolish and useless*. What could such an act possibly avail? The word of the Lord could not be hindered from fulfilment because the roll on which it was written was burnt. This act of foolish, wicked spite would not delay the armies of Nebuchadnezzar in their triumphant advance for a single half-hour. What an utter fool this young man was! The word of God cannot be put out of the world by a penknife and a brazier of coals. The only result of the act of the king was that he thereby drew down upon himself yet additional curses, for not only was the

whole roll soon rewritten as before, but "there were added besides unto them many like words."

We are now prepared to observe the lessons which the story holds before us. Here is the picture, which now we shall appreciate better than before. A luxurious young man, affecting culture in art and architecture, is reclining in his richly furnished and elaborately ceiled room, and is cutting to pieces the word of God, and throwing it into the fire!

Has this never been done since? Yes, often. Often has it been done even in the most literal sense. It is only a few years ago that, by the order, and under the direction, of Romish priests, the word of God was burnt in the Plaza of Bahia, in Brazil, as also again and again before this occasion where Rome has had dominance. But I am not now concerned to speak of Rome. We shall do better to come nearer home. Let us mark well that in spirit the very same thing is done whenever and wherever a young man, or any one, sets at nought the word of God, and treats it with contemptuous disregard.

The use of a penknife is a mere incident in the case. What is, in the eye of God, the same thing may be done where no penknife is used. And let us not imagine that it is done only by those who are openly profane and irreligious. For you will remember that, on the very day when Jehoiakim committed this wickedness, he was keeping a solemn fast unto the Lord. And so it is that a man may be at the same time very religious and very wicked; may honour God outwardly, while

in action He is denying Him, and setting His word at defiance. It is just so in our day. Indeed, it is one of the characteristics of much of the scepticism that is fashionable in our time, that it affects to be very religious. Many a sceptic is, like Jehoiakim, very devout in his own way, and cultivated, withal, like Jehoiakim; affecting, like him, a degree of culture in matters pertaining to art and letters, and so on. As if Art, spelled with however large a capital "A," could be any substitute for obedience to the Most High, or culture for repentance toward God! Yet there are many, many such, who reject the Word. And there are many more who, not so bold and daring, stand, in the meantime, quietly by when the word of God is contemned, like Jehoiakim's courtiers, and silently approve that which they would hardly have dared to do themselves. Yes, often, often this scene of long ago is re-enacted in the present.

Moreover, the reasons which probably moved Jehoiakim in his treatment of God's word are undoubtedly still in operation in the case of many who, like him, reject the word of God. Primarily, Jehoiakim's reason for his treatment of Jeremiah's prophecy was that there was in the message so much which to him, a fast young man, bent on luxury and display, and endeavouring to combine wickedness with an easy and popular form of religion, *was not pleasant*. For Jehoiakim was "religious" in his way; he liked preaching well if it was pleasant. We learn from the Book of Jeremiah that he had surrounded himself with not a few court-preachers; the prophet once and

again refers to them in terms of tremendous severity. The king and the people said to them: "Prophecy unto us *smooth things*." And so they prophesied smooth things, according to the demand, and king and court no doubt applauded. If only Jeremiah had fallen in with the fashion, and had prophesied smooth things with the rest of them, the king would not have cut up his roll, or ordered his arrest. But Jeremiah was not a man of that kind. He had heard the Lord's command: "The prophet that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully," and he obeyed that command. Naturally timid and self-distrustful though he was, he became, according to God's promise, like "a brazen wall" before the king. He told what God had told him was the truth, and he kept telling it; and when the king would not *hear* the truth, he *wrote* it and sent it to him—always the same stern, unmitigated truth. And the truth was just what Jehoiakim did not want to hear. He wanted the Lord by all means to be merciful to him and his people, but not at the price of giving up his sins. And so he rejected the word of the prophet, and no doubt persuaded himself that the prophet was a disloyal croaker in the pay of Babylon.

Just so is it still. The true reason for the most of scepticism is not found in inability of the understanding, of the intellect. It is not found in the head at all, but in the heart—in the will. Men often say, just as they said in Jeremiah's days, and in so many words: "Preach smooth things. Eternal punishment is in the Bible, but we doubt whether it is really the word of the Lord. In any

case, do not preach it ; we do not like to hear about it. Preach grace! Preach the grace and the forgiving love of God. We like to hear of that ; we do not like to hear of the other." And the reason for this demand is just the same that it was in the time of Jeremiah. Men do not like to hear of a grace which is granted only on condition of quitting from sin, from self-serving, and from self-pleasing, to live for the Lord their God alone. And then to hear eternal punishment held up as the alternative to their refusing to accept on these conditions the grace of God, to such is unendurable. But let us all learn from Jehoiakim to beware how we, any of us, reject the word, because in it are found hard things against unrepenting sinners. So to do is to use the penknife with Jehoiakim.

And then, the young king was *proud*. He was filled, apparently, with an egregious conceit of his own importance. *He* was a *cultured* young man ; he was a *connoisseur* in architecture—as Jeremiah tells us, he was striving to excel in fine building in the precious cedar. But Jeremiah took no account of this. He dealt with him just as with any common, uncultivated, unpolished sinner. - And this made the king angry. That *he*, such a refined young man, of such elegant tastes and fondness for all that was beautiful, dwelling in that beautiful house, the monument of his artistic appreciation—that *he* should be so little accounted of by God as to be threatened by God's prophet with "the burial of an ass," this was not to be borne ; it was absolutely intolerable ; it stung him to the quick. And for this reason

also he cut up and burnt the roll that told him what his estimation was in the mind of God.

And so also still it is *pride* that often is the deepest reason for men's rejection of God's Word. Sometimes it is the pride of refinement and culture, of rank and station, as with Jehoiakim. For the Word of God tells us that God is no respecter of persons; that His judgment of men is not based on their culture, but on their character; that He acquits not on condition of refinement, but on condition of repentance. And many there are to whom the idea is so repugnant that God should deal with such uncompromising sternness with men and women who, in their own esteem and in the esteem of their friends, are cultivated gentlemen and ladies, that they cannot receive a word which, if it be true, evidently dooms them.

Others, again, reject the Word through *pride of intellect*. This is especially the fashion of our time, both with young men, and with many who are old enough to be wiser. It is the way with many to affect to be "advanced thinkers." Preach to them the certified Word of God, and they will tell you with a learned air that the critics have decided that this book we call the Bible—much of it—is of very doubtful authority, and so make this pretence of superior knowledge an excuse—sincerely enough, no doubt—for rejecting it. But the Word of God cannot be nullified by the penknives of the critics, any more than by the penknife of young Jehoiakim.

But whatever various reasons for the rejection of God's Word may be, it is most important to

observe that the lessons from this story apply not only to the sceptic. Practically, the act of Jehoiakim is repeated, in its most fatal characteristics, whenever, though it may be in a way outwardly more decent and respectful, the Word of God is rejected. *Every* man is guilty with Jehoiakim who, when he hears God's Word, casts it aside and treats it as of no account.

However and by whomsoever done the same thing is to be said of such as of Jehoiakim. To reject God's Word is both wicked and foolish. It is wicked because, as it comes to us to-day, it comes supported by the most overwhelming *evidence* of its Divine authority. It is sustained to-day by far more evidence than it was to Jehoiakim: it is now sustained by the whole history of Israel and of the Church from that day to this. Against such light do not sin by rejecting it.

It is wicked, because if in the word of God is announcement of wrath and warning, there is also in it an expression and a revelation of the tenderest *love* and *grace*. Do not sin against the Word of God's love, and do not impiously reject such a grace, attested by the death of His own dear Son.

It is wicked, again, because all you who hear these words to-day have, like Jehoiakim, again and again been warned against rejecting it. You have been warned by faithful parents, by Christian friends, by teachers in your Sabbath school, and by the ministers of the Word: all these urging you, as Gemariah urged Jehoiakim, "Do not, do not reject the Word of God."

And it is yet the more wicked because most, if not all of us, are like Jehoiakim at that time in this also, that we *profess to give the Lord a certain degree of outward honour*. We profess to be, at least in a general sense, Christians. And, if not all, at least the greater number of us do admit that Christ was the Son of God, and that the Bible is His Word. That we profess this, that we admit this, that we have this outward show of a true profession, so far from serving as an excuse for not accepting the Word fully and wholly, and with our hearts as well as with our minds, so far from palliating the sin of disregarding the revelation of wrath and the revelation of mercy and grace which God has made, only makes the sin of the rejection of the Word the greater.

Remember, finally, that to reject the Word of God is as foolish as it is wicked. For with us, as with Jehoiakim, that Word will go on to fulfilment. We may, if we will, find this out through grace, in our blessed experience of the fulfilment of its promises. If we do not so find it out, then, like this foolish and wicked young king, we shall find it out through a personal experience of the fulfilment of its terrible threats against all who do reject the Word of God and the Son of God. Who that hears this Word will say: "I have rejected the Word long enough; I will receive, believe and obey, this very day, in repentance toward God, and faith in His Son Jesus Christ"?

XVI

“HEAVEN AND EARTH SHALL PASS AWAY, BUT MY WORDS SHALL NOT PASS AWAY.”—MATT. xxiv. 35; MARK xiii. 31; LUKE xxi. 33.

THE words of the text bring us instantly face to face with an irresistible alternative, and one whose issue cannot be evaded. They are such words as definitely prove Him who uttered them to be either Divine or demented; either an irresponsible fanatic, or the very God of very God. There is, I say, no middle ground on which we can stand on this matter, and in the light of these words uttered by Jesus of Nazareth there is no other possible answer to the question who He was that uttered them, than these two. He was *God*, or He was *insane*.

Consider the facts! Here was a poor Man, of the nation most despised of all at that time on the earth, and of low station even among them—a *Jewish Carpenter*, surrounded by a few other Jews, for the most part of lowly appearance and station, like Himself, fishermen, publicans, and such like. He sits upon the Mount of Olives, over against Jerusalem; and there seated, that bright spring morning long ago, this Jewish Carpenter calmly and quietly sets before those Jewish fishermen and their fellows a panorama of the whole future course of human history! A wonderful sketch indeed it

must have seemed to them, and not at all what they would have expected to hear. Parts of it, indeed, seemed likely enough, and easy to forecast. When He said, for instance, that there should continue to be "famines, wars, earthquakes, and pestilences in divers places," He was doubtless saying what might well have been anticipated from all the records of the past. But together with such words as these were others, which, at the time, must have seemed to any sober and thoughtful person in the highest degree improbable and incredible. The magnificent temple, the boast of Israel and the boast of Israel's Roman king who built it, was to be levelled with the ground. The holy people was to be scattered among all nations, suffering everywhere great wrath, and yet among all these unexampled inflictions never cease to be, until all things which this Jesus spake should be fulfilled. As for the little band of disciples, they were neither to subdue the world nor, on the other hand, to be subdued by it and suffered to lapse into insignificance. They should be the objects of universal hate and persecution, their record always, in one place or in another, a record of blood and suffering. And yet, always resisted, they were always to continue to spread; always fought against, they were in such wise always to triumph, that the Gospel which they should preach should yet be proclaimed in every nation under the whole heaven. And all this long while that their word should be thus spreading among the Gentiles, Jerusalem should remain "trampled," harshly governed, under Gentile power even to the end, while her exiled people should

vainly seek for rest, scattered among all nations. And at last the strange history should end—how? By the personal appearance of this same Jewish Carpenter as a triumphant King in the clouds of the sky, gathering then His chosen from every nation under heaven!

Try to place yourself in imagination among the members of that group on the Mount of Olives, and endeavour to conceive how all this must have sounded. When in all human history did it ever occur to any sane man to deliver such a prophecy as this? Where was it ever heard, before or since, that a religious teacher should give forth such a forecast, and then bring it to a conclusion by announcing his own final Advent from heaven in glory?

Yet in all the discourse we look in vain for any trace of "enthusiasm," or of a fanatical excitement. He who speaks speaks with the perfect calmness of conscious sanity, the certain tones of the utterance of absolute truth. And then in the same calm and quiet way He ends the prediction with the words of the text, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but *My words* shall not pass away!" Astounding statements these, from this lowly Jew! Think of what its meaning is! He bids you look whither you will—to the stable earth around you, as through countless changes it has come down from the geologic ages; at the starry heavens above you, still more ancient and enduring. Yet nowhere, He assures you, can the eye rest on anything so certain never to pass away as His words! For however long these things have lasted, or yet shall last, they

shall in the end pass away : but after they have all gone, His words shall still abide, ever unchanged and still unchangeable, fulfilled and fulfilling till all be fulfilled.

Yes, I repeat it, the words prove either one of two things, insanity or Deity. For any sane man thus to speak, for any man thus to speak whose mind had not by fanatical excitement lost its balance, were utterly impossible. History proves this, for "never man spake like this Man." Thus do these words—words which, if not absolute truth, are words of the wildest extravagance—carry with them the demonstration of their own verity. Hearing them, we are constrained to recognize in the speaker Deity Incarnate. That lowly Jew, seated on the Mount of Olives, is not then what He outwardly appears to be. By the token of these words we are compelled to recognize in Him the Creator of all the worlds, the Son of God in human nature. For whose word can be more enduring than the heavens and the earth, except it be the word of Him who created those heavens and that earth ?

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Let us consider more carefully the *implications* of these words.

In the first place, they plainly imply the conscious knowledge by the Speaker of all contingencies which, in all future time, might arise to hinder the fulfilment of any word of His. But when we remember the almost infinite number of these, which might combine to hinder the fulfilment of some word of Jesus, it is clear that (if of sane mind) He must have foreknown them all before He could

thus speak ; and must have known therewith, that among all such contingencies none could arise which should prevent the full accomplishment of His every word. But of such knowledge no human mind is capable : nor is any one capable of such knowledge as is here implied, but God Himself.

In the second place, the words also imply that the Speaker knew Himself to have at command power and wisdom to meet and control any combination of such opposing forces which could possibly arise. Take, for example, the single prediction, made in this discourse, of the universal propagation of His Gospel. What tremendous forces have in all ages opposed it and are still opposing it ! That His Gospel should be bitterly combated everywhere, as it has been, He foresaw, for this He repeatedly told His disciples. Kings and princes the mightiest, leagued principalities and empires, should oppose the preaching of this Gospel, and fight against it with fire and sword. Even physical nature, with barriers of desert and mountain, and invisible forces of deadly malaria and pestilence, should resist the onward movement of the messengers of Jesus. Yet all combined should not be able to prevent the final issue. " This Gospel of the Kingdom," Jesus none the less confidently declared, " shall be preached among all the nations. . . . Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away ! " Is it not quite plain that in these words Jesus speaks out of the consciousness of a power greater than that of all the combined forces of the material and spiritual world ; a power greater than that of all the allied empires of earth and the unnumbered

hosts of the invisible world, aided and helped by all the deadly forces of opposing nature? These are strong, no doubt, immensely strong! There is no individual man who should oppose them, but would go down like straw before a mountain torrent. Nevertheless Jesus must have been conscious that He was mightier than all these combined: else, being a good man and sane, He never could have ventured to speak these words. Yet whose power is thus superior to all other powers or possible combination of powers, but that of God Himself?

In the third place, the words of the text further imply the consciousness of absolute changelessness of purpose. As uttered by Jesus they certainly mean that under no conceivable contingency would any plan and intention at that time in the mind of Jesus be modified in the slightest degree. He evidently means to say that, whatever might happen, He should never be discouraged or alter His plan. He should steadily hold to His purpose till the very last word of prediction, of promise, and of warning should have at last become—after however long delay—accomplished fact. But such consciousness of absolute unchangeableness of purpose is possible to no creature. There is only One whose purpose is thus essentially incapable of change. How can we then avoid the conclusion that the One was then speaking, in the human form of Jesus?

Such are the *implications* of these wonderful words. We may now consider some of their *applications*.

The words apply to the *doctrine* of Jesus.

There are many who dislike definite doctrinal teaching: but the fact remains that Jesus taught doctrine. About His teaching there was nothing vague, or ambiguous, or hazy. He taught, for example, that man, notwithstanding his usual good opinion of himself, is "the slave of sin," and that in consequence of this he is "lost"; that except a man be "born again" of the Holy Spirit of God, "he cannot see the kingdom of God." He taught that He had come to save men, even the lost: and that He proposed to do this, primarily, not by His precepts or His example, but by His death—by shedding His blood "for the remission of sins," and by giving His life "a ransom for many": and finally, that He would hereafter judge the world, and summon every man from the grave to answer for himself before his judgment-seat. Such, undeniably, were the teachings of Jesus. This fact is not altered by the fact that the majority of men object to these teachings. This democratic age needs often to be reminded that the question what is truth and historical fact cannot be settled by a majority vote. Many are very impatient with the idea that the Nineteenth Century must accept the very same system of religious teaching which was promulgated in the First Century. They believe in what they call "progress." But no difference is made in the case by all this. The words of Jesus which are before us apply to all His teachings. According to Him, while human philosophy may be modified, corrected, progressively adapted to the time, it is not so with His teachings. Therefore, except we are prepared to maintain that He was

either a blasphemer or practically insane, we must admit that every one of these tremendous statements of Jesus, regarding man's ruin, man's redemption, and man's eternal judgment, stands to-day, just as when He first uttered them, unaltered and unalterable truth. For He Himself has said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

These words apply also to the *precepts* of Jesus. He not only taught doctrine, but He prescribed a law of life. It is a law which has in all ages commended itself to the conscience of the non-Christian no less than to the conscience of the Christian. It is a law that commands absolutely (us) every one to love the Lord with all our heart and mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves! He assures us that this moral law reaches to every passing thought and feeling. He teaches that whatever thought, feeling, *or* inclination is inconsistent with supreme love to God and perfect love to our fellow-men is sin, and will be judged as sin. To these statements of His regarding the moral law these words apply. Indeed, in the "Sermon on the Mount" Jesus used regarding the moral law the same illustration as here, saying: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one jot or tittle of the law to fail."

Further, these words apply to the *warnings* of Jesus. The warnings of Jesus are many, and very awful some of them are. He warns us that "whoever is angry with his brother is in danger of the judgment"; that "except we repent we shall all perish"; that "except we believe on Him we

“ shall never see life ” ; that there will be such a thing as a resurrection, and that for those who do evil it will be “ a resurrection of judgment ” ; that even for many of those who profess to be His disciples, the door of life will at last be found shut ; and that many will yet hear from His lips a sentence (to use His own words) of “ everlasting punishment.”

Now we may ignore these warnings, if we like, as many do ; we may put them out of our mind, as disquieting, as many do ; or we may cavil at them, as many others do, and prove to our own satisfaction that there is nothing so serious in them as some think, that God is too merciful for all this, and so on. Yet over against our ignoring, or our discarding, or our cavilling, stand these tremendous words of Jesus, now burdened with an awful solemnity : “ Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.” Let us not forget it ! These words apply to the warnings of Jesus !

The words apply also to the *promises* of Jesus. Let us thank God for this. For Jesus—Himself the Seed of Promise, promised by God through the prophets centuries before His appearing—preached a Gospel of Promise. Who can soon repeat all the promises of Jesus : promises of pardoning mercy, of strengthening grace, of sanctifying power, of resurrection in glory ? “ Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest.” “ Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.” “ I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish.” “ He that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” “ Ye shall weep, indeed, and lament, but

your sorrow shall be turned into joy." Nor does He forget the earthly need. He assures us that our "heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of" food and of raiment, and bids us therefore not be of anxious or of doubtful mind, seeing that if we "seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, all these" earthly things that we need "shall be added unto" us. He promises that He will be with us "to the end of the age"; and that if we ask anything in His name, He will give it unto us; and that, at last, if we are faithful, we shall hear from His own lips these blessed words: "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

What stupendous promises! In their grace so beyond our deservings, and in their glory so transcending present appearances, that we often find it very hard to believe them! Let us then to-day, all the more, give heed to this reassuring word of Jesus: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but" these words of Mine, these *promises* of Mine, "shall never pass away." Resting, then, on these, we are resting on what is more stable than the order of nature itself. That the stars shall come forth to-night, and that the sun shall rise to-morrow, is not so sure as that Jesus will fulfil His every promise that He has made to us, fulfil it even to the very letter.

Only one other application of these words is to be referred to. The words of Jesus apply to His *predictions*. In a sense this is already implied, for what is prediction but promise and warning? Still, we do more often speak of predictions as referring to the Church and to the world collec-

tively. The prophecies of Jesus shall be fulfilled. It was with special reference to these, in fact, that the words were first uttered: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." The Gospel, then, shall yet be published among all nations; for Jesus has said it. All nations may oppose it, but so it shall be. The laggard Church may long delay it, yet in the end it cannot fail to come to pass.

So, also, the great trial that had been predicted shall come. For you remember how, in this discourse, Jesus points us to a time of apostasy and "distress of nations," as that of the course and end of the existing order; a time of trial for His people, such that, except God had shortened the days, the very "elect" should not be saved. So then it shall be. This word shall not pass away. And at last, into the midst of a world wherein the Gospel shall at length have been everywhere preached, and the Church shall be yet strangely half asleep, professed disciples of Christ largely in word or life denying Him—suddenly, like a lightning-flash at midnight, shall the Son of Man appear; and all that are in their graves "shall hear His voice," and shall come forth," unto "a resurrection of life" or unto "a resurrection of judgment." "Hard to believe, this!" you say? So it is. Yet Jesus has beyond controversy so predicted; and, while heaven and earth shall pass away, His word shall not pass away.

Now, before closing, bear in mind the great *confirmation* of the text which history has already given. It stands before the eyes of every one, that

a large part of what Jesus said in this discourse has already become history. Little, indeed, remains to be fulfilled, but the completion of the universal preaching of the Gospel, the ending of Israel's scattering, and the final distresses consequent.

What, then, is our part but to hold fast, most firmly and undoubtingly, in these days of increasing scepticism and disbelief, our faith in the infallible *word* of the Lord Jesus Christ? Let us believe the doctrines He taught; for heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away. Let us obey His precepts; for heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away. Let us bear in mind His warnings; for heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away. Let us joyfully believe and rest upon His exceeding great and precious promises; for heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away. And in the meantime, "though the vision tarry, wait for it; for at the end it shall surely come: it shall not be behind the time." And until then "the just shall live by His faith."

XVII

“AND HAVE HOPE TOWARD GOD, WHICH THEY THEMSELVES ALSO ALLOW, THAT THERE SHALL BE A RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, BOTH OF THE JUST AND UNJUST.”—ACTS xxiv. 15

THE words of the text are found in that great confession of faith which Paul made in the magnificent defence of himself before King Agrippa. The words well illustrate the great prominence which the doctrine of the resurrection of the body had in the primitive Christian faith. I am not so sure that every Christian in our day would, under similar circumstances, mention this among the most prominent articles of his faith. Certain it is that the resurrection, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and the resurrection of His people, had a place in the apostolic preaching which it has not in much of modern preaching. In some places, and in some pulpits, we hear much of rite and ceremony; in others we hear of various moral and social reforms; literary and æsthetic disquisitions are not uncommon; such things as these form much of the staple of present-day preaching in Christian pulpits. When, on the other hand, we turn to the New Testament records, and read the accounts of the preaching of the apostles, we find that such matters are far less prominent, while among the foremost subjects of their preaching appears the startling doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, a doctrine now supposed by many to be more a matter of pious speculation

than of any practical importance in the Christian life.

The apostles preached, we are told, "Jesus and the resurrection." "They preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead." Such are the terse descriptions of the first preaching, that preaching which so transformed the whole ancient world, such expressions as these, in a description of the nature and substance of the apostolic preaching, can only mean that the announcement of the coming resurrection of the dead, as now already assured by the resurrection of Christ, "the first-fruits of them that slept," formed one of the chief subjects of the apostles' message; was, in fact, the burden of that which they had to proclaim to the world.

Sometimes, we learn, it gave much offence to the hearers. Thus, when Paul preached before the cultivated Athenians, and when he began, according to his wont, to speak of the resurrection, they began to mock. They had in their philosophy no place for a resurrection; to them it appeared essentially *incredible*. But to the apostles it mattered little whether men received the doctrine or not. They continued nevertheless to preach it. And they preached it not merely as true, as an incidental feature of the system of Christian truth, but as one of the fundamentals of Christianity, a doctrine in which even "babes in Christ," as the Hebrews were told, were expected to believe.

There were, indeed, some members of the church in Corinth who doubted this. But what did Paul say to them? What did Paul say to certain men

who denied the fact of the resurrection of the dead ? He told them plainly, and in words which he could not well have made more emphatic, that if they rejected this *their faith was vain*. His argument was brief and clear. "If the dead be not raised, then is not Christ raised ; and if Christ be not raised, then your faith is vain ; ye are yet in your sins."

From this it follows that, according to the Bible, a man who denies the resurrection of the body has no right to be called a Christian. Even if one, albeit retaining the doctrine as a form of words, would yet explain and spiritualize it away, as not a few nominal Christians do, such a one, whatever his profession may be, is, according to the New Testament, not a Christian. For this, precisely, was the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who, Paul says, "concerning the truth had *made shipwreck*, in saying that the resurrection was past already," so that by this very error it had actually resulted that the faith of some had been overthrown ; Paul thus giving us a very clear illustration of the practical truth of what he elsewhere has so insisted upon, that the doctrine of the resurrection, so far from being accidental and unessential, is of quite fundamental and vital importance to the very existence of a Christian faith. It is of this teaching of theirs, a teaching which "spiritualized away" the resurrection into a thing of the past, already completed in some mystical, figurative sense, a teaching which is given by many also now, that the apostle uses that striking language, that "their word doth *eat* as doth a gangrene," that is, that it was like a gangrene in sound flesh, noxious and destructive.

And thus, so far from covering them with a mantle of mistaken charity, he adds, that for this their sin in rejecting a truth so clearly revealed he had "delivered them unto Satan," that they might learn better.

Not many in our evangelical churches, we may trust, as yet thus boldly deny the resurrection. But that, as compared with the case in apostolic days, it is a truth that is much neglected—this, I fear, we cannot doubt. On belief in this article of Christian faith, as of all others, the rationalistic spirit of our age makes itself powerfully felt; so that with many the resurrection of the dead has ceased to have the power which it should have as a supremely practical motive in Christian life.

It is therefore of special importance that we should understand what the Scriptures teach on this subject, and hold it fast against the contrary tendencies of our day, contending earnestly for "the faith once delivered to the saints," lest, like Hymenaeus and Philetus, we too fall away from the truth, and make shipwreck of our souls. We must not forget that a truth neglected is a truth which is soon regarded as of little importance; and that, when so regarded, it is speedily and easily rejected altogether.

First, then, observe that, according both to the text and to every other passage of Scripture which bears on the subject, the resurrection of the dead is a *future event*. Observe in every case the phraseology: "There *shall be* a resurrection of the dead." "Those that sleep in Jesus *shall* God bring with Him." "Christ the firstfruits; *afterward* they that

are Christ's *at His coming.*" Christ is surely coming, but, as surely, He has not yet come again since those words were spoken. The words therefore teach that the resurrection of Christ's people is a future event still. "I will raise him up that believeth on Me at the last day." The last day has not yet come: the resurrection, therefore, which Christ promises for the last day cannot yet have taken place.

As opposed to this truth, there are not a few who maintain that the resurrection takes place for every man at death. It is plausibly imagined that within this grosser material body of ours exists, in a germinal way at least, another and more ethereal body, material indeed, but so tenuous as to be ordinarily imperceptible to the senses; and that at death this ethereal body, freed from the gross matter of the outer body, becomes, and henceforth is, the only habitation of the spirit. And this release of the ethereal inner vesture of the soul from its grosser encasement is, some fancy, what in Scripture is meant by the resurrection of the body.

Observe, however, with regard to speculations of this nature, that the assumption of such a body as is encased within that body which we have now is purely speculation. Whether there be any such we have no ground or means of knowing. And even though such there were, and though it were true that such a body as this escapes at death—which any one that wishes to believe is welcome to believe—it is certain that this is not the body which is spoken of in Scripture as the subject of the resurrection. For the resurrection is everywhere said

to be of that which dies, and as to what it is that dies there is no question. It is they who are in their graves, who shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth. But this hypothetical spiritual body, of which some tell us, on their own theory, never dies : how can it, then, be raised from the dead ?

How plain the Lord's words are ! “ The *hour* is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth ”¹—not “ do from time to time come forth.” When He is speaking in the previous passage, of the rising out of spiritual death, He uses the other language, employing the present tense, as expressing a continuous, often-repeated action ; but that only serves to make all the more striking the sudden change and the contrasted mode of expression when in the following verses the future *bodily* resurrection is spoken of, which is uniformly represented, as here, as pertaining wholly, and for all persons alike, to the future.

This not uncommon notion of which I am speaking is, indeed, but a modern edition of the ancient error of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who declared that the resurrection was past. This also declares that it is past for every one who has died. Let us therefore hold fast to this : that the resurrection of the dead—whatever, as we study the further teaching of the revealed Word on the subject, may prove to be its nature—is *not past, but future*. There *shall be* a resurrection of the dead.

As the second fact, which is clearly taught

¹ John v. 28, 29.

by the Holy Scriptures with regard to the resurrection, it is to be observed, that the resurrection is of *a material body*. As to the nature of matter, we do not know much : its essential constitution is one of the great outstanding mysteries of physical science. Yet, though we are unable to define what matter is, we know what is intended when we speak of matter ; and we know that by this we mean something which, whatever it may be, *is not spirit*, but is sharply contrasted with spirit.

It is important, however, when we say this, to keep in mind the fact, that even as we know matter we know that it may exist under a variety of forms : solid, liquid, gaseous, with yet a fourth form, as seems to be indicated by late scientific discovery, a form called *radiant*. We know that matter may be visible or it may be invisible. And in each of these several forms matter manifests different properties. Yet in one and all of these forms of matter known to us certain properties persist. Matter in all its forms occupies space : and in none of these forms has the power of spontaneous action.

Spirit, on the other hand, cannot be shown to occupy space. Who would ever speak of a soul as "large" or "small," excepting only in that common metaphorical sense, which bears no relevance to the present discussion ? Spirit, also, has the power of self-originated action. An atom of iron would never begin to move of itself ; nor, if once set in motion, would it ever stop except its motion were caused to cease by something outside of itself, as friction. The soul, however, necessarily thinks and feels and wills, and has the power of

spontaneous expression of its thoughts and its volitions in action. In these two fundamental respects is spirit contrasted with matter.

Keeping now this great contrast in mind, we affirm that the Scripture teaches that the resurrection will consist in the investment of the soul with *a material organism*. Scripture does not tell us what kind of matter it shall be, or of what elements composed; to what extent refined, or attenuated, or how organized. All that it tells us in these regards is, that in these respects it shall be different from the present bodies; a fact which the apostle expresses by reminding us that there are terrestrial bodies, and also bodies celestial, such as we shall have. It shall, however—and this is very clearly taught—it shall be a material, substantial and tangible body: not a ghost or an illusion.

And on this too it is essential to insist. For there are many who will have it that all which is meant by the resurrection is the enfranchisement of the soul at death from its bodily tenement, and its entrance thereupon into a purely spiritual existence. But this is heathenism, and not Christianity. For in such a theory, as you will observe, matter has no place at all: spirit is everything. This theory is in this respect very closely akin to the Manichæanism of ancient times, or to the Brahminism of the modern time, and very far removed from Christianity.

How far from Scripture teaching it in fact is you will see when you remember the language that the apostle uses. We are told in so many words that it is the body—that which, when we bury our dead,

is sown in corruption—which is to be raised in incorruption. The resurrection is always represented not as something which takes place at death, when the soul is introduced into a new state of being, but as something which takes place later, and which *brings death to an end*. It is easy to see that this is what the apostle means ; for that which is to rise is said to be *that which died*, and that which died was not the soul, but the body.

But the circumstance which on this teaching that the resurrection is to be of a material body is most decisive of all is, that the believer's resurrection is said to be *like that of Christ*. The resurrection of Christ did not have to do with His human soul, but with His body. Had it been a resurrection of His soul, it should have been spoken of as having taken place at His death : but that was not at all the case. It was of the body laid in the tomb that the glorious words were spoken, " He is risen " : and the wonderful event took place three days after His death. The apostles made this very mistake which so many now make : it is said that when He appeared to them after His resurrection, they supposed that they had seen a spirit. But what did the Lord tell them ? He instantly corrected them, saying, " Touch me, and see : a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." There is, there can be, then, no question as to what for Christ the resurrection meant. And " these bodies of our humiliation," we are told, " are to be made *into the likeness of His Body of Glory*."

This second part of the Scripture teaching, then, is clear. That which shall arise when Christ returns

shall be not spirit, but body: a veritable body, such as that of Christ. To this also, as an essential element of God's truth in the Gospel, let us hold fast.

I ought, perhaps, to add, by way of further explanation and to avoid a totally erroneous conception of what I have been saying, that the Scripture does not teach that the self-same particles of matter which entered into that body which died shall be reconstituted into a new body. They teach, indeed, the full and complete identity of the body with that body which died; but it does not for a moment follow that the identity which is taught is an identity merely of a material sort. This, apparently, was just the mistake of those doubters in Corinth; and Paul hastens to correct their gross misconception by reminding them that when a man sows seed, although every seed springing up gets its own body, yet "that thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but mere grain." In one sense, that is, and in the deepest and most profound sense of essential identity, the body is the same; while in another sense it is not the same.

A large part of the difficulty which many conceive to lie in the idea of the resurrection of the body is in this direction; but such an imagination as this is no part of Scripture truth. But you ask, "If this is so, how *can* you rightly speak of the new body as the same body? The word 'same' is a word of very definite meaning and bears no loose and general constructions of its meaning." I will answer by asking another question. How can you rightly speak of the body which you have now as the "same" body that you had ten years ago, when

you know, as a physiological fact, that every material particle which at that time went to constitute it has in the meantime changed? Identity in organized structure, though it may be hard to define, does not consist in the identity of certain material particles. The new body shall be body, not spirit : it shall be the body that was sown, in one sense, and the truest sense ; in another, and superficial sense, it shall not be that body which was sown.

The last element in the Scripture doctrine of the resurrection is that the resurrection will be universal, "both of the just and of the unjust." Through that transcendent experience we are all to pass. Only we must not forget that, according to our Lord, there shall be one great difference, which He expressed in these words:—"They that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation."

On this dread mystery we cannot say much, where the Word of God is silent. "What," you ask, "will be the difference?" I do not know. One thing only I think we can say : that that law which holds good in everything else should be found to hold good in this case also—the law, that it is characteristic of sin that all good is by sin turned into evil. You cannot think of any good thing which God gives to the sinner which does not become for him, through his sin, an occasion of evil ; and that this is so is simply because all is misused when it is not used to serve God, and used in fellowship with God. So it must be in this case. There is no doubt that the resurrection of the body is in

itself a great blessing. It is so represented in the Scripture. Yet to the unjust it will not be a blessing. It cannot be a blessing to those who have never repented of sin and believed in Christ to the saving of their souls from sin. For such it can only be a resurrection "unto condemnation," as Jesus said.

Do not think of all this as a merely speculative subject. Seek to have it wrought into your experience till it becomes there a felt practical power. It was so of old. We are told in the New Testament that if men and feeble women endured torture and death and the spoiling of their goods, it was with this hope before them as an inspiration, "that they might obtain a better resurrection." If Paul was able to look on the world, its riches and honour and dignities, with utter indifference, or even contempt for all that they could give a man, it was, as he tells us, this coming resurrection which he had in view ; so that, knowing for a time the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, he might attain unto the resurrection from the dead. So also, when the Thessalonians stood weeping by the open graves of their loved ones, Paul pointed them again to the glorious resurrection of those loved ones, when Jesus comes, as their great consolation. You remember the words, familiar words to all those of us who, like those Thessalonian Christians, have ever buried those whom we loved in their life in this body, words which we heard then read as we stood beside that grave—

" I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not as the others, which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and

rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God ; and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : so shall we be ever with the Lord. *Wherefore comfort one another with these words."*

There is no doubt that just in proportion as this great hope is left out of its due place in our inner life and as an object of unshaken belief and expectation, and as a motive to action and self-denial for Christ, just in that proportion we lose spiritual power.

There is, no doubt, joy and consolation in the death of a believer ; for he departs to be with Christ, which is " very far better " than to be here. But before him there is yet what is better still, even to be raised from the dead, and still to be with Christ—yes, to be, as the apostle told the Thessalonians, "*for ever with the Lord!*" It is impossible that *death* should inspire us as resurrection can inspire those to whom it has become a living article of faith and hope.

Only never forget that even the re-embodiment in which the resurrection consists can prove a blessing only to the Christian. God grant—God has in His infinite grace and mercy already granted : let us, accepting the offer of His wondrous grace, grant even to ourselves—that through faith in Him who is " the Resurrection and the Life " this greatest consummation of our glorious hope may for none of us be transformed into the consummation of doom !

XVIII

“YE ARE COME . . . TO THE SPIRITS OF JUST MEN
MADE PERFECT.”—HEB. xii. 23.

IF time permitted, I should like to go into a detailed exposition of the magnificent passage of which these words form a part. I can at present barely call attention to the several portions of this enumeration. The passage is a part of a great argument, addressed unto all believers, to seek after sanctification. “Follow after sanctification, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

The first argument for this is contained in the words just quoted, that without, or apart from sanctification, there is no seeing the Lord. The second argument is found in the example of Esau, who for a momentary gratification of his appetite lost his birthright. And the third is, the most exalted and holy fellowship into which by faith we have come. “Ye are come unto Mount Zion,” the antitype of the earthly Zion, which was the typical abode of God; “and unto the New Jerusalem,” the antitype of the Jerusalem which is on earth, which is “the city of the living God, the city which hath foundations,” which cannot be moved; then—I prefer to follow Alford and Delitzsch—“to myriads,” innumerable hosts, the festive assembly (for that is what the word always means); the festive assembly which is constituted,

first, of the angels, second, of the Church of the First-born enrolled in the heavens (that is, the Church of believers on earth); and then, to God the Judge of all; and then, again, "to the spirits of just men made perfect"—the spirits of those believers who have been perfected through the various discipline and labour of this present life and have passed to the other side of the veil; and then "unto Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling," through which we have even here received absolution.

At this time I wish specially to call attention to the single point which is here brought out, as to the present condition of the departed—they are "made perfect"; and then, secondly, our present relation to them—"ye are come near unto" them.

In the first place, then, we have before us the teaching of these words as to the present condition of departed believers. They are described as "the spirits of just men made perfect." They are called "just" or "righteous," a word which has regard to their legal and judicial standing before God, and a word which is used no less to describe their standing here. They are righteous because they have received and are invested with the righteousness which is of God by faith. They are spirits, because they have for the time become divested of a material body; but they are perfected: that for which God called them and redeemed them, and that which, despite many a failure and discouragement, they ever sought to be, that they have now become; they are perfected.

Many in our day are asking the question, "Is

sanctification complete at death? Have we not rather to think of a gradual process, continuing the other side of the veil; continuing perhaps for years and centuries, as the result of which, and of which only, they shall at last be made perfect?" And now we will ask ourselves, "Is this so, or is sanctification completed at death for the believer?" Many are asking these questions, and none more earnestly than some who have the most eager aspirations after perfect holiness.

The Church of Rome, as I may remark in passing, has long answered this question in the negative, at least as regards the great majority of those who die in the Church; and her answer is the doctrine of purgatory. I need not here enter into any detailed disproof of this special Romish doctrine. It is enough to say that for any Scripture in support of it we shall look in vain: it is not to be found in Scripture, but in the traditions of the Church. And not only so, but the Scripture is decisive against it. There was, for instance, no purgatory for Paul; for he said that for him to depart was to be "with Christ," and "very far better" than to be here. Nor can any one say that this was because he was such an eminent saint as to be exempt from the necessity of further sanctification hereafter; for he declares it as a general truth, with regard to all believers, that "if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"; and still more plainly does he say that to be "absent from the body" is for the believer to be "at home with the

Lord." And if anything still more decisive should be desired by some, we certainly have it in those words which our dying Lord spoke to that dying robber on the cross, who all his life long had led a robber's life, yet repented before Christ upon the cross: "To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise!" For if this was true even of such as he, then surely there can be no exceptions to the blessed rule. Paradise is not a place of pain! The happy and instantaneous transition from the experience of sin and pain to the immediate presence of the Lord is not the rare and exclusive privilege of a few Christians of holiest lives and exceptional attainments in grace. Hence we may already conclude, even apart from the specific words of the text, that sanctification for the believer is certainly completed at death, in such a sense that the chastisement for our profit is no longer needed. For assuredly, if sin were still abiding in the soul, we cannot imagine that the chastisement would be withheld.

But if, in the light of these words of the Lord, purgatory at once appears an antisciptural invention of men, the same is no less true of such views as are again finding some support among Protestant Christians, who, while denying purgatory in the Romish sense, yet inconsistently deny complete freedom from sin at death. Even such unmistakably evangelical Protestants as Dorner, Martensen, and others err here. For if "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord," if "to depart is to be with Christ," surely then those words of the apostle John which he

spoke concerning the Second Advent apply also here: "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. But we know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is." Surely, one would think it impossible to escape the blessed conclusion from these words, that, since we shall immediately upon death be "with Christ," we shall therefore "see Him as He is"; and therefore, being made like Him, be freed from long-indwelling sin.

And this prepares us for the direct statement of the words before us, which verbally assure us as to the departed righteous, as to those who have been in this life justified by faith in Jesus Christ, that their spirits have been "made perfect." Let me here read for you the admirable comment of Professor Delitzsch—

"How admirably do the words 'the spirits of just men made perfect' follow the words 'God, the Judge of all!' For it is the spirits of the perfected *righteous* who are the chief witnesses to and partakers of the comfort derived from communion with the Righteous Judge. . . . Of these it is here taught that they are now 'spiritual beings,' freed from the assaults and defilements of the flesh; and 'perfected ones,' who have attained the end and purpose of their calling and their endeavours, the way of suffering along which they marched to reach it lying now for evermore behind them. . . . And this their perfection is the work of Christ, obtained by Him in the way of suffering and obedience for all who follow Him."

Such then is the thought which by these words we are authorized to have concerning those who have departed hence. They are "perfected" members of a "festal assembly," in the presence of the Holy and Most Loving God, the Judge of all,

and of Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant. Perfected! Then the process of sanctification ends with death.

But to this reason often objects that it is difficult to conceive that after battling vainly with sin, never extinct all our lives, such a tremendous change should all at once be wrought in the article of death. Some time, surely, must yet be required! To this we must answer that the question is one which is to be settled not by reason, but by Scripture. Of the mode of the existence of the disembodied spirit after death what we know apart from Scripture is nothing; and even Scripture teaches us but little. If, therefore, the Lord has indeed assured us that when we are with Him and see Him as He is we shall be like Him, we shall do well, ceasing our reasonings and our doubts, with thankful joy to accept the gracious word.

And yet, little as we know of the change which death brings in our mode and conditions of life, certainly Scripture, and even reason, reveals so much as to make this, after all, not seem so impossible as some imagine. For the regenerate man is one whose nature has been so changed by the new life from God, that his supreme love is centred on God and Christ. And if we ask why, in that case, he still sins, Scripture and experience unite in giving us three reasons and occasion of his sinning while still here in this world, each of which reasons ceases to exist when the believer leaves the body. These three reasons are, the presence of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The believer sins because he is in the world: a

world which is hostile to God, which is incessantly seducing the believer by its temptations, and which has this great advantage for the time now present, that in its temptations it holds before us that which can be seen and heard, whereas the verities of the spiritual world are unseen, matters of faith, not of sight. But when in death the believer leaves the world, the case is reversed; the verities of faith have now become the immediately present realities, and the sinful things of the world of sense are gone for ever. For the regenerate man, who all the time in his deepest soul desires not to sin, this is a change of condition which surely must have a very great significance in the matter of sanctification.

Then, again, the Scripture, in all that it has to say about the present imperfect spiritual life of the believer, lays much stress also upon the fact that as yet we have a body which is inherited under all the weakness and proclivity to sin which have come on it in consequence of the Fall. And to this fact also the Scriptures frequently call attention as helping to explain the present existence of sin in the believer. With matchless tenderness does our Lord refer to this, in those words touching the sinful sleep of His disciples in Gethsemane: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And the apostle Paul describes the believer as one who "delights in the law of God after the inward man"; but who nevertheless finds a "law," an evil order, established "in his members"—in the members, that is, of this body, the eyes, ears, hands, and so on—which brings him ever and anon "into captivity." But when death comes the members are

laid in the grave ; for “ this body is dead because of sin,” and corruption is its ordinary doom. What, then, but that with the “ members ” also “ the law of sin which is in the members ” exists for the believer no more ? Here, then, is another change in the moral situation, upon which we may confidently count in our thoughts upon this subject.

If we then add to these two facts the teaching of Scripture that Satan has access to this world only, and surely not to Paradise, where Christ went at His death, and where believers go to be with Him, then it certainly does not appear so unthinkable as some imagine, that for the believer sinning should end with dying.

Yet we shall no doubt be reminded, and with good reason, that, after all, the ultimate seat of sin is in the soul, and that we are conscious of sinful passions, such as envy, anger, unbelief and their like, which have no necessary connection with the existence and presence of either the world, the flesh or the devil, and which thus might well survive death. To this we have but to answer, that while the objection is true the word of the apostle John before quoted intimates the power which shall be found adequate to extinguish this sin still remaining in the soul, especially when thus at the same time all the outward incitements and occasions of sin are removed. “ We shall be *like Him*, for we shall see Him even as He is ! ” Blessed fact ! The immediate vision of the glorified Christ shall suffice to effect the extinction of sin in the believer !

For the benefit of any who imagine that all the deepest and truest theological thought in our day

comes from Germany, and that all Germans are at one with Dorner, in taking a quite different view of this matter, we may add the beautiful words of another recent German theologian on the precise point—

“ In this fire (of the beatific vision) sin is consumed, when we see the eye of God turned on us with a brightness and fulness of love that we could never have anticipated. Not that we behold God, but that He beholds us : that is what melts sin away. It is He Himself that refines the gold. What God requires, He also gives ; this truth has then and there, above, its most blessed fulfilment. . . . Therefore, whoever is so oppressed by daily experience of sin, that, spite of his feeling to grace, he can hardly think it possible for him to be blessed, may still venture to rejoice.”¹

And so, with the text and other words of Scripture so plainly before us, we may, despite any difficulties which any may have felt, confidently depend upon this, that he who departs this life in true penitence toward God and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, is “ perfected ” as regards his spiritual character at death. The words of our Catechism concerning this question need no revision—

“ The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness.”

This is true of those who have gone from this life in the true faith of Jesus Christ. And it shall be true, dear friends, for every one of us who has believed on Christ, and who as evidence of this fact can truly say that, although as yet consciously full of sin and imperfection, perfect conformity to the

¹ *Beyond the Grave*, by Dr. Hermann Cremer, Professor of Theology in the University of Greifswald, Trans. by S. T. Lowrie, D.D., p. 96.

most holy and blessed Will of God is yet the supreme desire of the heart. To such apply the words of the Lord's beatitude—

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

A certain limitation must indeed be placed on these words, which, however, only the more brightens our hopes for the future. For it needs to be carefully observed that when we say that sanctification is perfected at death this is said only in the sense in which that phrase is most commonly used, as regards the presence or absence of sin in the believer. The process of sanctification does end at death, in the sense that from the hour of death onward, through the infinite grace of God, all experience of sinning, as of temptation to sin, or of sin indwelling as a presence and power, is for the penitent believer ended for ever. But the question, “Does sanctification end at death?” may also as well be raised, as it often is, in another sense; as regarding, namely, the continued growth after death, in the life to come, of all holy graces of character.

Now, if we use the word “sanctification” in this sense, and ask the question with this intention, then the question must be given an opposite answer. It must then be replied, “Sanctification does not for the believer end with death: nor will it ever end. It is easy to see how, according to the Holy Scripture, this must be so. For even here the measure of the change begun in the Christian “from glory to glory” is the degree of clearness with which, though “in a mirror, darkly,” we here behold the glory of the Lord. And when Scripture

tells us, as it does tell us most clearly, of eternally progressive revelations, in "the ages that are coming upon us,"² of the infinite glory of God, what can we conclude, but that those whose transcendent privilege it shall be through free grace to enjoy this eternally unfolding vision of the boundless glory of the God of Holy Wisdom and Love shall still themselves continue from age to age to be changed ever from glory into glory after the same image, then even as now !

And so it is that either by a " Yes " or a " No " we may answer the question whether sanctification ends at death, according as we take the words in the one sense or in the other ; and in both cases alike find reason for a " Hallelujah ! " Sanctification does end at death, in that the last remnant of sin has thenceforth vanished from the soul : let us thank God for that ! And sanctification does not end at death, but we shall for ever and for ever grow more and more like Christ : let us also thank God for that ! For ever seeing God in Christ more and more clearly, we shall unto eternal ages grow more and more in the energy of a rapturous love, and the might of an invincible confidence in, and unfaltering obedience to Him, " the Only Wise God, our Saviour," the Most Loving and the Most Holy, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen !

On the other thought of the text I can barely touch. " Ye are come near " unto this festal assembly of the angels and of the church of the first-born, the spirits of just men made perfect !

² Eph. ii. 7 (Gr.).

“Ye are come near!” I cannot do better than quote the simple and yet profound comment of Bengel—

“There is described here the highly exalted state of believers under the New Testament in consequence of their communion with the Church made perfect and with Christ and God Himself. This access too, not less than the access to Mount Sinai, with which it is contrasted, is joined with the faculty of hearing, and that too in this life; although our approach is much more obvious to heavenly eyes than to ours that are still veiled; and brings along with it the best hopes for the future.”

There is a sense, then, it is here explicitly declared, in which the departed in Christ are near us, or rather we are near to them. The natural conception that they are removed from us to some immense distance is here forbidden. We are near them! In any case we are near to them in time, for where they are, there we soon shall be. But perhaps we are near them spatially—who knows? It needed only that Elisha should call upon God to open the eyes of the young man his companion that he should see the mountains round about Samaria full of chariots of fire and horses of fire, the multitude of the heavenly hosts keeping guard. The departed in Christ have passed into that spiritual world, which, according to the hints of Holy Scripture, seems to encircle, and even to interpenetrate this earthly world of sense throughout; and into which, except the Lord Himself return very soon, we shall every one in a short time enter.

“Fixed in their eternal state
They have done with all below :
We a little longer wait ;
But how little, none can know.”

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Let us then seek to take comfort of this thought, both as regards our own approaching departure and regarding those who, as to the body, are asleep in Jesus. For through faith in Jesus the great Mediator we are in a deep and true sense come near unto them, and shall soon be with them. For this mighty consolation let us ever give God thanks

XIX

“LET BOTH GROW TOGETHER UNTIL THE HARVEST.”—MATT. xiii. 30.

WE have here, so to speak, a history of the world in a single line. The words occur in a parable, our Lord's parable of the tares; but happily it is one of the parables which are explained for us by the Lord Himself. This shuts out all debate as to the possible or probable meaning of the terms that are employed in the course of the parable. We have simply to take the explanation of Jesus Himself as absolutely certain and final. Let us first, then, note the meaning of the terms used or implied in the text.

The wheat, the Lord tells us, represents the children of the kingdom; the tares, the children of the wicked one. The field in which these grow, according to the parable, is said to be the world. It is the more necessary to notice this last point, that we are so often told that the field here represents the visible Church, and that by consequence the parable teaches the mixed condition of the visible, external Church throughout this dispensation. But, as a matter of simple fact, the Lord, in giving to His disciples the explanation of the parable, did not say that the field is the Church. He said expressly that the field occupied

by the tares and the wheat was the *world*. While the mixed condition of the external Church is a fact, it is certain that there is no allusion to that fact in these words, or anywhere else in the parable. *The field is the world!* Let us hold fast to that fact at the outset.

The harvest, as Jesus tells us with equal plainness, is the end of the world. But the Greek word here rendered "world" is not now the same as before, but a wholly different word, denoting the world not as existing in space, but as existing in time. Hence the margin of the revised version gives the true translation of this second word as "age." The harvest is "the end of the age," of this present age or dispensation. Jesus describes it yet more fully in His interpretation of the parable as that time yet to come, when "the Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and gather out of His kingdom all things that do offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire."

Such, then, according to our Lord Himself, is the meaning of the terms used or referred to in the text. What, then, is the teaching of this passage? When we analyse it we find that it contains two affirmations. The first is this: that the two classes called wheat and tares, children of the kingdom and children of the evil one, will *coexist* in the world until the end of the present age; until, that is, the Son of Man comes again the second time for judgment. This, observe, is not our inference from the words. It is directly and explicitly taught by Jesus Himself in these words of

the parable, "Let both grow together until the harvest."

And this affirmation of the parable, again, involves two facts. Howsoever, on the one hand, wickedness may increase, it shall never so increase that there shall not be still in the world some of God's wheat, some of the children of the kingdom. And howsoever, on the other hand, the number of true Christians may at any time increase, they will never so increase as that before the harvest, which our Lord tells us is the end of the present age, all men shall be truly converted. There have, indeed, been a few who have taught differently, and who assure us that as the result of the preaching of the gospel now going on all men shall at last be truly converted. But this opinion is directly contradicted by the words of Jesus in the text. Until the harvest there shall be in this field of the world tares growing with the wheat. We are, no doubt, taught to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and this doubtless means that God's will shall yet be done by all, and be done perfectly by all, for that is the way in which God's will is done in heaven. And it is certain, too, that the will of God shall yet be done perfectly on the earth. The Lord would never have told us to pray for that which God never meant to grant. But from the text of this morning it is plain that this blessed issue for which we pray is not, in the Divine plan, to be reached in this present age. It will be after, not before, the harvest; after, not before, the Second Coming of the Son of Man. "Let both grow together until the harvest." So

it is written. Certainly, then, it is clear that until Jesus comes again there will continue to be in this world children of the wicked one, as now. Take that for settled truth.

This first affirmation of the parable has given us already very momentous information as to the future course of human history. Whatever progress there may be in many respects, improvement will never bring it about that there shall not be wicked men among the human race until Jesus Himself comes. There will always be some true believers in the world, but never until Jesus comes will all be true believers. But does the text teach anything more than this? That it does cannot be doubted. For, you observe, the text does not merely say, "Let both the evil and the good exist together until the harvest," but "Let both *grow* together until the harvest." This is a statement of still more moment than the last. Not only will the wheat exist in the world until the Lord comes, but it will *grow* till He comes. Not only will the tares, the children of the wicked one, exist in the world till the return of our Lord, but until He comes they will continue to *grow*. That, plainly enough, is what the Lord says. What does this mean?

Observe, first, that it is impossible to understand this of increase in numbers. It is doubtless true that there are more children of the kingdom, much more wheat in this field of the world now than when Christ spoke this parable, and there may very easily be many more than there are now before the Lord returns. And it is no less clear,

when we remember the immense increase in the population of the world, that the total number of the children of the wicked one also is much greater than when Christ spoke this parable. But however all this may be true, there is no reference here to any such increase in numbers.

When we say that the wheat in a field is growing, we do not by that mean that the number of wheat plants in the field is increasing. In that there is no change from the time when the seed is sown. When we say that the wheat in the field is growing we mean that each plant, and therefore the whole field of wheat, is becoming taller and stronger, and is progressing toward full seed-bearing. After this manner, then, must we understand the statement of the text. Growth in character is the reference intended, not growth in number.

Observe, again, that in this parable, as in most prophecy, no account is taken of time. The Lord surveys human history in its totality from His own day to the end, from His first to His second coming. As a matter of fact, the individuals who successively in the course of this age make up the wheat and the tares that are in the field of the world are continually passing away, and others are taking their places. But through it all the general character of the world, as a field of mingled wheat and tares, remains the same. And it is without any reference to these individual changes that our Lord is speaking. The total number of the children of the kingdom from the first to the second advent He calls wheat; the total number of the children of the wicked one, from the first

to the second Advent, He calls tares. And it is thus regarding the world as bounded in time by the two Advents that Jesus makes the broad declaration, "Let both grow together until the harvest."

The predicted growth, then, denotes development of character. It does not refer primarily to the development of character in individual men, but to the development of each type of character in collective humanity. In order that we may understand this better, let us recur for a moment to the imagery of the parable.

We know of the Palestinian plant which is here called tare, that when it first comes up it is so nearly like wheat that it is almost impossible to tell the one from the other. But as they grow the real character of each comes out every day in a greater and greater degree, until at last, when the ear is put forth and the seed is ripe, the true nature of each, and the utter difference between them, are completely revealed. So it shall be in the field of the world, Jesus tells us. The same law will hold good. God's wheat will grow; that is, until the harvest the true inner nature of God's wheat will be ever more and more completely revealed; until the end of the present age the true nature of the children of the kingdom, their Divine, Christ-like character, will obtain as the years roll on more and more complete manifestation. This of the wheat. But the same, Jesus tells us, will be true of the tares also. The true character of the natural sinful man, of those whom our Lord calls tares, will in like manner appear ever more

and more fully and clearly until the dispensation ends.

If there shall be, therefore, an ever-increasing power of righteousness among those who are—not in profession, but in reality—God's own people, so there shall be, on the other hand, as the ages roll on, an ever-increasing manifestation of wickedness on the part of those who are not the children of God, but the children of the wicked one. And you will observe that it is expressly said by Christ that this growth, this development of character in each class as such, shall continue in the history of the world until the Second Advent. From this it follows that by the time of the coming of the Son of Man the world shall see, on the one hand, such a manifestation of God-like righteousness and holiness and martyr fidelity to truth among those who are members—not of visible churches merely, but of Christ Himself, as shall never have been seen before in history ; and, on the other hand, among those who are not true Christians such a manifestation of God-defying sin as never before in history. As never before it then shall appear what righteousness really is. And never will it have appeared so clearly as then what sin really is. The one shall prove itself truly God-like, the other truly diabolic.

To two very common errors this teaching of Christ stands opposed. There are those, first, who are wont to sum up their view of the future by saying, without any qualification or limitation, that we have nothing to look for till the Lord comes but constantly increasing evil. This an-

ticipation is false alike to Scripture and to history. As for the Scriptures, they uniformly represent the later years of the history of the earth before the Advent as marked by a great increase of missionary activity. The Gospel is to be preached, as the age draws to its close, among all the nations of the world, and that too with effect. A people is thereby to be gathered out, "a multitude," we are told, "which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues," who in blood-washed robes shall stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion. And such evangelistic activity as this, which shall be far beyond anything that the world has yet seen, implies of necessity a corresponding increase of Christian intelligence and sympathy with Christ and holy zeal and activity in His service. It involves a far larger and grander devotion on the part of true believers to this work of spreading the Gospel, a more full and whole-hearted devotion of their persons and their wealth than we have ever seen. Now, more than anything else, perhaps, does the increase of this missionary spirit mark a development of that which is most Christ-like in Christian character. To give our means largely to this work, to give our very lives to it, is in the closest way possible to imitate Christ in that which was the most distinctive feature of His character, in that He came into the world expressly to seek and to save that which was lost. That the Christ-like spirit shall in this eminent respect show itself more and more fully to the end is as plainly the teaching of other Scriptures as it is clearly implied in the words of the

text. Any view of the future, therefore, which leaves out this element is false to this text and to all other passages of Scripture on the subject. And, naturally, it is equally false to history; for history is but prophecy fulfilled and fulfilling, even as prophecy is but history written beforehand, and surely it is plain from history that the wheat of God has been growing. I am making no reference now to growth of the Church in numbers. Such growth, as we have seen, is quite aside from the scope of this parable, which makes no allusion at all to the proportion of wheat and tares in the field at any given time. But certainly history does show that, making all allowance for seasons of apparent pause, or even of seeming retrogression, the true character of God's wheat has, on the whole, in the history of the true Church, been coming to view more and more clearly as the centuries have passed. Let us only remember, in judging this matter, that the question is not as to the visible Church. We repeat, that to the visible Church there is in this parable no reference. Fix your eyes instead upon those who in all ages and in all Churches, Protestant, Greek and Roman, have been beyond all doubt of God's very wheat, and say whether in this goodly body of all true believers we cannot clearly see marks of continuous growth.

If, indeed, we should look at the state of the visible Church in the dark ages, for example, we might say that the wheat did not grow. But then the members of the visible Church, as such, are not the wheat of the parable. To see the wheat

of those days let us look to such as the Paulicians, the Vaudois, the Albigenses, the Huguenot confessors, the Lollards of England, and the brave Covenanters of Scotland. Looking at these, must we not say that through all those dreary centuries God's wheat in the field of the world was plainly growing? Had there ever before been a time when it looked so green and flourishing as then? "More so," you ask with doubt, "than in the primitive Church?" Yes, I dare to say, more even than then. For you may be sure that it took more of grace to resist the evil power of the devil when it came, as in those days, with the false pretence of being the voice of the Lord through His viceregent the Pope of Rome, than when in the earlier days it spoke in its true character in the deadly mandates of a Nero, a Decius, or a Diocletian.

Or take again, as an illustration, the history of our own time. In many directions we can see wickedness enough, no doubt; but is that all? Look at the immense increase in the missionary work. See how thousands of devoted men and women are on the foreign field, where at the beginning of the century there were but tens. See how each year millions of money are given for the extension of the Gospel where Christ is not yet preached, where only hundreds were given but a hundred years ago. In this, the most conspicuous feature of the history of the Church in this century, we have surely luminous evidence that the wheat is growing. That which is most Christ-like in character is manifesting itself in the

lives of God's people as never before in the history of the Church. I repeat, then, that history witnesses to the truth of the Lord's prediction in the text; the wheat of God has been growing, and is growing still. Shall it continue so to grow? Undoubtedly; for "grow until the harvest" is the word of Christ.

It follows from this that, though we have seen great things, we shall yet see greater: greater manifestations of grace, greater triumphs of the cross, greater manifestations of holiness, of God-serving righteousness and of self-denying consecration to Christ than the world has ever yet seen; always more and more and more until the harvest, until the Church shall be in some true sense ripe for glory, and the Lord shall come in the clouds to take her in resurrection to Himself. Those, then, who teach that we have nothing to anticipate but a growing increase of wickedness until the Lord comes are simply mistaken, misunderstanding the word of God.

And yet, on the other hand, the text condemns no less clearly the error of others, the opposite error, that not only is righteousness to grow and increase in power of manifestation, but also wickedness shall ever grow less and less, and weaker and weaker, till at last, and before the coming of the Lord, the children of the wicked one shall be—if not all converted, yet to all intents a vanquished host. This is a doctrine no less one-sided than the former. It is, equally with the other, in direct contradiction to Scripture and to history. The very sentence in which the Lord assures us that

the wheat shall grow until the harvest He tells us also that the tares too shall grow until the harvest. You cannot take the one thought out without taking out the other also. "Let *both* grow *together* until the harvest."

Remember that here also we are not for a moment to think of the question of the relative number of the tares and the wheat at any given time. The growth, it is clear, must be understood of the tares in the same sense in which it is understood of the wheat, as of a continually increasing development of character. That is, as the progress of human history ever reveals more and more clearly the true nature of righteousness in the lives of God's children, so, the Lord assures us, the true nature of sin shall also reveal itself in ever-increasing clearness in the tares, the children of the wicked one, as the ages roll on until the end shall come.

This is not, indeed, necessarily to say that sin in its grosser, more sensual, and more revolting forms shall increase. That is a separate question, and one on which the parable teaches nothing. What the parable does teach is that, as history goes on, it shall ever become more and more apparent what sin really is, and what it really means. The real essence of all sin, the apostle John assures us, is lawlessness:¹ the repudiation of the law of God as the rule of life, and the setting up instead of the will of man as a law unto itself. Sin, therefore, everywhere and always, really aims at the dethroning of God! It is the attempt of impotent folly to overturn the moral government of the

¹ Greek *ἀνομία*, 1 John iii. 4.

world. This, however, is not yet clearly perceived by all, whether saints or sinners, for sin is deceitful. The devil disguises the real nature and issue of sin even from many of his most faithful servants. Thus do we constantly see men sinning with a high hand and all the while professing the most profound reverence for the Supreme Being. Many, again, imagine that sin is merely an evil done to the creature, to ourselves or to others, and at the most a disorder in the relations of man to man; and then hasten to infer that because those relations are now improved over what they have been in earlier periods of the history of the race, therefore the power of sin is weakening. Multitudes do not yet see clearly that in every act of sin men really, though it be blindly, strike directly at the throne of the Most High.

The true nature, therefore, of those tares which so cumber God's wheat-field is not by many fully recognized. So the case stands even to our day. But the Lord assures us in the text that as the ages pass this real nature of all sin shall ever become more and more fully apparent. The tares shall grow! Wickedness may, or may not, increase in *extent*. Many forms of wickedness, such as have more immediately to do with the relations of man to man, may conceivably, under the influence of civilization and culture and an enlightened prudence regarding temporal interests, grow less, or even in some cases disappear. About that I do not know anything. But this the text does teach, that whatever changes in the form of wickedness there may be, they will be such as to bring out

ever more and more distinctly its essentially diabolic, God-denying character. Even although the proportion of the converted to the unconverted should greatly increase, which may easily be, yet wickedness in those who remain unconverted will ever become more and more intense in its God-defying and law-rejecting spirit. This is what Jesus clearly means when He says that the tares shall "grow until the harvest."

And do you not see that what Jesus Christ predicts in this is only what by the very laws of our nature really must needs be? This is so first, because by every successful resistance to good the will becomes more hardened to evil; secondly, because the greater the power of the motives and the light of the evidence upon Christ's side, the more will be the force of the will required to hold out against all in opposition to God; and lastly, because if, as Christ elsewhere tells us, it is of the nature of sin that the sinner hates the light of righteousness and truth, and if, as we have learned, the ages are to see an ever-increasing might of righteousness in the lives of God's people, then plainly this will bring out in just the same proportion the inborn hatred of the natural, sinful man to the righteousness of God's kingdom.

Even in the parable itself is the necessity of the case hinted at, not obscurely. For we cannot but remember that the same rain and sunshine which make the wheat to grow make the tares to grow also, and it is even so in the spiritual field. The same persuasive power of Christ's love, ever more and more fully and broadly preached, and thus

converting more and more as the centuries go by, also hardens more and more all those who still hold out against it. The fuller the evidence of the truth and the gospel's holy benevolence, and, by consequence, the fuller the evidence of the essential falsehood and malignity of all sin, the greater must needs be the power of the word to save, and the greater also its power to make still more obdurate those who still refuse to submit themselves to the way of God which His word reveals.

Thus, in our age, the evidence of the divine truth of the Gospel has been increased, and is still increasing with every new discovery, in a way which is truly astonishing even to the Christian believer. Hence all the more the Word of God has free course and is glorified. Hence also all the greater force of will is needed to resist with success this ever-growing power of the truth. And so it comes to pass of necessity that the man who in this age holds out against all this light, however educated, however polished, and however moral he may be, must in the very nature of the case become a more hopelessly incorrigible rebel against God than those could become who rejected saving truth in the earlier ages. So from these laws of our nature we might know, even if Jesus had told us nothing of the future, that as the evidence should become more and more luminous and unanswerable that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Christ of God, so the more in the nature of the case must sin tend to throw off all disguises, and to assert itself ever more and more in its real character, as direct and conscious and wilful antagonism

to Him that sitteth upon the throne and to the Lamb.

Yes, the laws of human nature make it necessary that the tares must grow. And when we look around, is not this illustrated to us by the events of our age in a very solemn manner? If, as we have seen, there is abundant evidence that in our day God's wheat is grandly growing, is there not as much and as clear evidence that the tares are also growing? Is it not a fact that wickedness is in our day becoming more outspoken and more defiant in its conscious opposition to God than ever before?

There have been, for example, atheists and pantheists in all ages; but when has the world seen an atheism so intensely propagandist, so malignant in its conscious hatred to the truth, so audacious in its blasphemies of the Most High, as that which is asserting itself throughout Christendom in our times? Safe it is to say that never in history has sin come so near as it has in our day to throwing off every veil and pretext and boldly avowing its real intent to overturn and to put an end to the government of God and of His Christ among the nations. So it is also with our modern pantheism, from Spinoza down. If more cultured and courteous in its tone, none the less deadly is its hate toward the rule of a personal, almighty, and most holy God on earth; and none the less emphatic its blasphemous deification of man. Surely there is evidence more than enough before our very eyes to show us that, as the Lord foretold, the tares are growing: that wickedness, whether

or not it be increasing in extent, is increasing in intensity, and is showing more and more clearly its real character as hatred of God and of His Son.

Do you ask for more specific proof? Surely we have it on every side! It appears in the extensive acceptance of theories of ethics which are *avowedly* intended to dispense with the authority of God. It appears in the general recklessness of the restraints of the Divine law, even in matters wherein formerly those who were not Christians have heartily accepted the law of God, as in laws concerning marriage and divorce. It appears, again, in regard to the attitude toward property right; not merely in disregard of the rights of property in isolated and individual cases, which the world has always seen, but in the multitude of socialistic and communistic schemes which are loudly urged in our day, and which practically propose to organize the discontented for a general nullification of the eighth commandment, denying the right to own capital, and, under pretext of elevating the poor, denying to the industrious, skilful and economical poor man the right to enjoy the fruit of his pre-eminence above his fellows in these respects. In former days, again, authority as divinely given was abused; that was bad. But worse still is the widespread *denial* in our day of authority as divinely given. Then, again, while there was, no doubt, fearful wickedness and cruelty of persecution in the days of the Reformation and before, there was in it all this great and signal difference from the wickedness of to-day, that all then was done not in avowed opposition to God,

but in the belief of the persecuting church that she was doing God service. Such also was the case of Saul of Tarsus. But the wickedness of to-day makes no such pretence. It is fast throwing off all disguise, and with startling frequency, in the persons of its Ingersolls, its Bakunins and others, boldly declares that the war is to the bitter end against the Lord, and against His Christ, and against the Lord's people.

History, then, witnesses no less to a growth of the tares than to a growth of the wheat. Not righteousness only, but also sin, is revealing more and more its own inner nature, and the children of the wicked one are showing more and more clearly their real nature and intention, namely, to assail the throne of God, and crucify His Son afresh. This is what we were to expect. And for how long ?

For how long ? "Till the harvest," answers the Lord Himself. When the Saviour came the first time into the world we are told that He came "in the fulness of time." And when He shall come again, that also shall be "in the fulness of time." In the very word "harvest" this is intimated. Christ will come when the wheat of God is ripe, and He will come when the devil's tares are ripe. For in the spiritual, as in the natural field, the wheat and the tares ripen at the same time. The Lord Jehovah told Abraham that He deferred the judgment of the Amorites four hundred years because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full. And so still He defers His coming for judgment because the tares are not yet ripe for the burning—because the wickedness of the world

as, also, indeed the righteousness of His people, is not yet full. Archbishop Trench, in his Notes on the Parables, has admirably summed up the teaching of the text in words which I commend to your attention.

“ We learn that evil is not, as so many dream, gradually to wane and to disappear before the good, the world before the Church, but is ever to develop itself more and more fully, even as on the other side good is to unfold itself more and more mightily also. Thus it will go on till at last they stand face to face each in its highest manifestation, in the persons of Christ and of the antichrist ; on the one hand an incarnate God, on the other the man in whom the fulness of the Satanic power shall dwell bodily. Both are to grow, evil and good, till they come to a head, till they are ripe, one for destruction, the other for full salvation.”

The lessons of this subject are self-evident. In the first place the words of Christ rebuke and should silence all baseless fears because of increasing wickedness. Let no one, because iniquity and unbelief abound, on that account fear lest the true Church of Christ be in danger of perishing. Certain denominations may perish ; to any one of them there is no promise. But, whatever may become of any of them, there will always be a people in the world to testify for Christ, and for the ancient faith and hope of His Church. And not only this, but their testimony, in word and life, shall ever become wider and stronger and clearer and louder, as the years go by and the end of the age approaches, until at the last Jesus shall come again. The wheat shall grow until the harvest.

The parable no less truly rebukes all false hopes,

so common with many in our day, as if we might for an instant hope to see in the present dispensation the church triumphant over the power of the devil, or to see evil at least suppressed if not destroyed. The parable tells us in so many words that this shall not be so. Not only are the tares to *exist* in the world until the harvest, but they are to grow until the harvest. Not days of ease and triumph are before the church, but days of conflict, fiercer and more soul-trying than she has ever seen. How, indeed, can it be otherwise? For if the righteousness is to grow, and the wickedness also is to grow, then plainly more outspoken and more terrible must the opposition between these two become as the growth on either side goes on. Whatever any in their short-sighted ignorance may imagine to be expedient, of *compromise* with the world in the hope of winning over the children of the wicked one, the days are coming when no sane man will longer talk of this. The day is coming when every mask shall be thrown off, and sin shall appear as sin really is. Then the word shall be simply, "Christ or antichrist"; to be for God wholly and without compromise, or to be against Him in avowal and in avowal with the devil. To dream, therefore, of any cessation of the present conflict before the Lord comes is directly in the face of this text. There is need that many should be reminded of those words of Luther: "Some say that before the last day the whole world shall have become Christian. This is a falsehood forged by Satan, that he might darken sound doctrine." So also said grand old John Knox: "To reform the face

of this whole world never was, nor yet shall be, till that righteous King and Judge shall appear for the restoration of all things."

And has not the truth of the text a very solemn and searching *personal* application? That which is true of the tares collectively is true of every tare individually, and that which is true of the children of the kingdom is true of every single child of the kingdom. Growth is a law of life. It is a law of the life in God. It is equally a law of the life in sin. And it is as with the wheat and the tares in the field: the very same influences which make the wheat grow make also the tares to grow. The truth which, if from the heart you receive it and obey it, saves you and makes you more like Christ; that very truth, if you do not believe it and obey it, makes you more the child of the wicked one and the slave of him in sin than you were before. In the spiritual life, as in the natural life, there is no standing still. Are you growing in grace, dear Christian friend? If you know that by your Master's grace you are, then be encouraged. Or if you cannot see any growth, and yet do long to grow, and are abiding in Christ by a living faith, yet still have courage, for the Word is that all God's wheat *shall grow*, and shall surely ripen at last for the heavenly garner.

But if you are not of the wheat; if in your heart you know that you have never broken with sin and believed on Christ; then, dear friend, how can you escape the awful conclusion that you belong to those whom He calls "the tares, the children of the wicked one"? Whatever, then, Jesus said

of the tares in the field is true of you. Except for you that regenerating miracle shall be wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit of God Himself, you are growing not in grace, but in sin ; not in likeness to Christ, but in likeness to Satan, the wicked one. Every day that you have put off repentance and faith you have been *growing* in sin. Do you doubt this ? Look back ! Is it a fact that you have not changed ? Is it not a fact that appeals which touched your heart years ago you now can hear without emotion ? Do you pray now as you did when you were a little child at your mother's knee ? Or has not the habit of prayerlessness been growing on you now for years ? Do not answer *me* ; answer to your own self, in awful sincerity, these questions. Hard as your heart has grown already, it will grow still harder. Difficult as it is to repent and turn now, it will but grow the more and more difficult as the years of your brief earthly life pass by, till at last you also shall be judged by the Master of the harvest-field to be ripe, ripe not for full redemption, not for the garner, but for the eternal fire. To-day, then, O *to-day* if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. Behold, *now* is the accepted time ; *now* is the day of salvation !

XX

“WHAT MANNER OF COMMUNICATIONS ARE THESE THAT YE HAVE ONE TO ANOTHER, AS YE WALK AND ARE SAD ?”—LUKE xxiv. 17.

SOMETIMES men are glad when they ought to be sad : these were sad when they ought to have been exceedingly glad. Let us look into this more closely. Why was this ? Why were these men sad ? And how was it that their sadness was groundless ? We shall find here lessons for our instruction.

The disciples whom the Lord met after His resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, were sad, in general, because of the terrible tragic death which had overtaken Him who had been their dearest friend. Jesus, the Christ, had been *crucified*. But still more were they sad because that death meant *a terrible disappointment*. “We trusted,” said one of them in reply to Christ’s question, “that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.” Ah, yes : if they had been right, that would have been a good reason for sadness the most extreme ! It was the sadness of a terrible disappointment.

In this day of ours there is much sadness of this kind. Let me read to you the words of “Physicus,” the English scientist and philosophic thinker who wrote, under that pen-name, “A Candid Examination of Theism.” The author of this able treatise

had in all sincerity felt himself compelled to give up his former faith in a personal, supreme God, and to abandon in its entirety the theistic position, convinced by the teachings of the agnostic Herbert Spencer. Writing this book, he sets forth his new position, and in the closing words he expresses the feelings of not a few noble natures in this our day :—

“ If it had been my lot to have lived in the last generation, I should have felt that the progress of physical knowledge could never exert any other influence on theism than that of ever tending to confirm more and more that magnificent belief, by continuously expanding our human thoughts into progressively advancing conceptions, ever grander and yet more grand, of that tremendous Origin of things, the Mind of God. Such would have been my hope ; such would have been my prayer. But now how changed ! Never in the history of man has such a terrific calamity befallen the race as that which all who look may now behold advancing as a deluge, uprooting our most cherished hopes, engulfing our most precious creed, and burying our highest life in mindless desolation. Science, whom erstwhile we thought a very angel of God, pointing to that great barrier of Law, and proclaiming to the restless sea of changing doubt, ‘ Thus far shalt thou go, but no farther ; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed ’—even Science herself has thrown down that trusted barrier. . . . I am far from being able to agree with those who affirm that the twilight doctrine of the new faith is a desirable substitute for the waning splendour of the old. I am not ashamed to confess that, for me, with this virtual negation of God the universe has lost its soul of loveliness ; and although from henceforth the precept to work while it is day will doubtless but gain an intensified force from the terribly intensified force of the words, ‘ The night cometh, when no man can work,’ yet when at times I think, as think at times I must, of the appalling glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as I now find it—at such times I shall ever find it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is susceptible.”

Even if they go not so far as “ Physicus,” yet

there are many who, not having renounced the belief in the existence of God, have yet come to doubt concerning Jesus of Nazareth whether He really was that which is written : whether He ever did come out of that unknown Judæan grave. And here too we must confess, that if it is not so, if in very truth Christ be not risen, then Christianity is an imposture (for there is no alternative), "our faith is vain," and "we are of all men most miserable." And many are to-day thus bewildered by the loud and ever bolder assertions made by a criticism which, if it has lost faith in the infallibility of the Word of God, has at least gained a proportionate faith in its own.

But observe next, that though the two disciples were so sad, owing to having lost their dearest friend, and though the transcendent bitterness of their dejection was due to the terrible disappointment that it involved, that for which they were so sad was *not a fact after all!* Jesus was *not* dead, but *risen!* And not only so, but at that very time they were actually with Him—with that very Lord and Friend whose death they were mourning—though "their eyes were holden, that they did not know Him."

And so it is now with many and many a saddened believer, whose heart of hearts is truly full of love and loyalty to Christ, but who fears because of the clamour of unbelief. That because of which they are sad is after all not a fact. Jesus is risen! Yes, and even more than that: He is with them now, even in their very doubt, though their eyes are holden, that they perceive Him not.

And now observe, yet again, this also. That by occasion of which they were so sad, however in itself tragic, contained within it the seed and fruitful germ of an eternal joy. For in it was the atonement of all their sins: the eternal triumph over death, not only of Him who had died and risen again, but for those very ones, so sad as they were, who walked with Him.

This fact, also, bears its message of comfort for us who have owned Christ in the present. That in the world which makes us sad within ourselves, giving rise sometimes to doubts as if the Lord were no more, not only is no occasion for sadness, but really contains the seed of a joy, which shall endure for ever. "Your *sorrow* shall be turned into joy." Sorrow and sadness in this life and age not only are not inconsistent, then, with the fact that Christ was He who should redeem us, but are the actual evidence of that fact.

Now let us notice together a further fact, and one that is full of the richest of instruction for our minds and hearts. *If they had known the Scriptures better, they would not have been sad.* This is the real and fundamental trouble with very, very many of those who are sad in this our day—sad because of the doubts which scepticism has engendered, sad because of the progress of defiant unbelief. For their sadness there is one great reason. They are sad, because they so imperfectly know the Scripture. If they knew better the Scriptures of God, they would see in them such a light on all their darkness that, even though they might continue as unable as now to answer the difficulties doubt suggests,

they would abide unshaken in faith. That was the case with those disciples, after they had seen and talked with the risen Christ, and after He had "interpreted to them in all the *Scriptures* the things concerning Himself." They might have been still, as we are now, wholly unable to resolve the difficulties connected with the idea of the resurrection of the dead to life, but once having seen and talked with the risen One, no such difficulties would disturb them.

And yet these disciples had had every opportunity for knowing the Scriptures. How came it that they did not know that which would have totally dispelled their sadness had they known it? The question asked serves to remind us of a further point: that *a man may have the greatest possible advantages for knowing the Scriptures and yet not know them*; he may fail to profit by these advantages and because of this be sad. You have said: "Ah, I know the Scriptures well; I have had the most careful instruction in them; but that does not remove my sadness. My sadness cannot be from lack of knowledge." But say not that: consider the case of the apostles. The apostles had been for three years in constant companionship with the Son of God Himself, the One who spake as never man spake, and taught as never man taught; and yet, despite all this, they had not yet understood the Scriptures, even fulfilling before their eyes; and of their sadness this was the cause. The rulers, also, the scribes and Pharisees, had a familiarity with the letter of the Scriptures which was simply amazing. They could tell you how many

letters there were in the sacred books ; they could give a profound reason why such and such a letter was large or small or turned upside down ; they knew all the commentators from the days of Ezra. And yet, because they knew not the Scriptures, because they knew not the words of the prophets which were read in their synagogues every Sabbath day, they fulfilled them in condemning Christ. So the disciples also, who had enough spiritual vision to have recognized in Jesus the Messiah so long as He was with them, had yet never been able to understand that the Christ must suffer, that He must be crucified—though that was predicted ; and even when He rose from the dead, though according to Christ that also was in the prophets, they had never been able to see it.

What, then, is the very practical lesson which we glean at this point ? It is this. We observe in the light of these facts, that it need not disturb the faith of a Christian much when he is told that many learned modern Rabbis have searched the Scripture through, with a zeal and learning beyond praise, and with a carefulness which is absolutely microscopic, and are able to find in them no Christ, no sign of foreknowledge or of plenary inspiration. Many are greatly troubled in our day, when they hear so much of the revolutionary conclusions of what is called “ higher criticism,” but it is without reason. It appears from what we have learned, that it does not follow that mere learning and research, matchless opportunities for understanding the Scripture when used with the utmost care, shall *secure* that a man shall understand them.

The situation depicted in the passage we have been studying is strikingly illustrated, again, in our own day. Before our eyes are even now fulfilling prophecies of both the Old and the New Testaments, on a scale unsurpassed and with a conspicuous visibility which has never been exceeded ; and yet multitudes even of Christian ministers say that they do not see it. The Gospel being everywhere preached ; the long scattered and down-trodden Israel returning by tens of thousands to their own land, and therewith also falling under the shadow of that predicted time of tribulation "such as never was since there was a nation," which was foretold centuries ago by the prophets in that same connexion ; unbelief increasing in extent and in perilousness, as in the aggressiveness and defiance of its tone—and yet, what do we see ? Even Christian ministers and learned university professors, with these things before their very eyes and with an open Bible on their table, denying that there is any such thing as true prediction ; or else, if not denying this in theory, yet seeing no special significance in these facts, as furnishing the most conspicuous proof possible of the plenary inspiration of the ancient Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and also as a witness that the appointed "times of the Gentiles" are fast drawing toward their predicted close in blood and fire, in judgment, grace and glory !

So also many Christians are saddened and greatly alarmed by the amazing increase of an aggressive and learned and an unlearned and brutal scepticism and antichristianity ; and the reason for their alarm

and sadness is, that they know the Scriptures so imperfectly, and fail to realize that this very thing was predicted in the inspired Word, and predicted as to be characteristic of these very times in which we are now living. In point of fact there had been, in all the previous history of Christ's ministry, no hour which, had the disciples understood the Scriptures, was so adapted to *confirm* their faith, as that agonizing time when they saw Him crucified. But as it was, they lost heart: they read in the crucifixion only the disappointment of their dearest hopes, and they were broken-hearted. Just so now, many are distressed, and scarcely dare to be sure that a wise man may really any longer hold fast his faith in the Scriptures, and in the Deity, the death and the resurrection of Christ, when so many wise and learned men are, on alleged scientific grounds, denying it. But if we knew the Scriptures, this increase of unbelief would not only not diminish faith, but would become an occasion of its greatest triumph. And the reason is simply this: that the Scriptures constantly represent this very thing as the foreseen issue of the universal preaching of the Gospel—increasing opposition and rejection quite along with the world-wide out-gathering of the countless multitude to stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion. There must be heresies. "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets who shall deceive, if it were possible, the very elect." Nor was this a prediction for Israel alone. "The day of the Lord shall not come except there come the apostasy first" is as plain a Scripture as we have in the Bible. These things are true,

and we see their fulfilment before our eyes ; and yet how many professed Christians, if they do not absolutely give up their faith, yet, as they walk with one another like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, are sad, because they fear that hope is perishing.

Yes, the precise experience through which the church in all lands is passing in respect of the trial of her faith is a striking illustration of the truth which is brought before us in this Scripture, that men may have the greatest advantages for understanding the Scriptures, and yet fail to understand them, and because of this either go on into fatal sin, as did the Jewish rulers, or else lose their courage and their joy together, strangely enough, on account of the very things which, had they understood the Scriptures, would have increased them.

A last from this passage in its connexion is this : that in order to escape from the sadness which so often oppresses many thoughtful souls by the understanding of the Scriptures—in order to discern aright their teachings, or even to discern the very matter of fact of the present fulfilment of their predictions, there is needed, not only by unbelievers, but no less by true disciples, a special operation of the power of the risen Christ. For so we read of these two disciples : “ *Then opened He their understandings,* that they might understand the Scriptures.” He did this not by revealing new truth which was not hitherto in the Scriptures which they possessed, but by opening their minds to discern what had been there all the time.

Ah, that is what we all need, especially in these

days when faith is so often sorely tried by the defiant confidence of a self-sufficient science and criticism. Let us then all join in the prayer, "Lord, open Thou our eyes! Thou art doubtless in the Scriptures, but we are dim of sight, and cannot discern Thee clearly. Give to us such a clearing of our spiritual vision that we shall see Thee everywhere in Thy Word: in the Pentateuch, Christ; in Samuel, the Kings and the Chronicles, Christ; in the Prophets and in the Psalms, Christ, no less than in the Gospels and Epistles; always the same Christ!"

Oh, it makes the wonderful difference to have the eyes opened! The man who sees but very imperfectly may indeed discern the reality of the sun, as he rises into the heavens turning night into day. But what a new revelation of beauty when the man's eyes are perfectly cleared, so as to see the sun, the one, incomparable, glorious sun, reflected in every dew-drop on every blade of grass, and on every leaf of every tree! Even so when the eyes are opened to see Christ, the one, incomparable Sun of Righteousness, reflected in every chapter, as it were, almost in every verse, of the whole Word of God; so that the Word written appears everywhere luminous with the glory and light of the Word Incarnate, the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Saviour! But for this it is necessary that Christ Himself shall open the eyes—yes, even of critics and learned professors.

And when the eyes thus are opened, then sadness no more! Then for sadness comes joy, a joy unspeakable and full of glory! For so it is written

later in the experience of these disciples that, having seen the once crucified but now risen One ascend, they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were daily in the temple, blessing and praising God."

XXI

“BEHOLD I HAVE TOLD YOU BEFORE.”—

MATT. xxiv. 25.

THE most momentous event in the past history of our race has been the manifestation upon earth in human nature, by holy incarnation, of the pre-existent Son of God, even Him by whom all things were created, visible and invisible ; that He might make His soul an offering for sin, and so become the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Even the sturdiest unbelievers confess, and must confess, that the appearing of Jesus Christ in Palestine has proved to be a turning-point in human history. It was a crisis which, for its immense and far-reaching moral significance in the transformation of individuals and of whole races, stands absolutely solitary in human history.

This undoubted and undenied fact lends the most impressive weight to the other fact, that before this same Jesus Christ left the world by death, resurrection and ascension, He repeatedly said that at some time in the future He would return to this world ; not, indeed, as then, in lowliness and humiliation, but in power and great glory : and that as His first coming, so, even more (if it were possible) His Second Coming would prove of the most overwhelming and far-extending import, both for the world at large and for every individual of the

human race in the past, the present, and the future. For He distinctly taught that when He should come again He would come as the King and Judge of both the living and the dead ; and that, in order to the carrying out of the infinitely exalted functions of this office, He would raise from the dead all who in any age had believed upon Him ; and that even those also who had done evil should hear His voice, and come forth from their graves, unto a resurrection of judgment.

If this is so, then it cannot be doubted that as the first coming of the Lord has been the most momentous event of the past, so this predicted Second Coming of the same Jesus will be beyond all comparison the most momentous event in the future ; and one moreover, which, unlike anything else that may hereafter come to pass, will personally affect for all eternity, for weal or woe, the life of every one of us.

No one who seriously considers these few simple facts—facts denied by no one who receives the testimony of Christ—will be able to think or to talk lightly on this subject, or to say (with many) that it is nothing about which we need to concern ourselves. Rather, the more that we think of it, the more transcendent will appear the solemn import of this great event of the future. And the question asked by the apostles will arise almost unbidden to our lips, “When shall these things be, and what shall be the *sign* of Thy coming ? ”

When shall Christ come ? That is the question which we shall ask. But there are in our day many who, whenever this question is asked, protest

against it, as an impertinent question and one which we have no business to ask, and one which, moreover, it is of no use to ask, since we can, in any case, know nothing of the subject.

But as regards the supposed impertinence of this frequent question, I must call your attention to the fact that the apostles asked it, and that the Lord did not regard it as impertinent, or one which they should not have asked. In His answer, which is recorded at great length, there is not a hint of rebuke. On the contrary, He received it as a reasonable question, and graciously proceeded at once to answer it, and that with such fulness, that His answer forms what is, with one exception, the longest discourse from His lips which has been preserved to us.

But, we are often impatiently reminded, did not our Lord tell us, in this very discourse, that "of that day or hour no man knows, but the Father only?" Undoubtedly He did so say. And from these plain words it certainly follows that any man who affirms, as many have affirmed, that the Lord will come without fail on, or by, some particular date, or who ventures to assert, as many others do assert, that the Lord *cannot* come until some definite period shall have elapsed, thereby places himself in direct antagonism to this word of Christ. "We know not the day nor the hour": let us all hold fast to that truth, as the Lord's own word, and a chief safeguard against the fanaticism which has so often shown itself in connexion with this subject. But none of this proves that the question as to the signs of the approach of the coming of the Lord

is either impertinent or useless. It is evident that, although we know not, and cannot know, the exact time, the question still remains open whether it may not yet be possible to know when Christ is *near*. The answer to this question is by no means involved in the answer to the other. To illustrate this point: we may be absolutely certain that a man must die; we may be, as we always are, utterly unable to predict the day or the hour of his death—which may, indeed, come without a moment's warning sign. But oftener, as we all know, there are warning signs, which may at last even infallibly betoken the approach, even the very near approach, of death. Or, again, I may be travelling, and maybe uninformed as to the exact distance of the place to which I go or the time of arrival there: and yet between this and that there are several places which, as I pass them in my journey, shall one after another apprise me of my steady advance toward the end of the journey; till perhaps at last, though I still knew not the *exact* distance remaining to be traversed, or the exact time of arrival, I may yet say, as the last large town is past, "I know that I am now near to the end of my journey, and the next stop will be at my destination." Just so is it in the present case. We may be, as we are, quite unable to tell the day or the year in which the Lord shall come; but it by no means follows, as some imagine, that there may not yet be signs, which, as they one after the other appear, shall be sufficient to show to all who study the Word of God and watch for Christ in humility and faith, that He is really near.

To this we need only to add that in this chapter, in answer to the apostles' question, the Lord told them of signs, and told them with this very purpose, that they might be able to discern "the signs of the times." To which fact He called especial attention in the words of the text, saying, "Behold, I have told you before." But so slow are many to receive this truth, that it may be well to call your attention further, to this: that in thus giving us beforehand signs of His approach, Christ has only done what all the analogy of the past history of redemption, would lead us to expect. Never has the day or year of any redemptive crisis in the past been known beforehand; and yet, in every case when any great crisis was approaching, there have been warning signs which have given sure indication of its approach to the Lord's believing people. It was so before the Deluge. The preaching of Enoch and Noah was followed by the mysterious translation of the former patriarch, and the ominous sign of the building of the ark by the other.

The predicted restoration from the Babylonian captivity, though of lesser moment, was preceded by the portentous writing upon the wall of Belshazzar's palace; and then visibly to all, by the predicted fall of Babylon. And it was then, we are told, that Daniel, stirred up by these events, applying himself to the study of the prophecies of Jeremiah, came to understand "by the books, the number of the years which the Lord would accomplish in the desolations of Jerusalem."

Eminently was this true, again, as the predicted threescore and nine weeks of years unto Messiah

the Prince drew toward their close, and the first advent of the Lord approached. There was not a Rabbi in Israel who in the century before the Lord's Coming could have foretold the year in which Messiah would appear. It was, indeed, according to the word of Daniel's prophecy, to be four hundred and eighty-three years "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem." But then, there were no less than three such edicts, and of these no one could know by the word of the revelation which was intended. No one, therefore, could know the absolute beginning of the period at the close of which Messiah was to appear. Nevertheless, any one could know (and that within very moderate limits) the period within which the beginning of the predicted interval from the Persian days must be taken; and as the first advent drew near, he could with certainty infer that the period predicted must arrive at its close *before very long*. And then, as the advent now became imminent, the signs multiplied, with Zechariah's vision, the revelation to the shepherds, and the star in the east. And the result of all was that when, some thirty years later, John the Baptist began his ministry, "all the people," we are told, "were in expectation, and mused of John, whether he were the Messiah or no."

So it was again, according to the impartial testimony of Josephus and Tacitus, when the predicted overthrow of Jerusalem by Titus approached. From five years before the desolation, portentous signs in heaven and on earth forboded the coming judgment.

In all these cases, then, when a great crisis in the history of redemption has been approaching, God has given signs, which, although they have never been such as to compel faith, have been quite enough to awaken anticipation, and in fact have not misled the devout soul who from these signs inferred that the crisis was near.

I have felt it desirable to multiply and to dwell upon these illustrations, because of a very common feeling that, in talking of signs of the second advent, we are going quite beyond any divine warrant, and it is therefore of consequence to observe, even before approaching the direct Word of God on this subject, that it has been a *law* of God's working in redemption, a law which has had no exception, *whenever* a great crisis has been approaching, to give signs which should forewarn His people of the fact.

So, then, it has in the past always been. But one great crisis, the crisis beyond all comparison the most stupendous of all, is yet before the world and the church : namely, the Second Advent of the Son of God for resurrection and for judgment. Is it likely that the analogy, unbroken hitherto, shall fail on this last occasion for the first time ? Or shall there yet again be signs which shall betoken to him who will heed them that the Advent of the Lord is near ?

But we are not left to conjecture, or to any mere argument from the analogy of the past, however cogent such argument may be. We are expressly taught that it shall in the latter days be possible for the devout and spiritually-minded student of

God's Word to know that the end is near. The prophet Daniel was told explicitly with regard to the coming day of Israel's trouble in which the resurrection should occur—the day of Christ's coming—that although the vision was “sealed up unto the time of the end,” yet then many should exercise themselves in those things (the prophetic visions) and that the knowledge of them should be increased. And the promise was then added that, while, even then, none of the wicked should understand, yet the spiritually wise should understand the meaning of those mysterious numbers the interpretation of which was denied to the inquiring prophet.

When we come to the New Testament these intimations, as we should expect, become more frequent and more distinct. That which is clearly implied in the frequently repeated command to watch for the Second Coming of our Lord is plainly taught, for example, in the parable of the ten virgins. The purport of that parable is to the effect that, in consequence of the unexpected delay in the coming of the bridegroom, all the virgins—the wise, be it observed, as well as the foolish,—“slumbered and slept.” At midnight, however, a cry was made that the bridegroom was at hand. It was a signal, not of his actual arrival, but of his immediate nearness. There was time left only for the hasty preparation, which all needed, in the trimming of smoking lamps, and then he came. This parable teaches plainly that the coming of the Son of Man will be, at least, immediately before His actual advent, preannounced by some sign, which shall

effectually rouse the whole Church from her long slumber of indifference to a hurried trimming of the dimly burning lamps and a distressingly anxious inquiry by many for the lacking oil.

So also we are told by plain words in the previous chapter, that the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven will be preceded by a "sign of the Son of Man in heaven" which shall fill men with apprehension and mourning. Both of these passages of Scripture, however, evidently refer to something which shall indicate the *immediate* imminence of the advent. But other Scriptures tell us of other and earlier signs, which, as they shall appear in ominous succession, howsoever unbelief and worldliness may ignore them, will announce to faith the rapid nearing of the glorious epiphany, if not its absolute imminence.

No portion of Scripture is more full and explicit on this subject than that chapter of Matthew's Gospel from which the text is taken. The whole of the chapter up to this twenty-fifth verse, as well as much of what follows in the same discourse, is taken up with the enumeration of one event after another, and one condition after another, which should preannounce His steadily approaching advent. Of so much consequence was it, according to Christ, to note these preannounced signs, that He pauses here in His discourse to call His disciples' attention to the fact that He was not leaving them uninformed on this subject: "Behold," He says, "I have told you before!" And then, resuming His discourse, He adds yet more to this enumeration of the signs which should go before His appearing.

Then, according to Luke, He bids them, when they should see certain things coming to pass, to "lift up their heads, knowing that their redemption was drawing near;" and, according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, adds the significant parable of the fig-tree, with the emphatic words that, when they should see certain things coming to pass, they might "know that He was near, even at the doors."

You must thus see, that both the text and the whole tenour of this discourse clearly teach that, while no man can know the day or the hour of the Lord's coming, yet there will be signs which shall pre-announce its approach. And no less clearly does the language imply that they shall be signs of such a kind as that the Lord's believing people shall be able to recognize them as signs and perceive their momentous import. For certainly a sign which could not be recognized as a sign would be no sign at all. What these signs are, the Lord has told us in outline in this chapter; and the Holy Spirit, in the later writings of the apostles, has still further filled it out. And the whole revelation is solemnly pressed upon our attention by the words of our Lord in the text, "BEHOLD, I HAVE TOLD YOU BEFORE!"

The inquiry what these predicted signs may be, I defer to a subsequent occasion. My present object is attained if I have led you to see that, according to Holy Scripture, there are given us such signs, and that it greatly concerns us to know them.

As to this last question, is it possible that any

man who believes in Christ can have a doubt? If Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, is really coming into this world again to take up in solemn judgment the question of sin and of righteousness as regards both individuals and nations, it must be so plain as to need no argument, that the event must be of an importance absolutely overwhelming. That, moreover, it must be a matter of no small consequence to be forewarned of His approach, if such forewarning be possible, is equally plain. Our Lord Himself teaches that it will be a very serious thing for any one to be taken (as most of the world will be taken) unawares by that event, which, He tells us, notwithstanding His preannouncement of these signs, will come upon them that dwell on the face of the whole earth "as a snare" and "as a thief in the night." We do not wish to "be wise above that which is written," but my trust is that we do all wish for our own spiritual good to be wise up to what is written in the Holy Scriptures on this subject.

Deferring, then, the inquiry as to what the Word of God declares to be the signs and preludes of the glorious appearing of the Lord, I will close this evening's exposition with one question which I would press upon every heart. It is this. How do you feel with regard to this future glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus? Do not misunderstand me? I am not asking you what you think or feel as to any particular theory about the Coming. Very possibly some of you may not see with me with regard to all the minor details of this subject. But this is altogether a matter of minor importance

compared with the other question: do you *love* the Lord's appearing, or do you dread it? One man may believe that Christ comes before the millenium, another that He comes after it, and a third may, with a few others, believe that there never will be any millenium at all. I do not say that these questions are of no practical importance: I believe that they are, and that they are of far more practical importance than some think. But I still insist that these questions fall into insignificance in comparison with this other question, DO WE LOVE HIS APPEARING? A man may believe that Christ cannot come until after a millenium has come and gone, and yet profoundly love and eagerly look for that Coming. Another man may believe that Christ is to come before the millenium, and yet in his heart, so far from loving the thought, hate and dread the Coming. I say that this is the burning question: why do I say it? Because when Christ comes crowns are to be given, crowns of righteousness and resurrection glory; but the apostle tells us in so many words, that they are to be given only *to them that love the appearing* of Jesus.

And how, do you ask, may we come to love the appearing? That too is a burning question. We may come to love the appearing by loving the One who is to appear. And that brings yet one other question. How may the poor soul who, hardened in worldliness and sin, has not yet *begun* to love this Christ—how shall such a one come to love Him? I answer, by believing at once in His redeeming love toward us. All who now love Him, and thus

love His appearing, have come to love Him in this way. "We love Him because He first loved us." We love Him because, when we loved Him not, He yet loved us, and died for sin upon the cross that we might by faith in His death have life eternal. Think of that! Who would not then love the Lord Jesus? And who that loves Him can help loving His glorious appearing?

But I fear that there are some here whom I cannot bid to hope for that day. Such are all who have not yet obeyed the Gospel of Christ. Better ten thousand times for you that that day should never come, if you are not Christ's true disciple. For it is written that when the Lord Jesus shall come again He shall "be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that obey not His Gospel." If then any of you, dear friends, have not obeyed the Gospel, this means that He will be revealed in flaming fire taking vengeance on you. It will then appear to all that, to have neglected God's great salvation, to have rejected an offered Saviour, was not the trifling matter that, alas! so many seem to take it to be.

Is there any one here who will venture to go on longer under this awful risk, the risk not only of losing the everlasting glory and heavenly blessedness into which the Lord shall bring His people when He comes, but of encountering the righteous wrath and indignation of a holy and sin-avenging God? May God forbid it, and direct the heart of every one of us into the patient waiting for Christ!

XXII

“AND AS HE SAT UPON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES,
THE DISCIPLES CAME UNTO HIM PRIVATELY,
SAYING, TELL US, WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS
BE ? AND WHAT SHALL BE THE SIGN OF THY
COMING, AND OF THE END OF THE WORLD
(AGE) ?”—MATT. xxiv. 3.

(I)

THIS is a question which has been often asked, and which is still asked by very many. It is a very natural question. The fact that there is a yet future visible appearing of Jesus Christ is so clearly revealed in Holy Scripture, that it is denied by none who hold to the supreme authority of that Scripture, but is an article of faith common to the whole nominal Church of Jesus Christ except Swedenborgians and Unitarians. And if this is the case, the question when we may look for this stupendous event, and what signs there may be, if any, which shall herald its approach, is one of the most natural possible, and by no means to be regarded as always the inquiry of an impertinent curiosity. The best proof of this is found in the fact that our Lord and His apostles after Him, taught by His Holy Spirit, *answer* this question ; and, indeed, judged it of such consequence, that they gave many signs by means of which, although none might ever be able to tell the day or the hour, yet believers in Christ, as the end should draw near, might

be made aware of the fact if they would, and be quickened thereby to greater watchfulness and care for holy, consecrated living.

Of no vain curiosity, then, are we guilty, when we inquire into this matter, what God's Word may teach. "The things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children." We are guilty only if we are indifferent, as too many are, to what our Lord and His apostles have taught upon this subject. We propose, then, to gather up to-night, in part at least, what, according to the Scriptures, is revealed in answer to this question. What are the signs and the preludes of the near approach of the glorious appearing of our Lord?

Only let me beg you to observe that to affirm a knowledge of the signs of the Advent of the Lord is not the same thing as to expound "the signs of the times." The two differ in this respect: that in the former case we have before us plain words of God to teach us, while in the latter case we are making a human comparison of the predicted signs with the condition of the world in the times in which we live. In the former case we may speak with the most absolute and unwavering certainty, just because we are speaking not the words of man but the words of the Lord. In the latter case, while it is quite possible that we may be right in our discernment of the signs of the times—while it is even said that such comparison *shall* in the time of the end carry conviction of the nearness of the Lord to the minds of many, yet it is still possible that in some particulars we may err in the application of the Scripture to the facts before us; and it therefore

befits us to speak with modesty in proportion as there is room for doubt as to the correspondence between the words of Scripture and the actual conditions around us.

It is important at the very outset to remove, if I may, two very common misconceptions on this subject. Observe, in the first place, that, according to the Word of the Lord, *physical and civil commotions*, in themselves alone, cannot rightly be taken as signs of the speedy appearing of the Lord. There are many who see in every war, or rumour of war, in every earthquake, famine or pestilence, a precursor of the imminent Advent of the Lord, and who are never slow to prophesy with confidence, nothing disheartened by repeated failures of their predictions. And it is not too much to say that the lamentable discomfiture of many such well-meaning interpreters of the signs of the times, and the repeated disappointments which have befallen them, have been the chief cause of the extreme impatience with which many good Christian people hear any reference to signs of the Second Advent, and a cause of the very strong disinclination to all study of the prophetic Word.

Most strange it is, that the very words of the Lord to which such persons most commonly appeal in support of their opinion is just the passage which, if they would only read through the verse itself, would show them that they were mistaken. They constantly refer to the Lord's words in this chapter, "Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars," with what follows; quite failing to notice that the Lord immediately adds, "But the end is *not yet*." That

is to say, these things, taken in and of themselves alone, are not to be understood as showing that He is near. It is, indeed, quite true that, in another part of this same Olivet discourse, He did speak of civil and social commotions, and distress of nations as among the signs of His near advent ; but if any one will look at the context in Luke, he will see that in that passage our Lord is not speaking of national distress in general, but only of a period of such distress as occurring in connexion with the cessation of the times of Israel's scattering and the Gentile supremacy in Jerusalem. At such a time, whenever that shall be, then will such signs be of profound significance as indicating Christ's near advent, but before that time they shall be of no significance at all.

There is one other misconception on this subject which is met with very commonly, and which it is of no less importance to remove if possible. In this second place I ask you to observe that, according to the Word of God, *the conversion of the world to Christ* is not to be regarded, as many in our land and time imagine, as a necessary antecedent of the Advent. The conversion of the world to Christ is not one of the signs which we must see before we may feel sure that the return of the Lord is near. As for this matter, the very idea of "the conversion of the world," in the sense in which the phrase is used in our day to denote a general nominal assent of the majority of the people of the world or of a nation to the truth of the Christian religion, is an idea which is utterly foreign to the Word of God. Any such mere external and nominal adhesion of

a people to the Name of Christ the Bible absolutely never recognizes as a conversion of that nation. It never calls such a phenomenon by that name. In fact, it never alludes to any such change in human society at all. The Bible knows of only one kind of conversion, a conversion from death unto eternal life in the individual heart. Never does the Bible recognize what we call the Christianization of a nation as a conversion of that nation ; and still less does it teach us that such a universal external acceptance of the Gospel is one of the necessary antecedents of the Advent. Such a universal nominal acceptance of Christianity there may be before the Advent, or such there may not be. On this point I do not profess to know anything, because I can find nothing revealed on this point in the Scriptures. In any case I cannot say that such a universal profession of the Christian faith is a *sign* of the Advent, of such a kind that, until I see it, I can be certain that Christ will not and cannot return.

Now, on the other hand, as for any *real* turning of the nations unto the faith of Christ and to holy living before the coming of the Lord, I have yet to find any warrant in the Word of God for the expectation that this will be. That such a universal acceptance of Christ the world shall yet see is certainly plain enough, according to the Scripture. But when it is said that this must take place before the Advent, and must therefore be regarded as one of the most unmistakable of the signs that are to be expected of its approach, I have only to say that I cannot find this in God's Word. If any one can

name a passage in which this order is affirmed, I should be glad to know it. In the meantime I must say that this common notion seems to me, as, I may add, to the great majority of the ablest interpreters of Scripture in our day, to be in irreconcilable contradiction to many of the plainest teachings of the Scripture as to what is the state of things that is to be expected throughout this dispensation. There are many places in which are explicitly given the signs of the Advent, but you will never find this expected millennial period of righteousness given as one of them. Search the Scriptures for yourselves, and satisfy yourselves upon the matter, for it is, as I have said, a matter of the very commonest misconception.

With the ground thus cleared for further inquiry, we may now bring ourselves face to face with the question, "What, then, are the events which the Lord and His apostles do bid us to regard as true signs of His approaching Advent?"

First of all, and with great plainness, our Lord tells us that a sign of the end, and therefore a sign that He is near, shall be *the universal preaching of the gospel*. For this we have His own explicit words: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall first be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and *then shall the end come.*"

This was the first point named by Christ in His answer to the apostles' question as given in the text. They asked Him, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?" And He answered, "This Gospel of the kingdom shall first be

preached among all nations for a witness, and *then* shall the end come." As to the meaning of this declaration of the Lord, observe first that, significantly enough, Christ does not say, "This Gospel shall be preached and result in the conversion of all nations," but simply that it shall be preached "for a witness to all nations." How extensive a proclamation is intimated in these words "unto all nations," we are not told, and cannot know. We do not know where the Lord draws national lines. Neither are we told how much preaching in any given nation will be enough to serve the purpose of such a "witness" as the Lord intends. Neither, again, does He tell us whether this preaching among all nations must be simultaneous, or whether it may not be perhaps successive. To illustrate: the Gospel appears to have been offered very extensively to China in the period between the fourth and the seventh centuries, and to have been by the nation rejected. Will that preaching suffice to have satisfied this prediction so far as China is concerned? Very possibly it may. But then we do not know, and therefore it does not touch the question of our present duty in regard to China. Moreover, we are not here told anything as to the actual result of this preaching in any particular nation. We should like to know, doubtless, but as to this our Lord tells us nothing. In any case, the silence of our Lord in this connexion as to the result of this universal preaching in conversion, whether it shall be more or less, shows us that His desire was to direct our attention not to the moral effect of preaching in conversion, as a sign of His advent,

although that is the end and aim of all preaching, but to the universality of the preaching. It is plain, therefore, that the so-called "conversion" of India or China, for example, to a nominal Christianity would not constitute any sign of the nearness of the Advent; while, on the other hand, the proclamation of the Gospel to the few races and nations who have not yet heard it, even were the result in conversions very insignificant, would be, as Augustine long ago said, a very ominous and indubitable sign that the end of the age was near, and therewith the return of the Lord. For this is exactly what Jesus says: "The Gospel shall be preached among all nations; and *then* shall the end come": come just so soon as in the mind of God it has been preached everywhere sufficiently to serve this purpose of a "witness."

This warrants us, you see, in saying that the nearer the Gospel is to being universally preached, the nearer we may know the Lord to be. In other words, one of the most definite and unambiguous signs of the near approach of the advent will be a high degree of missionary activity; for without this missionary activity the Gospel could not be universally proclaimed. Whenever the Church is seen in the fulness of her missionary zeal carrying the Gospel to all the nations, not one left out, then—we have the Lord's own Word for it—we may know that the end is at hand, and therewith the Lord.

Truly remarkable it is to find that, notwithstanding this, another mark of the times which shall usher in the personal appearing of the Lord is to be found, according to the repeated testimony

of the Scripture, in *a widespread decay of vital Godliness among professed believers*. This is everywhere insisted upon by our Lord and His apostles as one of the solemn signs of the imminence of His appearing. Notwithstanding the general preaching of the Gospel which shall prevail, it is predicted that, "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold!" So the Lord again teaches us in the parable of the unjust judge that, because of the long delay in the arising of the Judge, the very elect shall have their faith sorely tried; and then He adds, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" The same thing, again, He teaches in the solemnly suggestive imagery of the parable of the ten virgins, wherein the coming of the bridegroom found all (the wise, be it noted, as well as the foolish) overcome with slumber, and with neglected lamps. As has been truly and pithily said, "The best prepared were not quite ready: all found need to trim their lamps."

As the manner is, the later revelations are much fuller and more specific in their description of this general declension from a living godliness. Thus, in the second epistle to Timothy, Paul is very explicit and solemnly emphatic. We do not read that the last days shall be marked, as so many imagine, by the general triumph of the Gospel, but that they shall be marked by a state of things very sadly different. We read: "This know, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful,

unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." Such is the description which the Holy Spirit gives us of the state of things in the days immediately preceding the appearing of the Lord. It is concerning this particular description of the character of the last times that, as you will see, the apostle charges Timothy that he "put the brethren in remembrance of *these things*," and adds that if he do this he shall be a good minister of Jesus Christ.

A spiritual declension, therefore, very grave and general, is one of the predicted signs of the near approach of the Advent. But this is not all that is revealed as to this particular sign. *Mere* spiritual declension, however grave and general, is not, as history has already proved, a sign of the nearness of the Advent. In the Middle Ages, for example, all Christendom had lapsed into the deepest spiritual degradation; but, as the event proved, that was no sign that the appearing of the Lord was very near. Nor, when we look at the words of inspiration more carefully, do they teach anything inconsistent with this fact. What they predict as a sign of the nearness of the Advent is not spiritual declension merely as such, but a declension with certain very peculiar and distinct characteristics.

First of all, according to the representations given, the spiritual declension of the last days is *not to be marked by the prevalence of the grosser out-breaking forms of sin and crime!* Although a state

of things so bad as to be ominous of the speedy appearing of the Judge to put an end to it, it will nevertheless consist with a fair degree of outward morality and no little ethical improvement as compared with earlier days. This becomes immediately evident so soon as we thoughtfully compare Paul's description of the state of society in the pagan Roman Empire in the first century, which he gives in the first chapter of Romans, from the twenty-fifth to the thirty-second verse, with his prophecy as to the state of things in the last times given in the second epistle to Timothy, the first five verses of the third chapter. The gross and revolting forms of sin and crime, which are so prominent in the former picture, are almost entirely absent from the latter. The description of the last times is, in this respect, in the most significant contrast with the description of the moral condition of the Roman Empire, and it fits but little better with the account which historians give us of the state of society in the dark ages. Improved morality, therefore, is, according to Paul, to be expected in the last times.

But Paul says even more than this. He tells us explicitly, that the predicted declension from vital godliness which is to take place in the last days shall be accompanied, not only by a degree of outward moral improvement, but by a *general religiousness of life!* For we read that these same boastful, proud, self-sufficient, worldly, pleasure-loving men of the last times shall yet with it all have "the form of godliness." And this it is, no doubt, which forms the special peril of those times to souls,

of which the apostle speaks. Men though inwardly, and in the eye of God, so bad, shall yet seem like godly men. And this gives another mark of that special type of spiritual declension which, when it extensively appears, shall be a sign that now at last the Lord is near. *It shall co-exist with much profession of religion, much religious zeal and activity, and much of the outward semblance of genuine Christian life.* Let this remarkable prophecy be well noted.

But, in the third place, we are told that these fair-seeming men and women of the last times, while professing to be true followers of the Lord, shall yet, either in doctrine or in practical life, or perhaps in both ways, *deny the power of godliness.* That is, either they shall deny that which is the life and power of all true godliness, the supernatural work of the Son and the Spirit in atonement and regeneration, or, as Bishop Ellicot explains it, they shall deny their own profession of godliness by their gross inconsistencies of life.

The apostle Peter adds yet another characteristic mark which is to distinguish that spiritual declension which shall be the sign of the near appearing of the Lord, namely, *prevailing scepticism*; and, that we make no mistake in so momentous a matter, he tells us that it also shall have certain marked *characteristics*. First, it shall be a scepticism as to the origin of the material universe. Men in the last days, he says, shall wilfully ignore the evidence that the universe was made by the *fiat* of a personal God. His exact words are, "This they willingly (or wilfully) are ignorant of, that by the Word of

God the heavens were of old and the earth. But, as is inevitable, the unbelief will not stop there. It will, he tells us, find further expression in doubt or utter disbelief of that very event of whose imminent approach this state of things shall be one of the most solemn signs, namely, the return of the Lord to judgment. "They shall say," we are told, "Where is the promise of His coming?" And then, to complete the picture, Peter further tells us what will be the reason for this doubt or disbelief of the Advent of the Lord, which these philosophic thinkers of the last times will give. The reason given will be, *our prolonged experience of the uniformity of nature*. "They shall say, Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." And the prevalence of a scepticism marked by these specific characteristics is, according to the apostle Peter, another of the signs of the near approach of the Lord in His glory.

This part of the inspired teaching on this subject finds its completion in the Scripture passages concerning the antichrist. Nothing is more explicitly taught in Holy Scripture than that before the Advent of the Lord, and as characteristic of the whole dispensation, shall appear many antichrists, persons and systems of thought marked by the denial that Jesus is the Son of God in the sense in which He affirmed His Sonship; and that all the developments of this kind shall at last come to a head in a power, or person—it matters not which—that shall be, in a pre-eminent sense, "*the antichrist*,"

which denieth both the Father and the Son. I need not now enlarge upon this matter, as not long ago I preached upon this subject. I now only call your attention to the teaching of Scripture on this head, in order that, whenever we discern a tendency to a general denial of the supreme Deity of our Blessed Lord, we may remember that we are therein seeing the development of a power which, when it shall appear full grown (be that sooner or later), shall usher in the glorious appearing of the Lord, who "shall destroy the Man of Sin with the brightness of His coming." There is no mistaking the teaching of the Scriptures of God on this subject. We are most explicitly taught that when the Lord appears in glory, the armies of heaven following Him, He not only finds the Gospel universally preached, but also finds all the kings of the earth gathered to make war against the Lamb of God.

Finally, all these inspired testimonies agree in assuring us that, strange to say, these ominous portents of the speedy coming of the Lord, many and cumulative though they be, and although so long before clearly predicted, *shall not be generally recognized as signs of the nearness of the end when they appear!* And this very fact is repeatedly mentioned as another distinguishing characteristic of the general spiritual declension of the times immediately before the Advent. Those days, according to the Word of Christ, are to be marked by *a general sense of self-satisfaction, of security in the present and of confidence for the future.* Nor, indeed, is mere spiritual declension, even of the kind predicted, to be taken as a certain sign of the nearness

of the end apart from this last feature. This is one feature of the state of feeling in the Church and in the world which, I may say, is never left out of the prophetic picture. This it is which is to distinguish sharply the declension of the last times from that of earlier days. Thus, in the profound spiritual darkness of the Middle Ages the case was very different. Bad as things were, the evil of the days was, to some considerable degree, recognized. So crying were the evils of the time, that they seemed to men to call for the instant appearing of the Judge. The feeling of the age found its expression in the awful measures of the "Dies Irae," and in the solemn hymn of Bernard of Cluny:—

" The world is very evil ;
 The times are waxing late ;
 Be sober and keep vigil !
 The Judge is at the gate !
 The Judge who comes in mercy,
 The Judge who comes with might,
 To terminate the evil,
 And diadem the right ! "

But the declension of the last days will stand contrasted with such a feeling as this, in that it shall not be commonly recognized as a state of declension, much less as a portent of the speedy appearing of the Judge. Men, we are told, will be "boasters, proud," and shall apparently realize the description given of the Church of Laodicea, which, although really and in the Lord's sight "wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked," judged herself to be "rich, and increased in goods and in need of nothing." And if the sad lapse from God shall not be generally recognized as such, still

less will it be generally deemed a state of things presaging the speedy appearing of the Lord to judge His people. Very marked is the contrast in this respect with the days of the decay of godliness in the Middle Ages. The tenth century especially, as all students of history know, was marked by very profound and anxious apprehensions throughout Christendom, of the immediate imminence of the Day of Judgment. It was then believed, with fear and quaking, to be just at hand, when in fact it was still far away. In the declension of the last days, on the contrary, we are told that men generally will believe the Day of Judgment to be far away, when, in point of fact, it shall be just at hand. Men shall be saying, we are told, "Peace, and safety!" when sudden destruction shall come upon them, and they shall not escape.

To sum up, then, what we have seen this evening to be the teaching of the Word of God on this great subject, we have seen that among the most notable signs of the near approach of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus will be, on the one hand, a high degree of missionary activity, such as to result in the preaching of the Gospel to all the nations of the world; and, on the other hand, concomitant with this, in the professing Church and in the world without, a general spiritual declension, which apostasy from God is to present the following marked and exceptional characteristics. First, it shall be marked, as compared with the horrible days of the Roman Empire, in which the apostles preached, by the lesser prominence of the more hideous and unnatural forms of crime. (Such are not men-

tioned, at least, in the inspired pictures of the last days.) It shall be marked, further, by a general religiousness of life, without its power; much profession, with comparatively little practice. Thirdly, it shall be accompanied by a prevalence of scepticism in the world, which shall base itself upon our human experience of the uniformity of the laws of nature, and boldly doubt or deny these two fundamental truths: namely, the fact that the world was created by a personal God, and in the second place the truth of this very doctrine of the second appearing of the rejected Son of God for the judgment of the world. Finally, it will also be marked by a general state of boastful self-satisfaction, a sense of security and prevailing worldliness, even as in the days of Noah, when men were so taken up with their buying and selling, their marrying and giving in marriage, that they paid no heed to Noah's warnings till the door of the ark was shut, and the flood came and took them all away.

With this I close. I shall not attempt to make the comparison of these predicted signs with the present condition of the Church and the world. I speak to intelligent men and women, who know what is going on in the world. I shall, then, leave the question with you. Are there any indications of the speedy universal preaching of the Gospel? Are there any indications, notwithstanding, of an appalling amount of false profession and un consecrated and worldly living in the nominal Church? Are there any indications of the prevalence of a scepticism having the special marks which we have seen to be indicated in the Holy Scriptures?

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Remember, too, that just in proportion as any of us may think that of a truth such ominous signs are to be discerned in the present condition of the Church and of the world, in that very proportion are we solemnly warned by the Lord Himself to beware of His unexpected Advent. "For as a snare shall it come on all them which dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye, therefore, and pray; for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh." Are you ready to meet Him when He comes? God grant that none of us may hear from His lips the words addressed to the Pharisees of old, "How was it that ye did not discern the signs of the times?"

XXIII

AND AS HE SAT UPON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES THE DISCIPLES CAME UNTO HIM PRIVATELY, SAYING, 'TELL US, WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE? AND WHAT SHALL BE THE SIGN OF THY COMING, AND OF THE END OF THE WORLD (AGE)?'—MATT. xxiv. 3.

(2)

WE resume this evening and finish the presentation of what our Lord has revealed in answer to this question. In the previous sermon Christ was shown to have declared that the period immediately preceding His coming would be marked on the one hand by a high degree of missionary activity resulting in the preaching of the Gospel to all nations, and on the other by a general spiritual declension in the professing Church—much profession of godliness without that which is the power of godliness, together with abounding worldliness; and in the world without, prevailing scepticism as to the creation of all things by God and as to the Second Coming itself. I have to add to these, tonight, that according to the Scriptures another very distinct and unmistakable sign of the near approach of the Lord will be *the cessation of the long abasement of the Jewish nation*, and finally the termination of Gentile domination in Jerusalem, and the restoration there, in some form, of Jewish power. On a former occasion, in a different connexion, I showed you that both the Old Testament prophets as interpreted for us in the New Testament and the New

Testament itself connect in time the restoration of Israel with the coming of the Lord with all His saints, the standing of His feet upon the Mount of Olives, and the resurrection of the righteous.

I to-night will only emphasize the fact that our Lord, in the discourse from which the text is taken, makes the ending of this Jewish tribulation to be one of the most immediate *signs of His coming*. Combining the accounts of the Lord's discourse as given in Matthew and Luke, we find that on this point the Lord predicted, first, the destruction of Jerusalem after a terrible siege, even as it came to pass in A.D. 70. He added to this the statement that then should be *the great tribulation* such as never had been on any people; and then, according to Matthew, continued that "*IMMEDIATELY after the tribulation of those days*, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken." "And then," He continues, "shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." This passage, as I have remarked before, has been one of the strongholds of modern unbelief. Assuming that this tribulation began and *ended* with the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century, it is insisted that inasmuch as Jesus is represented as teaching that "*immediately after that tribulation*" should ensue the portents of His instant return in the clouds of heaven; and inasmuch as nothing in fact did come to pass after the overthrow of Jerusalem which could by any rhetoric be described as a com-

ing of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven, we are therefore shut up to one of the two alternatives : either we must admit that Jesus was mistaken, in which case *His* authority is gone, or else we must say that the evangelists must have reported His words erroneously, in which case *their* authority is gone as accurate historians. Therefore, not merely as regards the doctrine of the last things, but in the interest of Christian faith, it is of great importance to observe that the *assumption* on which the whole force of the objection rests is demonstrably false. That assumption is, that our Lord represented the tribulation, which He predicted as coming on the Jewish nation, as *terminated* by the final overthrow of the city under Titus. As a matter of fact, of which any reader of the Gospels can assure himself, our Lord taught nothing of the kind. Furthermore, it is matter of the most familiar history that Israel's troubles did *not* end but only began with that event. Even worse, if it were possible, has come on the nation since that day. After that event, immense numbers of the Jews were sold into slavery till, we are told, " the markets of the Roman Empire were so glutted with slaves, that the merest trifle sufficed to purchase one." In A.D. 116, under Trajan, and in A.D. 132, under Adrian, the Jews having rebelled were again defeated by the Romans, vast numbers put to death ; the city, which had somewhat begun to recover from the effects of the siege under Titus, razed to the ground, and every Jew forbidden, upon pain of death, even to come within sight of what had been its position. **And the tribulation has continued, with sometimes**

more, sometimes less of severity, from that day to this. From that time until to-day, Jerusalem has continued to be subject to Gentile power, first to the Romans, then to the Saracens : then for a brief time it was in the hands of the Crusaders, and last of all came into the hands of the Ottoman Turks, who hold it still.

Throughout this whole period the Jew has been wandering up and down among the nations, everywhere the object of obloquy and contempt, and often of the most savage and relentless persecution, a living witness that the Nazarene whom his fathers crucified, who predicted the overthrow of their city and prophesied that tribulation should come upon them such as never was since there was a nation—that that Nazarene spoke the truth, and was therefore a prophet of God, and their promised Messiah. Where was there ever a people who had such an experience as the Jews have had for now these 1,800 years and more ?

And when we turn to the account of our Lord's discourse as given by Luke, we find that not only did He *not* teach, as unbelief asserts Him to have taught, that the tribulation would end with the destruction of the Holy City, but that He explicitly taught the contrary. Look at Luke's account, and you will see that our Lord included in the prediction concerning the Jewish tribulation no less than six particulars, which cover the whole time from A.D. 70 to the present year. These are as follows :—

- (1) The destruction of the city Jerusalem.
- (2) Great distress in the Holy Land and wrath upon the Jewish people ; especially shown in

(3) A great slaughter: "they shall fall by the edge of the sword"; and also,

(4) A scattering of the survivors and their captivity among all nations; also,

(5) The subjection of Jerusalem to foreign domination; "Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot of the Gentiles (lit. "trampled," for the original word suggests not only domination, but domination of a rough and merciless kind).

(6) Lastly, He represents this state of things as continuing "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"; an expression which, whatever be its more precise meaning, *always*, according to the idiom of New Testament Greek, denotes a *prolonged period of time*.

Not only then is there herein no difficulty to faith, but on the contrary faith finds here a mighty support. For it is undeniable, that all this has come to pass and is still in process of fulfilment before our eyes exactly as predicted by our Lord more than eighteen centuries ago. I defy any unbeliever to explain these facts away. They never have been denied, because they never can be denied. From A.D. 70 till now has Jerusalem continued to be trodden under foot by the Gentiles, even as it is today. The tribulation predicted is thus before our eyes in this nineteenth century still, a patent visible fact, and the Hebrew walks the street of every city in Christendom silently testifying to its reality. But is this condition of things as regards Israel to continue for ever? No, for Jesus then went on to speak of something which should take place "*after* that tribulation." "*AFTER*"; then there will

come a time when Israel's tribulation shall *end*, a time when Jerusalem shall *cease* to be trampled by the Gentile ; a time when Israel shall be no longer "scattered among all nations" ; a time when, as the Frenchman rules in France, and the Greek in Greece, so shall the Jew rule in the land of Judea.* And do you ask, "*What* shall be then?" I will now read you just what our Lord said shall then be. Mark it well! for they are His words, not mine!

"IMMEDIATELY after that tribulation," as Matthew puts it, "there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars ; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity ; the sea and the waves roaring ; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth : for the powers of heaven shall be shaken, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

Observe the general connexion of thought throughout the discourse. The disciples ask Him what shall be the signs of His coming ; He answers that after a little while shall come upon their nation a great tribulation, beginning with the fall of their city, and continuing till the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled ; and then tells them that "IMMEDIATELY" after that tribulation shall begin the scenes which usher in the glorious return! How could words be plainer? Here is a sign which every one can understand ; a sign of which, when it

* Since this sermon was preached, in 1890, the Zionist movement has begun, the object of which is to re-nationalize Israel and to form a Jewish state in Palestine.

shall appear, no one will be able to say, "Such things as this have been always happening."

There is thus one political event in the future, which, however little it may interest many at the time, shall yet be full of both joyful and awful portent, beyond all events thus far in the history of mankind. That event will be the cessation of Gentile dominion in Jerusalem. One momentous political catastrophe in connexion with that city was foretold by Christ as to *introduce* the Jewish tribulation. In due time it came to pass, even as the Lord had said, and the Holy City passed under the yoke of the Gentiles. But that same Jesus who foretold that event, and in brief the whole course of Jewish history from that time until now, foretold also in that same connexion another great crisis, also connected with that same city and people, which is still in the future ; a day when the "times of the Gentiles" shall have run out, and the predicted tribulation on Israel and the Holy City shall end. Can any one escape the manifest conclusion ? Just as surely as all the foregoing up to the present time has been most literally and exactly fulfilled, just so surely shall all that remains come to the same literal and exact fulfilment. The rule of the Gentile in Jerusalem is therefore certain to end. How soon, no man can say ; though when, as in our day, we see the scattered nation returning into their land by tens of thousands, as never before has been the case since Jesus spoke, we may well ask with wonder, "Is it not possible that we are now approaching that day ?" But, however this may be, let us heed what the Lord Jesus said, "When ye

see these things beginning to come to pass, lift your heads ; for your redemption draweth nigh ! ” Let us mark it well ! Not only the universal preaching of the Gospel, but still more decisively the cessation of Gentile rule in Jerusalem, and the re-establishment there, in some form, of Jewish power, will be an event which, whenever it shall occur, will announce to Christendom as with a trumpet tone that the appearing of Israel’s Messiah, our Lord and Saviour, is at hand. Can we doubt about this, when the Lord Himself has told us, in so many words, that when we see these things coming to pass, we may be as sure that He is near as we are sure that summer is near when we see the buds begin to swell ?

The advent and glorious appearing of the Lord will thus follow, according to His own plain words, very closely upon the restoration of Israel, but how closely He has not told us. What He does say is precisely this : that *immediately* after that tribulation, when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, and Jerusalem shall cease to be trodden down of the Gentiles, there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, and then there shall be upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, men’s hearts failing them for fear and for looking for those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken, and then shall they see *the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*. Here then we have a direct statement to the effect that immediately upon the termination of Israel’s tribulation shall ensue two signs more, which shall directly usher in the glorious epiphany. The one shall consist of omin-

ous appearances in physical nature ; the other in distress and perplexity and boding fears and apprehensions for the future among the nations. Whether the distress among the nations shall precede or follow the celestial portents, or whether (as from a comparison of other Scriptures seems most likely) they shall co-exist, we are not directly informed. Neither has the Lord anywhere told us how long this last period of distress shall continue ; excepting only that the Word of God always represents it as *short*. In any case, we are warranted in saying that another and more immediate sign of the approach of the advent of the Lord will be a period of distress, of anxiety, and extreme apprehension as to the future among the nations of the earth, occurring simultaneously with the regathering of the Jews into their own land.

And here perhaps we may best mention another sign which is no less explicitly mentioned in a later part of the same discourse. The Scriptures predict that the *Church* in general, by reason of the long delay in the return of the Lord, would fall into a condition of indifference and dulness of expectation on the subject, which is represented as continuing until very near the time of the Advent. This state of things is set forth by the slumber of the ten virgins in that parable, in which, however, it is added that just before the actual arrival of the bridegroom, a cry was heard, "*Behold ! The Bridegroom cometh ! Go ye forth to meet Him !*" What this "cry" may precisely be, and how conveyed to the ear of the Church, we need not dogmatize ; but these words warrant us in saying

that in whatsoever way, there will be brought about, very shortly before the actual appearing of the Bridegroom, an awakening of the whole Church to the conviction that the Lord is indeed at hand ; and therewith shall be seen a great and sore distress and anxiety on the part of the many who too late find that they are insufficiently provided with the oil of grace for that hour of supreme need. And this general conviction succeeding to the long indifference, when it appears, will be another sign that the Lord is near.

Finally, our Lord also tells us, as just remarked, that there shall be also, in close connexion with Israel's restoration, signs in physical nature portending His imminent appearing. "There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars." He tells us, moreover, that among these signs there shall be a mysterious failure of the light of the heavenly bodies, for the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light. Some have questioned whether this may not all be merely figurative, as it has been put, of obscurations of rulers and powers in the political firmament. But I see nothing in these words to justify such an interpretation. Unlike the specifically prophetic books of the Bible, this whole discourse, up to this point, is barren of figure, and to be taken as literally as history. Why should we assume that these words will prove an exception ? Is the analogy of nature against it ? I answer, even if this were true, it would prove nothing ; for the Lord is here speaking of something which is *not of nature*, even the glorious appearing of Him who is the Creator and Lord

of nature. But our Lord does not *say* that these phenomena shall be miraculous; He simply predicts their *occurrence* at that period of human history. And as for their possibility, modern astronomy has already ocular evidence of the occurrence of even such startling phenomena as here described, in the case of other systems than ours. Even in our own day, suns like our own have been seen to blaze up and then go out into ashy darkness. Such things have then at rare intervals happened; our Lord apparently says that they shall happen again, and in connexion with our own system. And it is very suggestive, as bearing on our interpretation, that already three great crises in the history of redemption, each of them also a crisis in Israel's history, have been accompanied or preceded by similar portents in physical nature. A thick darkness of three days' duration preceded the Exodus from Egypt, and heralded the great Egyptian judgment. A darkness of three hours at mid-day over all the land of Palestine veiled the cross on which hung Israel's rejected Messiah. Finally, both Josephus and Tacitus, certainly without desire to certify the truth of our Saviour's predictions concerning great signs from heaven which should precede the destruction of Jerusalem, tell us of great celestial prodigies, which preceded that event for a period of five years. If, then, the Exodus of the fleshly Israel and the judgment of Egypt was ushered in by warning signs in material nature, is it *in the nature of the case at all unlikely* that the final solemn exodus of "the Church of the firstborn" from "this present evil age," and the

judgment of *all* nations, should be preceded by no less manifest and solemn signs in nature also? Why not? Or again, if we believe that the sun withheld his shining when the Son of Man hung on the cross, is it hard to believe that he shall again withdraw his shining, in solemn portent of the second appearing of that Son of Man to judgment?

Such, then, are by no means all, but the most notable and unmistakable of the signs which, according to the Word of God, shall herald the appearing of the Son of Man. Observe in regard to them all that while they are such as will enable the prayerful, Bible-reading Christian to be warned of the near approach of the Master from the far country, that that day may not come upon him unawares, yet there is not one of them which will ever to any man reveal the day or the year of the appearing. And further it is to be noticed that these signs derive much of their significance *as signs* from their *concurrence* with one another. If any one think that he discern even one of these signs, it should stir him up to watchfulness. But if we at any time are able to discern, not merely one but many of these signs taking form in history before our eyes, then we have the word of the Lord for it that we "may know that He is near, even at the doors." Let us therefore bear these clearly revealed signs in mind, that we may wisely watch for the appearing of our Lord. Five words will characterize those to which I have called your attention.

(1) The *evangelistic* sign, the general dissemination of the Gospel; (2) the *spiritual* and *ethical*, the spiritual declension and prevailing scepticism as to

the being of a personal *God* and future retribution ; (3) the *political*, the cessation of the abasement of the Jewish nation, culminating in the re-establishment of Jewish power in Jerusalem ; (4) the *social*, distress of nations with perplexity ; (5) the *herald cry* throughout the Church, *Behold ! The Bridegroom cometh !* and finally (6) the *physical*, or preternatural portents in physical nature. As the time approaches these will beyond a doubt reveal themselves more and more distinctly, with more and more indubitable clearness. It is as when at night one is watching for the sunrise. First, there is a glow of scarcely perceptible light along the horizon ; then again one is not quite sure whether it be there or not ; then it brightens again : but it is not yet the sun, but only the rising of the morning star. But now the brightness which at first had spread itself far along the eastern horizon, so that we could not tell where the sun at last would rise, as the hour approaches, concentrates itself more and more, and now radiant streamers from up the sky all converge to one glow of golden light and bid us there, just there, watch for the glorious appearing of the sun. So shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. *Our* souls wait for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning. So earnestly do we wait and long for Him that eager faith and hope may once and again be disappointed, as indeed they have been, and mistake the glow of the morning star for the light of the near presence of the Lord of Light Himself ; but though the vision tarry, wait for it ; for at the end it shall surely come, it shall not be behind time. But meanwhile.

let me beseech you to notice that, according to the Word of the Lord, clear as these signs may seem in the hearing, only the spiritually wise shall at last discern them as signs when they in fact appear. This is the constant burden of the Word of GOD in many a solemn warning. We are expressly told in reference to this very subject that none of the wicked shall understand, but the (spiritually) wise only. Of this the *typical* judgment of the destruction of Jerusalem affords a most impressive illustration. Josephus, when narrating the fearful sights and great signs from heaven, which, as the Lord had predicted, took place, before the actual destruction of the city—as a matter of fact about five years before—says that “the people neither attended to nor believed the manifest signs fore-signifying the approaching desolation, but like infatuated men, who have neither eyes to see nor minds to perceive, they neglected the Divine denunciations.” Precisely so, the Lord repeatedly assures us, shall it be in the days which precede His glorious appearing. I would charge you all therefore, even as I would charge my own soul, most solemnly and affectionately, in those never-to-be-forgotten words of Jesus Christ :

† “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. *Watch ye therefore*, and *pray* always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

XXIV

“THIS SAME JESUS WHICH IS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN.”—Acts i. 11.

IF we examine the teaching and preaching of the apostles concerning Jesus Christ, as recorded for us in the New Testament, we shall see that it chiefly concerned three topics: namely, Christ crucified, Christ risen at the right hand of God, and Christ coming again. Under one or the other of these heads can be brought all the Gospel testimony concerning Christ.

Each of these three heads of teaching, moreover, is essential to the full Gospel doctrine concerning Christ. If we leave out any one of these in our teaching, we are declaring not the whole counsel of God regarding His Son, but only a part of it. If any one of these has not entered in a practical way into our experience, then our experience has not conformed to the New Testament standard. Christ crucified! Christ risen! Christ coming again! These are the three great Gospel themes.

Christ rejected! Christ risen! Christ returning! Of these three I need not say that the last especially is often much neglected, whether in the public preaching of the Word from the pulpit and in our

Sabbath Schools and Bible Classes, or in the inner experience of Christians. So much that is wildly foolish, nonsensical and unscriptural has been said and written by ill-instructed and ill-balanced men concerning the Second Advent of Christ, that many good and sober men are afraid to speak much on the subject, lest they shall be misunderstood, and seem to countenance serious error and fanaticism.

Nevertheless, Paul did not neglect the doctrine. He preached Christ crucified ; he preached Christ risen at the right hand of God ; and none the less he preached Christ's future glorious return. He had not been more than three weeks in Thessalonica when he wrote his first epistle, but in that short time he himself had set forth, and that very fully, how that the risen Christ would come again. He went to proud and cultivated Athens, and, in the Areopagus, told the Greek philosophers that God had appointed a day in which He would judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He had appointed, even by that Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified in Palestine. And the cultivated and philosophical Athenian gentlemen, quite like many in our own day, laughed and scoffed at the preposterous idea. Jesus come again, to judge the world ! Why, all the world knew that He had been dead for many a year ! But Paul preached on, whether men received or rejected the truth.

And the doctrine of the Lord's ever imminent return he found an efficacious doctrine. Even the sceptical historian Gibbon tells us that it was one of the chief causes of the wonderful progress of the Gospel, the universal belief and expectancy of the

Christians of that day, that the Jesus whom they believed in as crucified for their sins would come again, and perhaps soon, in power and glory as the Judge and King of men ! It is no wonder that the preaching of such a truth as this was a power. The bare suspicion that this might possibly be true should be enough to make any men pause in their worldliness and sin. So we read that it was when Paul again struck this chord, and told Felix of righteousness and judgment to come, that the hard old Roman trembled. He had reason to tremble.

For all preachers of the Gospel in our day, too, their course is plain. They are, one and all, bound to preach as the apostles preached, and to make those things prominent in their preaching which the apostles made prominent, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear.

The Second Coming of our Lord is the theme of the text. The circumstances under which the words were uttered you will easily recall. As often before during the forty days after His resurrection, Jesus was talking with His disciples concerning the things of His Kingdom, and when answering their questions as to when the Kingdom should come, in a few prophetic words, He stretches out His hands and blesses them, and in the very act of blessing is parted from them and borne aloft into the heavens, where He is received into that mysterious Shekinah Cloud which once before had overshadowed Him upon the Holy Mount. The apostles stand gazing upward, evidently astonished and bewildered beyond expression. Had, then, the Lord left the earth for ever ? And were all the precious experi-

ences of those forty days to remain in all future time only as most blessed and holy memories of the past? Or would Jesus ever return? Through the minds of the disciples such thoughts as these must no doubt have passed, as they stood looking steadfastly toward heaven as Jesus went up. For, as if in response to such anxious questioning, two men (perchance that same Moses and Elias who had appeared once before on the Mount of Transfiguration with that same Shekinah Cloud)—two men stood by them in white raiment, which also said: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” That is, ye have not lost your Lord: nor hath He left this earth for ever. Nay, His ascension to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, which ascension ye have now beheld, is itself the pledge and the prophecy of His future return from the heavens in the full glory of His Kingdom. As surely as He has now in His human nature visibly ascended, so surely in that same humanity, and in like visible manner, shall He come again into the world the second time.

The great truths, therefore, which, according to these words, the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ is intended to teach us, are two: first, the certainty of the Second Coming—He *shall come*; and second, the manner of His coming—*in like manner* as He was seen to go.

This narrative should first of all remind us of the great fact that Jesus of Nazareth is coming again into this world. To believe this is exceedingly

difficult. That same faith which is the gift of God, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, is quite as much required in order that the truth of the Second Coming may be received, as it is in order that the truth of the First Coming may be received. That Jesus should come to the earth again is so entirely outside the ordinary course of nature! Nothing purely natural that the world has ever seen could even suggest such an idea. Moreover, among things supernatural there has been nothing like this. To think that, some day, forth from yonder empty space, with a sudden blaze of glory, far exceeding the noon-day sun, shall appear a Living Man! That a Man shall yet be seen coming in the clouds of heaven! Apart from explicit revelation, this could only be held the wildest fancy of a distempered brain. Modern philosophy, and not a little that passes for theology, has no place for such an apparition as this.

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ, so far from being a development of anything human or an evolution from anything earthly, is directly contrary to human development as at present proceeding. Nay, when Jesus comes, He comes for the very purpose of arresting that development, and cutting it short as a development in apostasy from God. There is no earthly cause, material or spiritual, or any conceivable combination of such causes, which could bring about such an event as this—a Living Man coming in the clouds of heaven! Judged by what we see around us, the very idea is preposterous. Hence all the current thinking of the present day is utterly hostile to the idea of a Second Advent

of the Son of God in human nature. It has become exceedingly hard for even Christian men to hold fast to this faith ; and the more so, that now so long time has passed since Jesus left the earth. Delay weakens the vigour of hope. For that generation of Christians who had witnessed His bodily ascension it was comparatively easy to look for His return with that vivid expectation with which history tells us that they anticipated it. But now that centuries have elapsed, things have gone on again in the same old natural way for so long that many say, "Where is the promise of His Coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." The bridegroom has tarried so long that many who should be watching slumber and sleep.

Now, the great divinely appointed remedy for this weakness of faith and expectation touching the Second Coming of the Lord is found in His Resurrection, and especially in His Ascension.

Who of us often thinks of human bodily form and life as existing somewhere among the starry hosts above us? And if the heavens are thus utterly empty of human life ; if we have forgotten that our great High Priest, clothed in our humanity, has passed into the heavens, no wonder it is difficult for us to believe and realize the great truth that some day from out the heavens Jesus of Nazareth shall come again. But, granted the Ascension, then yonder space is no longer empty ; somewhere there is the Man Christ Jesus. And if He had the power to go, how shall He not have equal power to

come? If this seem a prodigy quite too great to expect, here is a prodigy no less astounding, even the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Here is a fact, of which we have no lack of eye-witnesses, and those eye-witnesses men of stainless lives, men who gained nothing, but, on the contrary, suffered even torture and death because of this their testimony to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth; men whose testimony, in short, is confirmed by every test that legal and judicial wisdom has ever yet devised for the ascertainment of the truth or the detection of falsehood. And these unanimously testify that they beheld Jesus of Nazareth in His real and substantial human nature leave this earth and ascend into the heaven. He did beyond all doubt, then, thus ascend, or history may never again be trusted. And if the ascension of Christ be thus a stupendous historical fact, then at once it follows that the return of this Jesus is quite possible. And when we learn that Jesus, who foretold His ascension, and so in due time ascended, has also most explicitly said that He will again return, then, beyond all question, in due time return He will. Death itself is not so certain as that we shall yet see Jesus returning in the clouds of heaven. For it is written that those of His people who may be alive when He shall come shall not die, but "shall be changed." But whether we are thus changed or whether it is to be ours to die, we shall beyond all possible doubt yet see that same Jesus, who was crucified in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago, again return to this world.

Yes, it is written "This same Jesus." The iden-

tity of the Person is thus emphasized. We look for no new manifestation or incarnation of the Godhead ; and still less do we look for any abstract influencé or power emanating from Jesus ; but we look for Jesus Himself, that same Jesus who was born at Bethlehem, who stood and was judged at Pilate's judgment seat, who was crucified between two thieves, and who was laid in Joseph's tomb. The same Jesus of whom the Gospels tell us, and profane historians of that day have also written, He Himself shall come, and shall be known as the very same Jesus who "was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities."

Behold, He cometh ! But how shall He come ? The text gives answer plainly and simply. He shall so come *in like manner* as He was seen to go. In the first place, Jesus of Nazareth will come again *literally* and *visibly*. Whether the New Testament ever speaks of a spiritual "coming" of Christ, which is not literal and visible, may well be doubted, but this is not the question now. Nor is it of the slightest consequence, with reference to this present matter, how that question is answered. For in this verse we are told plainly of a coming which shall not be figurative or spiritual, but real and literal and visible, as was His ascension. For it is written : He "shall so come, in like manner as He was seen to go." As to how He went, there is no question and can be none. He went, literally, in that very same body of flesh and bones which He carried safe through Death's domain and brought up out of the tomb of Joseph ; and He went visibly, out from the midst of His disciples, they beholding

His ascension, dumb with wonder and amazement.

He shall come *literally*. As His bodily presence was, not in a figure but in a confessed reality, withdrawn from earth; so not in a figure or in any spiritual or metaphorical sense, but in living fleshly reality shall He return to this earth.

And He shall return visibly. Never, indeed, has any event occurred which has been so conspicuously and universally visible as that shall be. Even the risen sun illumines but one half the earth, but when He, the great Creator of the sun, shall appear, His brightness shall enwrap the globe. For it is written, "Behold, He cometh with clouds! And every eye shall see Him!" And then the Eternal Father shall bring again the Only Begotten into the world, arrayed not, as before Pilate's bar, in the mockery of royalty, but in its original blazing splendour and reality. He who is Pilate's Lord and Master shall take up Pilate's pregnant words, once uttered to the Jewish mob, and cry, "Behold the Man!" And at this solemn charge all the thronging populations of the world shall look up and behold Him. From Europe, Asia, Africa, America, wherever the millions of the human race are found, from every land they shall behold Him! All worldly speculation, commerce, trade, art, pleasure, all shall come to a sudden and instantaneous stop, and be forgotten, and the gaze of all humanity be concentrated upon Him. Yea, the very generations of the dead shall hear His voice, and shall be awakened from their slumbers to behold Him. The heavy gates of death shall open. His work shall not be done until all the multitudes of bygone ages, and the

myriads of all the nations of old time, Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Roman, Aztec, shall pour forth in order that they may behold the Man of God's right hand, who has come in the clouds of heaven. Abraham, who desired to see His day, shall see it, and be glad ; and Balaam too, who cried, " I shall behold Him, but not nigh." And the goodly fellowship of the prophets shall then behold Him of whom they sang, and praise Him. And the noble army of martyrs shall behold Him for whose beloved Name they died, and shall anew extol Him.

Not one of all who have lived in all the ages shall miss that spectacle, Jesus of Nazareth coming in His glory. Many there will be who would fain escape a sight which tells but of doom to them ; who, as it is written (kings, great and mighty men though they be) shall hide in the dens and the rocks of the mountains, saying to the mountains and rocks, " Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." But it will not avail. Proud philosophers, who sought wisdom but failed to find Christ, the Wisdom of God ; bold blasphemers, who used the Name of Jesus only in horrid oaths : self-righteous, self-styled Christians, who denied His Godhead and scoffed at an atonement through blood ; all, whether they will or no, shall be constrained to behold that Visage once so marred, now shining like the sun in his strength. Many a fair theory and many an elaborate philosophy shall wither and vanish before that vision like a spider's web before devouring flame. Palsy shall strike

dumb the blasphemer's tongue, and the deniers of Christ's eternal Godhead and atonement shall quail with conviction and terror before the countenance of unveiled Deity, and the face of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Jesus shall come visibly to all. Then we too who are here to-day shall see Him. Many great wonders we never have seen, nor shall see; but here is the one great Spectacle and Wonder of all the ages, that we are sure to see. When the Lord Jesus comes again in His great glory, we are sure to see Him; we shall by no chance miss of seeing Him. Every man and woman and child of us shall in that day behold Him!

Again we learn from these words that the Second Coming of our Lord will be *with great power and glory*. For His Ascension was with power and glory, and He is to come again *in like manner*. The Ascension was a most astounding exhibition of Christ's power. Never has man, with all his advances in science, been able so to overcome the control of the great force of gravitation which binds him to this planet, as to leave our surface that he might visit even our nearest satellite, or go any whither in the illimitable space. Nay, such are the conditions of the case, that it is not even conceivable that man by any possible mechanical contrivance shall be able to do so. But what is thus utterly beyond all possible human power Christ literally did; and by His own transcendent might, infinitely exceeding all the force of gravitation, and by the power of His own immortal life, He rose from the earth by a mere act of His free will, and departed

into the heavens as easily as we go out through an open door. Looked upon, therefore, merely as a physical phenomenon, the Ascension was a manifestation of the glory of Christ's power equalled only in His Resurrection from the dead.

And there were yet other glories of the Ascension. For the apostle Paul, in the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, quotes from the sixty-eighth Psalm, and assures us that in the words "Thou hast ascended up on high," and in their context, we have a description of the Ascension of the Lord. Whereupon, turning to that Psalm we read, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai." And why? The next verse tells us: "Thou hast ascended up on high; Thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast received gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them." So it appears from this that the ascending Lord went up in great glory, and was escorted to His high throne by innumerable legions of glorious angels. But His coming again is to be in like manner as He was seen to go. He went with power and glory: He will come again, therefore, in power and great glory. To use His own words, He will come in His own glory, in the glory of His Father and of the holy angels.

He went with power: He shall therefore come again with power. The voice which once called Lazarus from his tomb shall yet again be heard, and the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth; and the sea also shall give up the dead which are in it. And at that voice the sun

shall veil his face before his Maker, that the Lord alone may be the Light of that day. And the stars of heaven shall withdraw their shining before the rising of that One Bright and Morning Star.

As He ascended with angels, so in like manner shall He come again with all His holy angels. Never any royal victor of this earth had so regal an escort, or such armies of attendants, as shall come with Him the Coming King. For these armies of heaven shall follow Him, one solitary warrior of whom sufficed to lay prostrate Sennacherib's mighty host. The coming of an earthly king is oftentimes announced with booming of artillery and the thundering of heavy cannon. But when the Lord shall come, and His feet shall stand again upon the Mount of Olives, heaven's own thunders shall reverberate from pole to pole, and the earth shall quake beneath His feet. For the heavens shall shake, the earth also, and the sea, and the dry land; and the Desire of all nations shall come! Clouds and darkness shall be round about Him. His throne shall be like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire; and a fiery stream shall issue and go forth from before Him. Thousand thousands shall minister before Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him. And the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. And the judgment shall be set, and the books be opened. And thus, with such awful accompaniments of glory and grandeur, according to the Word of God, is the Man Christ Jesus to return to this earth. He went with glory; and with yet greater glory shall His Coming be!

The Ascension suggests another great characteristic of the Second Coming of our Lord. It will be altogether *sudden* and *unexpected*. On that fortieth morning the apostles, apparently, had no idea that Jesus was about to ascend to heaven. Before they realized what was to be, He had actually left the earth, and was ascending in their presence. Note again, now, what we have already observed, that it was said that He shall come in like manner as He was seen to go. He went thus suddenly and unexpectedly. Suddenly, therefore, and unexpectedly, He shall come again. Christ had told the apostles of His Ascension before it came to pass : “ What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before ? ” But, for all this, when He did at last ascend it came to them unexpectedly, and as He disappeared in the cloud above them they were stupefied with wonder and amazement. So also the Lord has foretold His Second Coming, and even given certain signs of its approach, but according to the Gospel it, like the Ascension, will take all men, even Christians, by surprise. So He has everywhere said, “ Behold, I come as a thief.” We do not know beforehand when a thief is coming ; before we ever become conscious of his approach, he is in the house. And again Jesus said, “ As a snare that day shall come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.” Here again is no previous warning, that men understand. The first that we know of a snare upon which we come is that we are caught in it. The first that the world will know of the day of judgment, they will behold that it has begun : that the Lord has actually come.

Let us away, then, with the dangerous and delusive fancy, that the return of the Lord cannot be close at hand because we may see no unmistakable signs of its imminence. Let us not imagine that all things are going on as yet in what is so nearly the old way, that He must needs be far away. That is an argument that proves precisely nothing. What sign of His Ascension was there before He began to ascend? And did He not specifically say that when He should come it would be as a thief; that the day should come as a snare? His coming may *not* be near; but it *may* be awfully close at hand. It is of the greatest consequence that we lay this to heart. Most people have a vague notion that such a stupendous event must needs be heralded by such distinct, premonitory signs as will *compel* their recognition of them; that the day of the Lord's coming will, as it were, gradually reveal its approach, so that we will have a little time to prepare ourselves. But there is not a single syllable to this effect in the Gospel; and there is a great deal to the contrary. Jesus said again: "As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." Like the lightning! Sudden! Instantaneous! Who was ever able to anticipate by even a second a flash of lightning? "So shall the coming of the Son of Man be." Mark that. The foolish virgins had no time to buy oil after the cry was heard, "The Bridegroom cometh!" Be sure that Christ's Second Coming to this earth will, like the Ascension,¹ be a great surprise to the best of men. The first that the apostles knew, they

saw Jesus going ; and the first that we know, we shall see Him coming. The predestined day on which He shall come will be a day just like other days, a day just like this day. For "as it was in the days of Lot," Jesus said, "so shall it be. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded ; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and devoured them all." Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. The judge will be in his court, and the merchant busy with his wares, and the mechanic at his work. And here will be a merry company laughing and sporting together, and here a gay picnic party, and here a company in the whirl of the dance, and here a marriage, and there a funeral ; and in the midst of all, and without a moment of warning, the cry shall be heard echoing from earth to heaven, "Behold, He cometh ! He cometh !"

The practical question for us all is plain and simple. Are we ready for this ? As surely as Christ Jesus ascended in His human nature, visibly, gloriously and suddenly from the midst of His disciples, so surely will He like a flash of lightning appear again in power and glory. Are you ready to meet Him ? I do not ask, "Do you *hope* that you will be ready against He shall come ?" Every one would maintain that that is his hope ; but it is a vain and a deceiving hope. The burning question is, "Are you ready *now* to meet Him ?" Such as each one of us is, here and to-day, such in all probability will the day of the Lord find us. After

they come to adult years, it is few who ever change their way: that you all know. Are you then ready *now* to meet the Lord Jesus? Understand the question well. It is not "Are you moral? Are you religious and devout? Are you a member of the Church?" All this is very well, but it does not follow because you can answer "yes" to all these questions, that you are ready to meet the Lord Jesus. Is your religion of a sort that will stand in the day of the Lord's appearing? It is written: "Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire, and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." Will your religion stand that fire? You are not sure? Test it then. How test it? How test the truth of your profession? Test it in this way. True Christians are in God's Word described as men "who *love* their Lord's appearing." Does that describe your character? Or does the responsibility of facing His speedy and unexpected return fill you with anxious apprehension and dismay? If so, then in your heart you are not sure that you are ready. And if not, what then? What, indeed, but to prepare at once! The way is simple. It is the old, old way of repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no time to lose; a single day cannot be promised you. Go directly to Him who has said, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." Behold the Lamb of God, once sacrificed for sin! Place the hand of faith on Him! Make sure that that atoning blood is on your guilty soul. In that night when God visited His wrath on Egypt,

no one escaped except him on whose door-post was the blood of the paschal lamb. And when God shall again visit the whole world for judgment, nothing will save you for a moment except the blood of Christ. Nothing, nothing in heaven or earth can save from the wrath of the Lamb, but the sprinkled blood of the Lamb. See to it that that all-atoning blood be sprinkled on your guilty soul before another sun shall set.

And if, beloved friends, that blood has already cleansed us, so that we are ready, then let us love and watch for His appearing. It will be for us a day of joy and glory, beyond all our loftiest imaginings. Then shall we, with the whole perfected Church of God, rise from the dead in the likeness of Christ's glorious body, and bid an everlasting farewell to all anxiety, to sickness, bereavement, and death. Then the broken families, whose loved ones have fallen asleep in Jesus, shall throng together in the resurrection of the just, clothed all in living, glorious bodies. We shall again see those lost ones face to face, and clasp hand in hand! And above all, we shall then see eye to eye Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us, whom hitherto we have not in the flesh seen nor shall see in the flesh until that day. And His own pierced hands shall wipe away all tears from off all faces; and so, perfect in holiness, and filled with heaven's own joy, we shall be ever with the Lord!

How sweet to think that all this glory and happiness may be very close at hand! Surely then we cannot remain indifferent, as so many Christians are, to this Blessed Hope, of the glorious appearing

of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ ! If this glorious coming is so certain, and if it may possibly, as a great and increasing number of the most devout and prayerful students of the Word believe, be very near, surely we should watch, lest, coming suddenly, He find us sleeping ! Let us then as we go down again from this Sabbath day into the world, keep in mind the exhortation of the apostle, that " living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," we live " looking for that Blessed Hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ," " who gave Himself for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him ! "

XXV

“AMEN! EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS!”

REV. xxii. 20.

THAT our Lord Jesus Christ, who nineteen hundred years ago was crucified in Palestine, and who rose from the dead and visibly ascended into heaven, is again, sooner or later, to return to this earth, is taught us with the utmost possible clearness in the New Testament. Our Lord Himself told the priests in the High Priest's palace, that He who stood before them in shame and weakness should yet of them be seen “sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.” And truly, seeing that He has already once come into the world, that He should now come again a second time were neither impossible nor unlikely. Nay, in that He has come once, the second coming is far more likely than the first coming could have been. We must confess that His first coming was, in its very nature, to the natural reason utterly incredible. For then He left the glory of the Father, in order that, being conceived in the womb of the Virgin and made in the form of a servant, He might for us sinners be made sin, be “wounded for our transgressions,” and be “bruised for our iniquities.” But when He shall come again the second time it shall be in quite another manner. It will be in the

dignity befitting Him : it will be in the unveiled glory of Incarnate Godhead ! If He came once to suffer, how much more shall He not come again to reign !

One manifestation of God on earth in human nature there has already been, a literal, historical event. There is to be yet another manifestation on earth of God Incarnate, in the glorified person of that same Jesus of Nazareth. And that will be, no less truly than the former, a literal, visible, historical event. This has been in all ages the *faith* of the Church. It is so plainly taught in the Gospels, that even Mohammedans expect it. It is denied only by Swedenborgians, Jews, Unitarians, and those rationalists who deny everything that cannot be explained by the ordinary laws of nature.

This Second Coming of our blessed Lord is one of the chief themes of the Scriptures. It is the great subject of all Old Testament prophecy ; and it is the one focal point of burning light to which converge all the predictions of the New Testament. When the Lord Jesus would by words from His own lips close the canon in the Book of Revelation, He did it in no other way than by a threefold renewal of the promise of return, with the greatest emphasis assuring us, "Behold, I come quickly !" And it was in answer to this promise that the beloved apostle responded, in the words of our text, with a longing most intense, "Amen ! Even so, come, Lord Jesus !"

And this prayer of John has been re-echoed from the hearts of believers in all ages from that day to this. So prayed Augustine, long ago, in his im-

mortal "City of God." So in later times prayed John Milton, in such words as these: "Come forth out of Thy royal chambers, O Prince of all the kings of the earth! Put on the visible robes of Thy imperial majesty! Take up that unlimited sceptre which Thy Almighty Father hath bequeathed Thee! For now the voice of Thy bride calls Thee, and all creation sighs to be renewed!" So, again, prayed the seraphic Rutherford of the Westminster assembly: "Oh, that Christ would remove the covering, draw aside the curtains of time, and come down! Oh, that the shadows and the night were gone!" So, again, prayed Richard Baxter, in that never-dying work, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*. "Hasten, O my Saviour, the time of Thy return! Send forth Thine angels and let that dreadful, joyful trumpet sound! Delay not, lest the living give up their hope! Delay not, lest earth should grow like hell, and Thy Church should crumble into dust! Oh, hasten that great resurrection day, when the seed Thou sowedst in corruption shall come forth incorruptible! Thy desolate bride saith, 'Come!' The whole creation saith, 'Come!' Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

So has the Church prayed for now these eighteen hundred years and more; and still He comes not. And yet she holds fast His faithful word of promise, and still prays, "Come, Lord Jesus!" That He who for His love for her laid down His life shall come again, that this very earth which witnessed His humiliation shall see Him in His supremest exaltation—this is the Church's expectation, as it is (or ought to be) the deepest longing of her heart.

Such, at least, Christian friends, is the New Testament experience, and the experience of all whose experience has been shapen not after the traditions of men but after the New Testament model. "It is a marked characteristic of the apostolic writings," says Dr. Charles Hodge in his *Theology*, "that they give such prominence to the doctrine of the Second Advent." "The promise of Christ's Second Coming," he continues, "had taken a deep hold on the minds of the apostles and of all the early Christians." "It is certain," he says again, "that the apostles believed that Christ would come visibly and with great glory, and that they held that coming to be the great object of expectation and desire."

To this we may add, without fear of contradiction, that it is equally certain that the Second Coming of Christ holds no such place in the minds of most professing Christians in our day, and especially in our own country. Is there not reason to fear that by many it is scarcely thought of at all? By a large number the doctrine is regarded with seeming indifference; by some even with apparent dislike. With many, again, it is a matter of the head rather than of the heart. It is by them confessed, for the reason that it is in the creed and in the catechism, and that it would not be orthodox to deny it; but it has never been wrought, like other doctrines, into their personal experience. *Death* is made, with the most, to take the place which in the experience of the early Church was held by the coming of the Lord as the destroyer of death. But a miserable substitute it is for what Paul called "that

Blessed Hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ." How rarely, in modern experience (in our prayer-meetings, for example), do we hear expressed those almost impatient, irrepressible longings for the return of the Lord Jesus, which marked the spiritual life of Paul and John, of Milton, Rutherford, and Baxter ! So far from this, the Advent has become to many, alas ! an object rather of dread than of hope. The one awful conception of Christ as Judge and Avenger has so overshadowed all others, and the full assurance of hope has become so rare, that to look for the appearing of the Lord with eager longing is to many an almost incomprehensible experience. Hence there is special need that one seek to recall Christians of to-day to the type of experience which finds expression in the text, but which, sad to say, has so largely disappeared from the Church. To this end I wish to show you from the Word of our Lord that His glorious appearing, so far from being regarded with dread or indifference, ought to be, above all else that is revealed as to the future, the object of the most intense, unceasing longing to every soul who is redeemed by the blood of Christ. May we each one learn to join with heartfelt fervour in the prayer of the text, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

The reasons for this are many. First, when the Lord Jesus comes again, then will be the resurrection of the dead and the translation of all living saints. For thus it is written : "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that . . . they which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with Him. For the

Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God ; and the dead in Christ shall rise first ; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. . . . For we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."

Such is the Word of God. But with us too many have come to quite a different way of looking at things. Heathen notions have found lodgment in the Christian Church, and by very many the body is conceived of as being in its very nature an encumbrance, of which to be free at death is but a happy riddance. To have a body again, material, tangible, such as the Scripture teaches that we shall have, seems to such hardly desirable. But with all such notions, which find an expression in not a few of our popular hymns, the teaching of the Gospels is in the most striking contrast. The teaching of the Bible is that the body belongs to man as man ; that without it he is not better off, but worse off—an imperfect and crippled man. It is not the body, as a body, but the body as sin has marred it, that is the hindrance in the divine life. Sin has made sad work with these bodies : it has marred their beauty, and it brings their glory to the worm. Hence it is, and hence only, that they are spoken of in Scripture as bodies corruptible, weak bodies, bodies of dishonour, bodies of death. For this reason, and this reason only, is it that even Paul was constrained to say, "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." Yet all this is unnatural. Because man is man, and not an angel, a disembodied

life is for him in itself undesirable ; it is a life imperfect and incomplete. Hence Paul adds to his words which I have quoted, "Not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." The perfect state for man is an embodied state. Even Christ Jesus dwells in flesh eternally. Yes, The Son of God Himself exists in bodily form to-day, as a man ! Hence it is that the Bible teaches that it is in the plan of Christ's great redemption to redeem our bodies also from all the effects of sin. He is but a poor workman who does only the half of the work. To the believer his Redeemer promises everlasting life now and here, and the resurrection afterward, as it is written, "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." And so verily it shall be. When the Lord comes again death shall be swallowed up in victory. These bodies shall be raised again, in glory, strength and beauty. Then shall be fulfilled that which is written, that "they which sleep in dust shall awake and sing," and we shall come forth in the splendours of resurrection life from the dawn of that glad morning, to shine as the sun in the kingdom of our Father !" All this shall be when Jesus comes : then it shall be, and then only. Have we not even already found reason enough for praying, "Amen ! Even so, come, Lord Jesus" ?

Thus I am led to add that we should desire the coming of the Lord because we are to be glorified when He comes. Not, assuredly, in this life, and not even, as so many imagine, at death, will we be glorified. To suppose the contrary is opposed both

to fact and to Scripture. It is opposed to fact : for until our Lord returns our *bodies* shall remain under the power of death, and in this assuredly is no glory. It is also opposed to the Scriptures, wherein we plainly read that—not at death, but “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we appear with Him in glory.” There will be in the resurrection, a glorification of the body. There will be also a glorification of the soul, in that then, and not till then, it shall be united to the body as a perfect instrument for the highest and the holiest activity. There will be a glorification of the whole person of the believer, for it is in that day that the Church shall be presented to Christ in the most solemn and august manner, with exceeding joy, “as a glorious Church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

And this suggests another thought. For the day of Christ’s Second Coming is called “the day of the manifestation of the sons of God.” There are sons of God in this world even now, as we know. But we cannot always surely tell them. We could in no case conjecture their lineage and destiny from their present appearance. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Though we be sons of the Most High, we are His hidden ones. If we are His, we are princes ; and yet neither to ourselves nor to others do we seem like princes. We are princes in disguise. In this, as in all things, we are made to conform to Him who is our Head. In human sight He was but a poor Jewish carpenter, “despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Yet all the time He was in truth the

eternal Son of God, "the Brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His Person." It was only at His resurrection that it first appeared to sight who and what He really was. Even so also shall it be with us. Our real position shall first be seen in the resurrection. Then we shall be manifested, or, as the word in the original means, "then we shall be unveiled." The disguise which until then we wear shall then be taken off, and we shall stand at the right hand of the King clad in the likeness of Christ's body of glory. Is not this then another reason why we should long for the hastening of our Lord's appearing?

But we may, according to the Word of God, associate yet another element of blessing with the Lord's return. When He comes, then comes *re-union*. For the inspired apostle calls the day of the Second Coming of the Lord the day of "our gathering together unto Him." We have many brethren whom we have never seen. On many of the noblest of our own Father's house we have never looked. Many, too, whom we used to know, and who were very dear to us, are gone. We laid them to sleep in the grave, and we know that we cannot look upon those well-remembered and beloved faces again till the resurrection morning. Yes, the family of God is a scattered family, but He does not intend that they shall be scattered always. When He shall bring again the First-begotten into the world, the Son of Man will send, we are told, and "will gather His saints from one end of heaven even to the other." Then shall we again see, not in some spiritual and incomprehensible manner, but literally and face to

face, those whom we laid to sleep in Jesus. Then shall eye answer again to eye, as of old, and the loving tones of long silent voices shall be heard again, to be silenced no more. Whatever there may be or may not be after death, it is absolutely certain that, according to the Scriptures, the literal, visible, bodily reunion and mutual recognition of those who have been parted on the earth by death shall not, cannot be, till Jesus comes again. Is not here, then, another reason why we all, especially those of us who have laid beloved ones to sleep in Jesus, should long and pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Closely connected with this is yet another glory attending the coming of the Lord. When He comes, His people are to be made *one*. They are indeed one now: they have all been baptized into one body, and have all been made to drink of one Spirit: they have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all. And yet they are not manifestly one. The Church seems not *one* to the world: she scarcely seems one to herself. For there are divisions. One saith, I am of Paul, and I of Cephas, I of Luther, and I of Calvin, and I of Christ. This is an evil thing. It is not as the Lord would have it. It is not even as His people would have it. There is indeed an inward unity, but it is not manifested fully because of the weakness of the flesh. But when the Lord comes again, then it shall be. Then first shall that prayer of His be answered, which He prayed, that His people might be one, even as He is in the Father, and the Father

in Him. Then shall it be evident that Christ was not divided, that the Body is one, even as the Head is one and as the Spirit is one ; and the reproach of the divisions of the Church shall be taken away for ever. For it is of that day of "the dispensation of the fulness of the times" that we read that God shall then "sum up all things in Christ as Head." And so, even as we must all long for the perfect manifested unity of all in Christ, must we ever pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

It is yet another reason why we should desire the return of the Lord Jesus, that when He comes, and not till then, we are to be *rewarded*. We deserve nothing, and yet, strange to say, we are to be rewarded. And the day when the high awards are to be apportioned, according to the unvarying testimony of the Scriptures is—not death, but the day of the Second Coming of our Lord. Thus the Saviour said to the apostle John from the seat of His throne in glory, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me." Thus had He also said before: "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father, and then shall He reward every man according to his works." Earnests of this reward, indeed, He gives us now, in the assurance of His love, in holy spiritual joy in communion with Him. Still larger earnestness do departed saints undoubtedly receive when they depart this life to await with Christ in Paradise the resurrection. But these are only earnestness of the reward, and not the great reward itself.

There are many things which we do, that seem to go all unnoticed by the Master. So often one's

whole life for Christ seems to pass unfruitful alike in result and reward, that the question will oftentimes suggest itself, "What profit is it that we have served the Lord?" But it shall not always be so. In the resurrection at last we shall be rewarded a hundredfold. It is written: "The Lord is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love." But He has nowhere promised to give the full reward until the day that He shall come. He bids us remember the poor, and tells us that we shall be rewarded—not at death, but "at the resurrection of the just" when He shall come. Then everything shall be rewarded: not one thing shall be forgotten. The very cup of cold water given for His sake, the most trifling service rendered any one because that one belonged to Christ, shall then be rewarded most royally.

Nor does even this exhaust all that we are told of the blessedness which the coming of the Lord will usher in. Then, and then only, is it that the Church shall enter into *rest*. There is, indeed, rest at death for every one who falls asleep in Jesus. But the Church as a whole, in its full completeness, shall enter into rest only when Jesus comes again. Until then, as the Lord has over and over again said, the Church has to look for tribulation. So it has always been. The true Church has ever been, and till the Lord return will ever be, a troubled Church. The world which crucified the King will never allow His loyal subjects long to abide in peace. Whether through fiery persecutions, as in so many lands and ages, or, as now with us, through yet more dangerous flatteries and allurements, the world will ever

seek to destroy the Church of Jesus Christ. But when the Lord comes, then, for the first, all this shall be changed. Then shall the Church at last have rest : rest from the assaults of Satan, for he shall be bound ; rest from the violence of the wicked, for they shall be destroyed out of the Lord's inheritance. Thus Paul puts this everlasting rest of the Church in the most immediate connexion with the Second Coming of the Lord, where he writes to the Thessalonians, comforting them in persecution by the coming of the Lord, telling them that when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, with all His mighty angels, God will then render righteous tribulation to the troublers of His Church, and will also recompense rest to them who are troubled, "rest with us," says Paul, "with us" the apostles and other martyrs of the Lord. All shall then enter together into the holy Sabbath rest which remaineth for the people of God. Is not this worth praying for ?

Yet another glory there is, which the Scriptures always associate with the coming of the Lord. That is what is called "*the marriage-supper of the Lamb.*" That glorious event (whatsoever mystery of glory may be intimated in those words), the marriage of the King of kings with His mystic bride, the Church of the elect, is to take place only when Jesus comes. Thus much we may say, that, at the Second Coming of our Lord, there will be a most august and holy public solemnization of the union of the God-man Christ Jesus with that mystic body of all true believers, which is in Scripture called "*the Bride of the Lamb.*" The union, indeed, exists in a manner

even now. For a long time the Church has been betrothed to her Lord. But the marriage of which this is the pledge shall not be until Jesus comes again. Meantime, the Lord has gone, according to His Word, into a far country, there to receive for Himself a kingdom. And now the days are on us of which He spoke when He said that the days would come when the Bridegroom should be taken away, days in which the Bride, left without His personal presence, should have cause for mourning. Days of mourning indeed they are, to all who truly love the Lord. Nothing can make up for His absence. We derogate not from the eternal glory of the ever-blessed Comforter the Holy Ghost, when we say that even His priceless presence was not intended to be a full and perfect substitute for the presence of the Son Himself. Rather does the Scripture represent the Comforter as being sent to quicken our longings for our absent Lord, and especially by His holy anointing to prepare the Church for the consummation of her union with the King of Heaven. In that sense, and in that sense only, was it expedient for us that Christ should go away. All this, however, is but in way of preparation for that high festival of all the ages which the Scriptures call "the marriage of the Lamb." Ought we not then, as we long for the consummated union with our Lord, to pray with the beloved apostle, "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Much more might be added; but all is summed up in those words of the apostle Peter, "Hope to the end for *the grace which is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" We do now receive



grace exceeding abundantly; but so far does the grace to be revealed then exceed all that we may before that have received, that the apostle speaks as if grace were then to be revealed for the first time; as if, compared with the amazing grace which shall then be revealed toward us, all grace previously bestowed should seem to be not worthy of mention. Grace is mercy to the undeserving. This it is which we most need, which only we are fit for, and which includes everything. For grace therefore we continually pray, as when at the close of each worshipping assembly we use those words, words too often whose meaning is but little thought of, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." These prayers, which do procure for us abundant grace even now, are to be chiefly answered for us then. All this is summed up in those words of our Larger Catechism, words which have the ring of a triumphant anthem: "In that day we undeserving sinners are to sit on the right hand of Christ our Redeemer; we are to be openly acknowledged and acquitted; associated with Christ in judgment and rule; and shall, both in body and soul, be fully and for ever freed from all sin and misery, filled with inconceivable joys; made perfectly holy and happy in the company of innumerable glorified saints and angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of God the Holy Ghost, to all eternity."

This is "the grace which is to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ." How then can any Christian help praying, with earnestness unspeakable, "Amen! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Is it any wonder that the apostle Paul, in that sublime passage in the eighth chapter of Romans, represents the whole creation as groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for that day of the adoption, to wit the redemption of the body? Then shall come resurrection, then glorification, then the gathering together of all Christ's people unto Him, the reunion of all that were scattered, rest and reward, the bridal of the Lamb, the new creation, the eternal Sabbath-keeping, glory fadeless, everlasting! Well may we exclaim with one of the Lord's people, "Blessed consummation of this weary and sorrowful world! I give it welcome! I hail its approach! I wait its coming more than they which watch for the morning! Oh, my Lord, come away! Hasten with all Thy congregated ones! Bring the resurrection and the marriage-day!"

Brethren, if these things be so—and who, with an open Bible, can deny them?—can there then be any possible excuse for the prevailing indifference with which the Second Coming of our Lord is regarded? It is for the bride to be indifferent for her marriage! It is for the heir to be indifferent to the possession of his inheritance! To transfer to death, as so many do, what the Scriptures exclusively associate with the glorious appearing of the Lord Himself, not only is to play fast and loose with the Word, but can only result, as it has resulted, in serious damage to Christian life. Corruption and the grave, and a disembodied state of which we can form no conception, these cannot possibly be made, as a motive, to take the place for power of the hope

and expectation of communion with a visibly present Lord, and re-embodied friends in Christ in bodily corruption.

The Church sorely needs a return to what Dr. Hodge characterized as apostolic belief and apostolic experience in this matter. But this cannot be brought about by fanciful speculations. It can only be attained in the presence of God, upon the knees, before the open gospel. Try then by grace, my Christian friends, to seek a development of your Christian experience in this direction. There are four things that it will do for you. It will greatly increase your concern to attain a full assurance of hope. You will soon come to feel that you cannot go on uncertainties, with the vision of a returning Lord before you. It will also increase your Christian consistency. Many a bright temptation of the world which now allures you into sin will pale and lose its brightness in the presence of that coming glory, the glory that excelleth. To risk the gaining of that glory for the doubtful pleasure of an hour—this will not be so easy, as you fix by faith your eye upon the majesty of your returning Lord. It will also increase your Christian joy. How can sorrow be possible at all, if all this is really true? If this great glory and happiness is really coming, and coming for us, how can we help knowing joy, knowing it in a way, maybe, in which we have never before known it? And then, finally, this blessed hope, if by God's grace you make it a part of your Christian experience, will quicken your zeal for missions. For the coming of all this blessedness for you and for the whole Church of Christ is con-

ditioned by our Lord upon our urgency in proclaiming to all the lands of the earth the blessed Gospel of His glorious kingdom. For "this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and *then* shall the end come." And "what manner of persons we ought to be" said the apostle Peter, "looking for and *hastening* the coming of the day of God!"¹ Wonderful thought! Although that day and hour is not known even to the angels of God, but is hid in the eternal counsel of the Father's foreknowledge, yet He has said that it is in our power actually to hasten the coming of the day! How eager we will be, then, to haste abroad with our King's proclamation to the four corners of the earth!

Ah, if you have been indifferent to this Blessed Hope in the past, be indifferent no longer! If you have dreaded it in the past, repent, believe, and dread it no longer! Let it be to you in your life, as Christ designed that it should be in the life of all His faithful, loving followers, a light and a power for hope and holiness and joy and diligence in Christian service!

But, alas! there are some to whom I cannot offer this truth of the Lord's appearing as a glorious Hope. For on all those who reject His Gospel the Lord will appear not as the God of all this blessing, but as a God of wrath and judgment, a God who hates sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. Oh, do not reject the salvation that is offered you now, for nothing but the atoning blood of Christ will avail to save you in that day when the Lord

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 12 (R.V. margin).

Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that obey not His Gospel. May God forbid that any of us fail of an entrance into that eternal kingdom, for the coming of which He has bidden His people patiently to wait and hope !