EXPOSITIONS OF JOHN. I-XII

REV. F. B. MEYER

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THE LIFE AND LIGHT OF MEN.

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BY

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"Elijah: and the Secret of His Power;"
"Israel: a Prince with God;"
"Tried by Fire;" etc.

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PREFACE.

THIS is the Gospel of the Divine Life of Jesus. The eagle has always been its recognised emblem, as denoting its sublime and heavenly character. And, clearly, in its diction, its insight into the deepest truths, its repeated testimony to the Glory and Deity of our Lord, it holds a unique place among the records of His life.

It soars. It holds fellowship with the Throne. Its eyrie is in the Heart of God. And yet, in one of its aspects, this Gospel is as much the record of the Man Christ Jesus, as of the Only-begotten Son; and for this it is of inestimable worth to all who desire to follow in His steps.

There is no part of Scripture more conducive to the culture of the inner life; and it is under this aspect that it is considered in the following pages.

This attempt to present some of the unsearchable wealth of this Gospel may be compared to a shell-full of water dipped up by a child from a vast fresh-water lake; but such as it is, it is commended to the people of God with the desire that it may be used by the Divine Spirit to bring them into a deeper knowledge of Life, Light, and Love, as they are in Jesus Christ our Lord.

F. B. MEYER.

Science ; but it is probable that the ages of eternity are to witness an eternal progression in this sublime theology. Our knowledge ever increasing our capacity to know ; our capacity ever leading to fresh hunger ; our hunger ever appropriating the blessedness of the fourth Beatitude. Remember the majestic Apocalyptic vision, in which the seer beheld Christ riding forth on his snow-white steed, his eyes as flame, his head girt with many crowns, his vesture dipped in blood ; but this is the name by which He was known—a name symbolic of his eternal ministry—*his name is called the Word of God* (Rev. xix. 13).

Before illustrating in detail our Lord's three-fold utterance of the Father, there are one or two thoughts suggested by the sublime opening sentences of this Gospel which we do well to notice.

I. The Eternity of the Being of the Lord Jesus.—"In the beginning was the Word." Is there not here an evident reference to the opening words of the Book of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." But what a contrast! At that moment, described as the beginning, and which may be pushed back far enough to include all the demands of modern geologists, you do not find the heavens and the earth, which as yet are not ; but you do find the Word already in existence. The words in the one case expressly exclude the eternity of matter ; but in the other they expressly include the eternity of the Word. Moses strikes the chord to descend the stream of Time ; John strikes it to look out on the expanse of Eternity lying beyond created things, but in which the Word was already existing.

It is not so difficult to wend one's way slowly back into the past, or to imagine the successive ages during which the world was being prepared for man's habitation. But when we reach the place where the links of the time-chain stop, and we stand at the first moment of the creation of time and matter, and look out into the void on the other side—it is then that thought staggers and gives way.

There is no light to guide us—sun, moon, and stars are

not created. No spirit to lead us; cherubim have not begun to love, or seraphim to burn. No stepping-stone for our feet; for space is unoccupied save by the all-pervasive presence of God. No sufficient unit of measurement; since, when arithmetic has reached its uttermost, the mighty aggregate is but a mote floating in the sunshine of the Being of God. What shall we do then, as we learn the pre-existence of the Word, but worship Him?

That mind must indeed be slow to perceive which does not recognise that what is eternal must be Divine. If it be true that before the mountains were brought forth, or the earth was formed, the Word was, then, from everlasting to everlasting He must be God. Wherefore "unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever."

II. The Personality of the Lord Jesus.—"He was with God." We may not at first perceive the significance of this clause, any more than the casual tourist sees the importance of an embrasure in the fortifications where sheep browse, and soldiers stand at ease. But if ever there should come again days of conflict, like those which swept across the early Church, in which men should assert that the Word was but a momentary and impersonal manifestation of God, we should instantly revert to this significant clause, and cry, It cannot be—*The Word was* WITH *God. The same was in the beginning* WITH *God.*

The preposition selected by the Evangelist is very significant. It means communion with and movement towards. It denotes the intimate fellowship subsisting between two, and well befits the intercourse of the distinct Persons of the one and ever-blessed God. "The face of the everlasting Word was ever directed towards the face of the everlasting Father." He was in the bosom of the Father. "He makes the Divine glory shine outwardly because He is filled inwardly. He contemplates before He reflects. He receives before He gives."

We are not then surprised to hear the Divine colloquy: "Let *us* make man"; or to learn that Jesus knew the Father (x. 15).

How could He do other, when, "trailing clouds of glory behind Him," He proceeded and came forth from God?

Let us never forget that our Saviour, who lived, and died, and rose, and is our familiar Friend, is a distinct personality, who was before all worlds, and will be unchanged for evermore. This is what we want. It is not enough to give us an abstraction, an ideal, a word. Our hearts crave One, and, blessed be God, they may have One who may be a living, bright reality.

> More present to faith's vision keen
> Than any earthly object seen;
> More dear, more intimately nigh,
> Than e'en the dearest earthly tie.

III. The Deity of our Lord Jesus.—"The Word was God." He is not said to be *the* God; for that assertion would ascribe to the Son the totality of the Divine Being, and contradict the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. And He is not said to be *Divine*, which would lessen the emphasis. But He is said, distinctly and emphatically, to be God. "God manifest in the flesh."

He was born of a woman; yet He made woman. He ate and hungered, drank and thirsted; yet He made corn to grow on the mountains, and poured the rivers from his crystal chalices. He needed sleep; yet He slumbers not, and needs not to repair his wasted energy. He wept; yet He created the lachrymal duct. He died; yet He is the ever-living Jehovah, and made the tree of his cross. He inherited all things by death; yet they were his before by inherent right.

And what is the Word to us?—In his first Epistle, the holy Apostle tells us his intention in declaring that which he had seen and heard and handled of the Word: it was that others might share with him his fellowship with the Father and the Son. And fellowship means partnership, a common participation in a common stock; and, in this case, a blessed share in the very life and light and love of God.

But how may such things become ours? There is a sense in which the orator, the thinker, the friend, is able to infuse himself into us by his fervid and quickening words. And is

there not also a deep sense in which Jesus is the Word of God, because through Him God is ever pouring Himself into our hearts and lives? As a man puts himself into his words, and by them communicates himself to others, so has God embodied Himself in Jesus, and those who receive the Son receive the Father, who has sent Him (Matt. x. 40).

As the Father has put Himself into the Word, so has the Word put Himself into his words. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Live then in meditation on the *words* of Jesus; so that his being may become infused into yours, and through the Word the eternal Father may come and make his abode within you (John xiv. 23).

So shall you be inspired by the very life and indwelling of God, and be lifted increasingly out of the time-sphere into the eternal; into fellowship with all noble souls, with all saints and angels, with all who, through all worlds, live on Him, who is the Eternal and Divine Word, ever-blessed, ever to be adored.

II.

The Word in Creation.

"The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made."

JOHN i. 2, 3.

IT is a distinct loss to many of us, whose lives are spent in the heart of great towns, that we miss those enlarged conceptions of Nature which are suggested by the far horizon of the sea; the outlines of distant hills; the snowy summits of the Alps; or the outspread panorama of woods, rivers, and pasture lands. And the privation affects us principally in this, that contracted views of Nature sometimes carry with them more limited views of God's being and glory than if we dwelt in habitual contemplation of the vastness and splendour of his Creation.

One of the first thoughts which occur to the devout mind, on emerging from the straitened conditions of city life into the larger world of Nature, is to reproach itself that it has entertained such dwarfed ideas of God. And whilst it does not abate one note of the tender strain, *Our Father*, it adds to it the deep bass of the Psalmist's awe, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable."

Such thoughts open straight on the passage before us. We look, and rightly, on the Lord Jesus, as Brother, Saviour, Friend; but do we always conceive of Him as invested with the awful glory of Godhead? We cannot be too intimate and tender in our relations to Him; but we do well sometimes to go outside to see what He has done, that we may know how great He is, who is so near and dear.

"THE SAME WAS IN THE BEGINNING WITH GOD."—At first this seems merely to sum up and repeat the previous

verse. But it does more. It tells us that He who was before the beginning was also at the beginning; and that that face-to-face fellowship, which had subsisted before all worlds, was in active exercise at the august moment when the ever-blessed Trinity proceeded to create. "Let *us* make man."

"ALL THINGS WERE MADE BY HIM."—The Greek is very significant: *All things became, i.e.*, came into being, *through Him.* This *became* is in striking contrast to the *was* of the previous verse, and indicates the passage from nothingness to being. *Became, i.e.*, all things emerged out of nothing at the creative fiat. There is a beautiful parallel in another passage of this Gospel, in which our Lord affirms, "Before Abraham *became*, I am" (viii. 58).

The preposition "through" is always used of the office of our blessed Lord in the work of creation (1 Cor. viii. 6; Col. i. 16; Heb. i. 2), and is full of meaning. It leaves God the Father as the origin and source of all things, so that the elders are justified in their perpetual ascription of worship before his throne (Rev. iv. 11); but God the Son, our Lord, is the organ through which the creative purpose moves. Through Him the infinite God utters Himself in his works.

In the archaic record of creation with which the Bible opens, two phrases are to be noticed—*created* (Gen. i. 1, 21, 27) and *God said* (which occurs ten times). Into each of these we must now read the announcement of this text. Note those three acts of creation. Whatever else we may concede to men of science, we must insist on retaining these for God, and ascribing them to our Lord. And whenever God is said to speak, we must listen for the well-known accents of a voice we love.

It was the voice of Jesus that said, "Let there be light"; and the new ethereal substance spread like a haze of glory through space. It was the hand of Jesus that made the expanse between cloud and sea, in which the birds fly (Gen. i. 20). It was the bidding of Jesus that drove the turbulent waters from the land into the ocean-bed which He had scooped. It was the thought of Jesus to splinter the mountain peaks; to thrust the frozen glacier down into the valley by inches; to pour forth the rivers; and to shake down over the hills the falling foam of the

cataract. It was Jesus that carpeted the earth with flowers, and devised the innumerable sorts of plants, and planted the noble forest-trees. It was Jesus that rolled the stars on their orbits, to tell forth the glory of God, and to keep time on Nature's dial. It was Jesus that made the fish to flash in the deep; the reptile to creep in the brake; the firefly to glance through the forest; the birds to sing in the woods; flocks to browse on the hills; and herds to traverse the prairies.

It was Jesus who created the human nature which, in after years, He was to assume. He made man in the image and after the likeness of what He was Himself to be in the fulness of time. What strange emotions must have filled his heart as He built up that first man from the red earth!

"WITHOUT HIM WAS NOT ANYTHING MADE THAT WAS MADE."—This is added to make exceptions impossible. The Greek is very emphatic, *not one single thing*. You must not except angels because too great, nor emmets because too small; not worlds because too ponderous, nor dust-atoms because too insignificant; not electricity, nor light, nor heat, because too ethereal, nor the ichthyosaurus nor the toad because too ungainly. The hand of inspiration writes the name of Jesus where artists put theirs, beneath all things in heaven and on earth, visible or invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.

> "Not a flower
> But shows some touch, in freckle, streak, or stain,
> Of his unrivalled pencil."

"IN HIM WAS LIFE."—We must light up these words by his own: "As the Father hath life in Himself," the source and fountain of all being, "so hath He given to the Son" that is, in the subordinate position which He voluntarily assumed for the purposes of creation and redemption—"to have life in Himself." All life is of God in its original reservoir; and all life is in the Lord Jesus, as a cistern of supply, from which all demands for life of every sort are met.

All life — natural and physical, animal and intellectual, spiritual and religious — is in Him. The whole universe

of living things was not simply brought into being by Christ; but it is kept in existence and sustained in living beauty by the constant communications of his fulness—as a vale is kept in fertile beauty, luxuriant with vegetation, by the spray of a perennial waterfall. As the Word, He creates; as the Life, He sustains. As the Word, He declares God; as the Life, He communicates his essence. "As the Word, He is God without us; as the Life, He is God within us."

Apart from Christ, you may exist; but you have no life in you. "He that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." You may have many attractive and amiable qualities, much that is correct in behaviour, and beautiful in appearance; but you have no *life*.

But if you are in Christ, opening all your being to Him, door behind door, back into the most sacred chambers of your being, so that He has free and unhindered entrance into your entire nature; then, as the Nile, descending through the channels cut by the Egyptian peasantry, bears life and fertility into their gardens and cornfields, so will He bring his own life, the life of God, "life indeed," into you, and though you were dead, yet shall you live (John xi. 25).

(1) *Say "No" to your Self-life.*—It is in proportion as we curtail the self-life that we increase the Christ-life. Michael Angelo was wont to say of the chippings that fell thick on the floor of his studio, "While the marble wastes, the image grows"; and as we chip away ourselves by daily watchfulness and self-denial, the life of Jesus becomes more manifest in our mortal body (2 Cor. iv. 10, 11). A rosebud may be grafted into a briar; but the briar must never be allowed to put forth its own shoots beneath it, or they will drain away its strength: therefore the gardener must ever mercilessly bud them off. After the same manner must we deal with every assertion of self. "I have been, and am, crucified with Christ...Christ liveth in me."

(2) *Yield to the Christ-life.*—This is the law of all natural forces; if you want them to help you, you must yield them obedience. In using them, you are less their master, and more

their slave, than you suppose. They are willing to toil for you day and night ; but on the one condition that you should study and obey the laws of their operation. And it is so with respect to that greatest of all forces, the life of the Son of God. It is throbbing in every believer's heart. And the difference between Christians consists in this, that some ignore its presence, or, at least, are very careless of its promptings, whilst others are ever on the alert to translate into instant obedience, the tiniest impressions. As you yield to the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus, you become more conscious of his blessed strivings within, they increase in number and power, and bear you upward, as when the ocean pours its tides up an estuary or river, and reverses the direction of its flow.

(3) *Replenish waste by going again to the source.*—There is so much leakage in us that we speedily exhaust what we have received. The oxygen absorbed by the blood is soon exhausted by its contact with the waste of our tissues, and needs to be drawn back through the veins to be soaked again in the air of our lungs ; so does the freshness of the Divine life within us need to be daily renewed, and we must go back to Him in whom it is ever brimming, that out of his fulness we may receive, and grace for grace. It is in the reading of his Word, in prayer, and in waiting upon his ordinances, especially in the Lord's Supper, that the inner life becomes thus replenished and "fulfilled with his grace and heavenly benediction."

"The Life was the Light of Men."—All true life is luminous. The lowest forms of physical life are light ; as when the keel of the vessel ploughs up the wave, and leaves long lines of phosphorescent glory in its wake. And who does not know of some community which has been lit up by the glow of some noble life ! During his life in our mortal body, Jesus could not be hid ; no bushel of obscurity sufficed to conceal Him. And now, when He enters into contact with any soul or life, that soul begins to glow, that life to shine.

We are like so many unlit candles, some of coarser and some of more refined material, clustered together in a darkened chamber, but not one of us able to dispel its gloom, or cope

with its dense obscurity; but just so soon as we touch Jesus Christ, or are touched by Him, we begin to sparkle and shine. His Life is Light. "Arise, shine! for thy light is come." "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

These then are our closing reflections :—

(1) How great must He be, through whom this great universe was made, who was one with God the Father in its inception, and one in its execution! He could not have been less than divine, or the infinite God could not have found adequate expression through his means. Only the Infinite can be the channel for the Infinite.

(2) We may learn something of the beauty of his mind. The beauty sleeping in a seed reveals itself by the colours of the flower as they unfurl to the sun, and the fragrance that fills the air. The beauty in the unexplored heart of a friend reveals itself in the verses we suddenly light upon, or the books which bear his name. The beauty of the artist's mind is discovered in the pictures or statues which he has produced. And what revelations are made to us of the beauty of the conceptions of our Lord, as we arm our eyes with telescope or microscope, and study the infinite above or the infinite beneath!

(3) We can trace some lingering remnants of the grandeur of our original nature, in that we ourselves, sinful and fallen though we be, are able to admire the works of his hands, and to repeat his "very good" of all that we behold of his power and skill. Devils seem devoid of this power; for they are pictured as haunting uninhabited and desolate places, roaming through desert places, and infesting the ruined heaps of the past.

(4) We can understand the miracles and parables better. In the one, our Lord was simply re-asserting his original power over nature; as when Ulysses returned after years of wandering, and bent with ease the bow which had defied the efforts of all who had essayed to use it in his absence. And in the

other, He simply read out the meaning which He had hidden in vines, and seeds, and natural processes; for all things around us are made after the pattern and type of spiritual realities.

(5) We may be sure that He who made can and must redeem. It is impossible to suppose that He through whom all things were made could stand by and see them vitiated and spoilt by sin, without making a single effort to arrest the progress of the devastator, and to restore the universe to its pristine beauty and order. We are not then surprised to learn that the same paragraph which tells us that all things were created by Him, also tells us that it pleased the Father by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven (Col. i. 16-20).

He who is the Alpha must also be the Omega; He who created by a word must redeem by his blood; He who originated must see that He is not robbed of the fruits of his toil; He who said, "Behold, I make," must also say, "Behold, I make all things new."

III.

The Word as Light.

"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."—JOHN i. 9.

IT is not for us to attempt to celebrate the Praise of Light. What a wonderful conception it was of the mind of God! How delicate the loom of that creative skill on which it is constructed day by day! And how complete an argument for the divine workmanship is afforded by the adaptation between the element of Light and the crystalline gate of the eye by which it enters man's soul! (Luke xi. 34–36.)

Themes like these rather become such as our great epic bard, whose blindness made him more sensible to the value of that which he had lost, and whose lofty genius could alone find terms to describe its worth. Or, better still, Light might well be the subject of a sonnet by that angel minstrel who composed the majestic Psalm of Creation which is perpetually sung before the throne (Rev. iv. 11). But neither could proceed long with his task without rising from the material substance—for ethereal as light seems to be to our dull sense, it is still material—to that glorious Being who made it as a parable and emblem of his Divine nature. "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John i. 5).

But the glory of the Father's nature is of such insupportable splendour that it would be impossible for any creature that He has made to behold and enjoy it; and it is very consolatory to be told in the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews that our Lord Jesus is "the effulgence of his glory" (Heb. i. 3, R.V.). The human eye could not bear the full splendour of

the sun's heart or surface of golden cloud, but it can bear the far-travelled and diluted ray; so, though we could not behold the nature of God in its direct and original manifestation, we can behold his glory in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. iv. 6). And for this reason we hail thankfully and adoringly the announcement that the Word is the Light.

I. The Characteristics of the Light.—*Light is pure.*—It is so pure that evil cannot stain or impurity defile it. It will pass through a fœtid and poisonous atmosphere without contracting taint, or carrying a germ of poison with it, as it issues forth to pursue its ministries of mercy beyond. So pure was our blessed Lord. Evil fled abashed before Him. He gauged the power of temptation, not by yielding in a hair's breadth, but by resisting and overcoming it. When He died, after thirty-three years' close contact with men, his spirit was as absolutely stainless as when He was born of a pure virgin. And the instant effect of his life within our hearts will be to kindle a purity as sweet and chaste and unearthly as his own.

Light is gentle.—With each dawn its tides revisit us after having traversed the abyss with inconceivable speed; but its wavelets break so gently that they fail to shake the dewdrop from its blade of grass or the trembling petal from the overblown rose. Even the gossamer of the spider's web does not quiver as the sunbeams strike it. And how apt a symbol is here of that gentle goodness which made the shepherd-boy great, which leads the flock into pastures of tender grass, and fans with anxious care the dull sparkle of smoking flax! And when His love is shed abroad in our hearts, it begets a corresponding gentleness in judgment, speech, and behaviour. All true Christians are *gentle folk*. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, *gentle*, easy to be entreated, full of mercy" (James iii. 17).

Light is all-pervasive.—It kindles a line of watch-fires on the pinnacles of an Alpine range; but it does not neglect the hill-slopes up which the plovers follow its last retreating beams. It gilds the golden roofs of the palace; but it glides through

prison-bars to sparkle in the tear-drops of the repentant prodigal. It lights the good man to his work, and the bad man to his home after the unholy revels of the night. Nor is it otherwise with the loving-kindness of Christ, which misses none in its daily ministry, however poor, and sad, and lonely ; which includes the evil and the good, the just and the unjust ; which "lighteth every man that cometh into the world." And it is thus with those in whom his life repeats itself. They, too, are said to be "without partiality." Their lives resemble the sun and the rain (Matt. v. 45).

Light reveals.—It revealed to Jacob the deception practised on him by Laban under the cover of darkness. It revealed to the host of Midian the meagre force before which it had fled panic-stricken, misled by the noise of the crashing pitchers and the flashing of three hundred lights. In darkness the traveller lies down to spend the night beneath the open sky, in terror lest he may stray to the brink of the ravine ; but the morning, with rosy finger, reveals that he has been sleeping within a stone's cast of his home. So does Christ reveal. He is the light of all our seeing. He not only lights up our inner sight, but He casts a light on God, and providence, and truth, and the mysteries of redemption, which, apart from Him, notwithstanding all our intelligence, had been obscure and unknown. In his light we see light. Light is whatsoever doth make manifest. Let us lift up our souls unto Him who is light, so that we may be filled and saturated with his nature and being, and made to glow with it in this dark world ; as I have seen a certain kind of diamond, which, after having been held up for some short period in sunlight, has continued to sparkle like a star when carried thence into a darkened chamber. "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed (*i.e.*, transfigured, it is the same Greek word as in Matt. xvii. 2) into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. iii. 18).

I. The Ministry of the Light.—*The Word was the Light of unfallen man in Paradise.*—In the glades of Eden two trees were planted ; the one the tree of life, the other of the

knowledge of good and evil. It is impossible not to see in these a lively representation of Him who is Life and Light, and who, from the first, must have been the organ and channel of Divine communication to mankind.

It was in the person of the Son that the ever-blessed God walked with our first parents in the cool of the day; conversed with them; uttered the memorable prohibition; sought them in their fall; and, with sad prevision of all that it must cost, foretold the ultimate triumph of the woman's Seed. Even then He rejoiced in the habitable part of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men. Even then He was the Light of man's moral nature, teaching him all he knew, and prepared to lead him on to know the deep things which lay concealed as a landscape under a morning haze. Even then the Son had commenced his favourite ministry of manifesting the Name of his Father (Matt. xi. 27; John xvii. 26).

The Word was Light in the World amid the long dark ages which preceded the Incarnation.—"The Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." There are two methods by which darkness is produced. The one by absence of light; the other by loss of sight. It is dark when the sun sets, and primæval darkness resumes for a brief parenthesis its ancient sway; but it is also dark when the eye is blind. And the darkness mentioned here is not the first, but the second.

There has never been an age in which the Divine Light has not shone over our world. Not Gospel light, not the light of revelation, not light as we have it; but still, Light. And whatever light existed was due to the presence and working of the Lord Jesus. *He shone* in the good He did; giving rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, and in the food and gladness with which He filled men's hearts, so that He left not Himself without witness (Acts xiv. 17). *He shone* in the clear testimony given since the creation, through the works of nature, to the everlasting power and divinity of God (Rom. i. 20). *He shone* in the intuitions of truth, which we call conscience, and which are his voice in the human breast, and are so evidently referred to here as the true light, lightening every man coming into the world (Rom. ii. 14, 15). *He shone* also in those great movements

towards righteousness, which seem to have swept from time to time over the heathen world. Whatever of truth there was in any of these must have been due to Him. It was of the heathen that the Apostle spoke when he said: "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them" (Rom. i. 19, R.V.).

But the light shone amid blind and darkened hearts, which could not comprehend it. Though men knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; and, as the result, "they became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was *darkened*" (Rom. i. 21). Since they would not believe, the god of this world was permitted to blind their eyes.

It is characteristic of this Gospel, and it well befits its theme, that so much space is given to the story of the man born blind (ix.), for such is really the condition of the race; and it is significant that that story is prefaced by the announcement so constantly reiterated by the Lord, "I am the Light of the world" (ix. 5; see also viii. 12; xii. 35, 46). A family born blind; a race stricken with blindness, as Saul was, and groping for some one to lead it by the hand; a vault, like that in which the dead are buried, around which the sunlight plays, whilst not one beam can enter—such is a picture of our race. "The Light shineth in darkness."

The Word was the Light of the chosen people.—Throughout their history God sent them prophets, rising up early and sending them, that they might bear witness to the coming Light. They were not that Light, but they came to bear witness to it (John i. 8); just as the moon and planets bear witness to the sun while he is absent, though every moment is bringing him nearer to close their reign. Of these John the Baptist is here cited as the greatest and last.

We need not recapitulate their names—the evangelical Isaiah; the plaintive Jeremiah; the seraphic Ezekiel; the abrupt Habakkuk; Amos the herdman; and Haggai the priest. They are not all mentioned here; but are summed up in the greatest of all, John the Baptist, of whom Christ Himself said: "Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater." All these were lights;

John was "a burning and shining lamp": but their light was not their own, it was derived from Him to whom they all bore witness. They spake of Him. The testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy. Overtopping other men in the grandeur of their personal character, and by the gift of the Spirit of Inspiration, they saw the day of Jesus, as mountain-peaks first catch sight of the rising sun; and they declared to the world of men below what glory was on the way.

What a new interest would come into our reading of the Old Testament Scriptures, if we always remembered that they testify of Jesus, and glisten with light caught by anticipation from his life; and if we sought to discover what the Master meant when, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, "He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

As every dewdrop on the morning meadow glistens with the sunlight, each of them reflecting the whole sun, so do the paragraphs of the prophets flash with the presence of Jesus. They are beautiful in his beauty; strong in his strength; true in his truth. The lips may be those of man, the voice that of a prophet; but through all, the Word of God speaks, and the true Light shines. In the pages of the prophets the quick ear of love detects the accents of Him who spake as never man spake. Indeed, we are told expressly that the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets announcing that Gospel which is now preached throughout the world (1 Pet. i. 11, 12).

Finally, the Light became incarnate.—Too bright to be beheld, the Light of God curtained Himself in human flesh, as the face of Moses beneath his veil, or the Shekinah beneath the folds of the tabernacle. Such is the direct force of the word translated *dwelt* in ver. 14. It might be better rendered *tabernacled.* But of this more afterwards.

And it is not possible to do more than take one brief glance at that bright world which awaits us, when, *in the ages of eternity, our blessed Lord will be still the Everlasting Light.* For it is written that the heavenly city will not need sun nor moon to shine in it, because the Lamb is the light thereof (Rev. xxi. 23). And so, from the first creation of man till the new creation; from the garden of innocence to the city of

matured and tested holiness; from the origin of the race in its lonely and single representative to the untold myriads of his progeny who shall stand in the unsullied purity of robes washed white—always and everywhere, the Word of God is the Light of men, the *true* light, that is the archetypal light, of which all other lights are types and illustrations.

III. The Reception of the Light.—(1) *Before his Incarnation* "He was in the world." In every spring, in every sunbeam, in every God-breathed thought, in every providence; walking up and down the aisles of his own temple; brooding over the teeming myriads of mankind. In Him they lived and moved and had their being. He was not an absentee from his own creation. In Him all things consisted and were maintained (Acts xvii. 28; Col. i. 17).

"And the world was made by Him." Mark this touching repetition of *the world*; we shall often meet with it again. It is used repeatedly, as when a bereaved parent, brooding over the sin or misfortune of some beloved child, repeats his name again and again. "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" And see how the Holy Spirit emphasizes the fact that our Lord was the organ through whom creation was wrought.

"And the world knew Him not." As though a man might build a splendid mansion—with frescoes on its walls, fountains splashing in marble wells, luxuriant furniture, exquisitely-planned grounds—put it in trust for the sick or destitute, go away for years, and on returning be denied admittance, or watched as an intruder; until, touching some secret spring, he showed such knowledge and power as to compel recognition of his claims.

It was a sorrowful confession, extorted from our Lord, by all his experiences, both before and after his Incarnation—"the world hath not known Thee." And it is confirmed by the Holy Ghost when He says, in the wisdom of God, "the world by wisdom knew not God." Alas for the poor world, vaunting its science and its pride, but not knowing that glorious Being who was in it from the first!

(2) *At his Incarnation.*—"He came unto his own, and

his own received Him not." Throughout the Old Testament the Jews are spoken of as God's peculiar treasure; but here they are described as Christ's, because Christ is God. They were his by the calling of Abram; by the covenant of circumcision; by the passage of the Red Sea; by the desert discipline; by the education of history: but when He came to them, they cried, "We will not have this Man to reign over us."

"They received Him not." This is a note which we shall hear again; but in the meanwhile, the word seems carefully chosen to suggest that it was not a case of ignorance, but of wilfulness. They knew, or might have known, who He was; but they deliberately refused to enquire into his credentials, and they shut the door resolutely in his face. This is why they are a nation of weary-footed wanderers, bronzed by the sun of every clime, having everywhere a recognition, but nowhere a home.

(3) *Since the Incarnation.*—There has been no longer a dealing with nations, but with individuals. Many have received Him, rising above the general indifference around. Mary in the highlands of Nazareth; Elisabeth in the hill-country of Judæa; Simeon in the temple; Hannah the prophetess; and Zachariah the priest, are representatives of untold multitudes beside. And to as many as have thus received Him He has given the right to become the sons of God.

Stepping across the humble threshold of their hearts, He has suddenly thrown aside the garments of his great humility, which He had worn as a disguise and test. Then, rising in the full stature of his Divine Manhood, He has taken from out his skirts a parchment patent of sonship and heirship, and, handing it to the recipient and astonished spirit, has declared that from henceforth it may dare to reckon itself, without presumption, a child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And for lineage, it is revealed that all such may trace their descent past earthly parentage—"not of blood"; past natural instinct or desire—"not of the will of the flesh"; past human volition—"not of the will of man": to the thought, and purpose, and grace of the Eternal Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

IV.

The Word Made Flesh.

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."—JOHN i. 14.

"THE Word *became* flesh," thus the Revised Version better renders the original. But what a profound mystery these words cover!

Open the golden compasses of thought to measure, if it be possible, the distance between these two extremes, *the Word*, and *flesh*. The Word, the eternal and ever blessed Son of God; the fellow of Jehovah; able to utter God because Himself God; through whom all things were made. Flesh, a frail and transitory fabric woven from the dust, and destined to return to dust; limited to time and space; comprehending, as it does so evidently, not only the human body, but the entire human nature of which the flesh is the outward and visible embodiment. What verb shall unite extremes so infinitely removed? What link is there for these two?

The Word *made* flesh? It is true, but not enough.

The Word *was wroth with* flesh! So it might have been; but this is not the knot of union.

The Word *pitied* flesh! That had been marvellous, but also insufficient.

The Word *clothed Himself with* flesh! Even that were inadequate; for in that case He would only have borrowed a temporary disguise, which He might as easily have thrown off, and there had been no entire oneness.

No. THE WORD BECAME FLESH! He was the same Divine Being as before. He kept his place in the bosom of the

Father during his earthly life (iii. 13). Though confined to time and space, He kept his identity with Him whose Being is beyond either. There was no break or cessation in the essential Oneness of his personality, even when He stooped to be born of the pure virgin mother. But, as far as we can understand it, though in the essence of his Being He underwent no change, yet He voluntarily gave up the Divine mode of existence, that He might assume the human, and might bear it with Him through death and resurrection to invest it ultimately with the Divine glory that He had with the Father before the worlds were made (xvii. 5).

Note, for a moment longer, that word *flesh*.—It seems to have been carefully selected, to show that the nature of the Lord Jesus sums up in itself all the different traits and attributes of our many-sided nature, sin excepted. If we had been told that the Word became a man, it would have seemed as if men only could have perfect sympathy with Him, or that his nature contained only the elements of manhood. But, since the word *flesh* is used, we feel that not one sex but both, not one age but all, not one race but the entire human family, may find its characteristic properties in his lovely glorious Being. No one form of human life has an exclusive right to Him. All forms of life find their counterpart in Him. All rays of colour blend their hues in the white light of his nature. All sides of love, like the double optics of a stereoscope, do but set forth that one infinite love which fills his heart.

"Christ gathers up in Himself the ideal virtues of man and woman, of boyhood and girlhood, of age and middle life," of European and Asiatic. All that is most noble and strong in men, all that is most graceful and tender in women, all that is most winsome and engaging in little children, all that is lovely in any one, is to be found in our dear Lord, in whom is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, since Christ is all and in all (Gal. iii. 28; Col. iii. 11).

This distinguishes Christianity from all religions beside. They are tribal, topical, limited in their range to the people among whom they have originated. Take Mohammedanism, for instance. It no doubt has some grains of precious truth,

as, for instance, the unity of God; but it can never become a world-wide religion, because there are large portions of our common human nature which can find no response or representation in the character or teachings of Mohammed. To use the expression of another, "the mosaic of humanity is not totalized in him."

But Christ touches man at every point, man as man, through every grade and variety of manhood. There is no note in the great organ of our humanity, with the exception of the jarring discord of sin, which does not, when it is struck, awaken a sympathetic vibration in the mighty range and scope of the being of Christ.

This is the secret of that wonderful fascination which Jesus has for men. We feel that He can understand us. "He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities." "He is made in all things like unto his brethren." And, as we shall see in a moment, every man can find in Christ the complement of his nature, the supply of his deficiencies, the fulness for his need.

Dwelt Among Us.—*Tabernacled* is the better word. What is there here but an allusion to the wanderings of the desert, during which Jehovah dwelt in a tent or tabernacle, a pilgrim like the rest! Listen to his own words: "I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day; but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle" (2 Sam. vii. 6).

All that was a symbol of eternal realities. The Tabernacle was a material representation of the great truth of the Incarnation. It was made after the pattern of the nature of our Lord, which, as the sublime antitype, was eternally present to the mind and thought of God. Well then might Jesus speak in the same breath of the temple and of his body (ii. 21). And well may the Holy Ghost here use the same comparison.

We are the pilgrim host. Our bodies are but frail, shifting tabernacles, to be as easily dissolved as a tent is struck (2 Cor. v. 1), and amidst us has been reared the true Tabernacle, which God has pitched and not man; and through which the

Shekinah has shone, kindling the frail curtains of mortal flesh with dazzling radiance on its passage through their folds in waves of glowing glory.

There were times when the light that shone in the most holy place could not be confined there ; but issued forth, and flooded the entire structure so that the multitudes without could discern its splendour. And so in the earthly life of our blessed Lord there were moments when the glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father broke through the limitations which He had assumed, and bathed his mortal body in transcendent light and beauty. Such a season was the Transfiguration, when even his garments became white as the light. Then were the Apostles "eye-witnesses of his majesty." Then did they behold his glory, "the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father."

We beheld his Glory.—It is as if the writer said, "There can be no mistake. The Lord was no mere appearance, or phantom, or vision of the imagination. My eyes are dimming now ; but once they were bright and keen, and could not have been deceived. My head is white with the snows of many winters ; but it often lay on his bosom. I can easily recal the accents of his voice ; often have I felt the clasp of his hand. And if there is one day I remember above others, it is that in which He challenged us to behold his hands and his feet, and assure ourselves that it was not a spirit, but Himself. 'We have not followed cunningly-devised fables'; and we could not have been mistaken as to the glory, which refused to be hid, but inevitably betrayed his divine power and Godhead."

Full of Grace and Truth.—Grace is mentioned three times in this paragraph ; and it is the fitting climax to the golden series of revelations. The keynote of Nature was Order ; of History, was Justice ; of Conscience, was Righteousness ; of Jewish revelation, as summed up in the name of Moses, was Law. But the keynote of the Incarnation was Grace—the unmerited love of God—which made itself of no reputation and took up the nature of man.

God's glory is his grace. When Moses desired to behold his

glory, this was the reply wafted back into his soul: "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious."

But it is grace allied with truth.—He is a just God and a Saviour. There is a bridal between his righteousness and his mercy. Deep down in the solid granite of everlasting truth are laid the foundations of the Temple, of which the doors stand ever open to welcome the *whosoever* of mankind. Who would wish it otherwise? Who would care for a love which contravened the most elementary conceptions of justice in our hearts, and which might one day have to yield to disturbing scruple and compunction?

Of his Fulness have all we received.—The *all we* cannot only mean the writer himself and his fellow apostles who had seen the Lord, but all the believers of that early age, to whom he wrote, scattered in different places, and removed by sixty years from the death of Christ; and not them alone, but all who have become one with Him by a living faith.

The Apostle sheds an exquisite light on these words when he says, "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell. In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And in Him ye are made full" (Col. i. 19; ii. 9, 10, R.V.).

God longs for us to live full lives; and that we may, He has stored all his glorious resources into the nature of the Man Christ Jesus, so making them accessible and putting them within the reach of the weakest and most sinful of his children. Thus does the channel of the Nile bring water which is generated in the mountains of Central Africa, within reach of the Egyptian peasants, whose gardens are situated on the edge of the burning sands. Why then are we so content with poverty and emptiness? Let us receive out of his fulness. It is continually throbbing like an ocean against the walls of our hearts; it is for us to open and let it in, that it may cover the long unsightly reaches of ooze and sand.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to teach us the blessed habit of taking what we need from hour to hour. The uplifted eye of

faith will at any moment cause a tide of his fulness to enter, enriching, strengthening, and blessing the soul.

GRACE FOR GRACE.—Wave on wave. It is a mistake to rest on past or present experiences, eking them out with jealous care, lest they should run short. The best means of getting more grace is to use the grace we already have. It is the law of all life, especially of spiritual life: "To him that hath shall more be given, and he shall have abundantly."

We may not always perceive the flow of the golden oil of grace from its Divine reservoir. We may not be always sensible of the Divine communications. But if we claim them by a naked faith, and if we live up to the limits of what we have got, so as to become spendthrifts of our spiritual revenues, there will be no stint in the blessed stores with which we shall be enriched for ever.

V.

The Word declaring the unseen God.

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."—JOHN i. 18.

ITH this marvellous verse, the Evangelist brings to a close his sublime prologue. It is a befitting introduction to all that follows. Like some noble portal to a temple of transcendent size and beauty, it admits the reverent soul into this Divine Gospel, thrilling the heart, quickening the imagination, and preparing the thought for things which have not entered into the heart of man to conceive. Here is the seed-plot of the Gospel. Here is the standpoint from which the nature and ministry of the Lord are to be viewed. Here are struck those three keynotes—Life, Light, and Love—which, in different combinations, vibrate through the entire range of the writings of the Apostle John.

We believe in the Being of God. Vast as this universe is with depths and heights, and its immeasurable expanse, we believe that it is filled throughout with his mighty Spirit. He is everywhere. He knows everything. He can do all things. But the human heart pines to know what He is. Man seeks after God, groping in the dark, if haply he may feel after Him and find Him, and read the secret of his inner being. "What is God? What does He think and feel? What will He be to me?"

You send me to study Nature. But I find there nothing but his power and Godhead, his deeds, not his heart. And sometimes I am baffled by the apparent working of a malign power by which the creature is brought into subjection.

You send me to study Providence. But the march of God through the ages is so vast, and his footsteps so far apart, that they seem to be hidden in the sea, and his path in the dark waters ; so that it is hard to understand the true trend and character of his dealings with the children of men.

You send me to decipher the Names of God. *El-Shaddai*, the God of Might, on whom difficulties which threaten to overwhelm us break harmlessly, as storms on the brow of the Matterhorn. *Jehovah*, the Unchangeable, who knows no shadow of turning ; whose word is inviolable, and his covenant sure. *Jehovah Sabaoth*, the Lord of hosts, on whose bidding legions of bright spirits wait. But, after all, these names rather disclose the might and splendour of a sovereign, and do but increase my dread of Him as my sins come back to memory.

Is there nothing more? May I not see Him? Is there no open door of vision where I may stand and satisfy the hunger of my soul ; no spot in all the wilderness where I may shelter behind a rock and catch a glimpse of his majesty as He passes by, escorted by the serried ranks of angel armies? "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to his seat!"

But it may not be! NO MAN HATH SEEN GOD AT ANY TIME. *Never yet.* Not Moses ; for he was hidden under the hand of God, and saw not his face. Not Elijah ; for God was not in the earthquake or fire. Not the favoured three ; for the cloud of glory dazzled them with its splendour. And even in the Apocalyptic vision, the rapt gaze of the seer beheld only the circumambient halo as of the jasper and sardonyx stone. And if we were to search the annals of any other nation, we should receive from every quarter the reply, addressed by a grey-haired Indian to Sir John Franklin during one of the expeditions of that renowned explorer : "I am an old man now, but I have never seen God."

And the explanation is given in those memorable words of a later Scripture : "He only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see." "The King eternal, immortal, invisible, the

only wise God." If the vision of the glory of God as it was veiled by the human nature of our Lord was so awful, in its dimmed radiance of glory, that the beloved disciple fell at his feet as dead, what would not be the effect of its insufferable splendour on the nature of any created being! It is of God's mercy that there are as many dense curtains between Him and us as covered the tabernacle of old, and veiled the unearthly glory of the Light that shone there.

But, surely, there must be some satisfaction for this hunger of the soul to know God, and of that other hunger, more eager still and harder to bear, for love. Our hearts pine for God and for love. What will we not give to appease our yearning for love! This makes us seek so eagerly for human friendships; mourn so bitterly if they are withdrawn; feel so lonely if they come not within our reach. Oh that this great and invisible God were Love! But how can we know? Hush! the Word hath declared Him; hath told the secrets of his inner being; yea, more, hath let those inner secrets reveal themselves through his words and life.

I. The Qualifications of the Word for declaring the unseen God.—(1) *His Eternity.*—This was indicated by John the Baptist (15). Our Lord was his cousin, younger by six months, and John had already been for eighteen months before the people when Jesus came from Nazareth to be baptized. Thus, in a very true sense, "our Lord came after him." But when the greatest of woman-born saw Him approaching, he who had never quailed before the face of man, whether royal or priestly, lowered his erect bearing to a deep humility, and cried: "This one must take precedence of me; it is his by right, for He was before me." And so speaking, he is the spokesman of the entire prophetic band, whom he represents.

Ask Isaiah, the evangelic; or Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish race; or Noah, standing on the green-sward of a new world; or Adam, the first man; or the oldest star that first glimmered on the bosom of the night; or the most ancient elder who stands at the foot of the eternal throne; and from

each the reply comes back dimmer and fainter from ever further distances, *He was before me.*

Jesus is the Alpha ; the beginning ; the first. He was before time, as we have seen. As Isaiah tells us, He is the Father of Eternity. And therefore He is well qualified to declare God.

(2) *His Nature.*—"The only-begotten Son." Many ancient manuscripts give this phrase as *God only begotten.* God has many sons, but only one Son. Angels are sons by their creation. Penitent sinners are sons by regeneration and adoption. But our Lord Jesus is Son in an altogether unique and unrivalled sense. He is Son by generation. "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee" (Psa. ii. 7 ; Acts xiii. 33). And He is the *only* Son thus begotten.

It is a profound depth, for which our thought has no fathoming-line. But clearly this phrase indicates that our Lord Jesus shares in its fulness the very Nature of God. "He is a partaker of that incommunicable and imperishable essence which is sundered from all created life by an impassable chasm."* He is the object of such love as an Abraham might have felt to his son, his only son, Isaac ; but multiplied by the difference which must ever part the finite from the infinite. He used the expression of Himself, because it constituted in Jewish speech the very strongest method of claiming equality with God. It was well understood in that sense by the Jews, who instantly charged Him with blasphemy, and sought to avenge so daring an assumption of Deity (v. 18).

Is it not significant that the humblest and meekest Being that ever trod on our world—the pattern of perfect holiness, whose perceptions as to the truth of his own being could not have been mistaken—dared not withdraw a single iota of his claim, but died, rather than evade its entire force ? (xix. 7). He could not abate those claims, because He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. He was ever conscious of his Divine oneness with God (x. 30). He knew whence He was (viii. 14). He lived in constant fellowship with God (x. 15). And therefore He was well qualified to declare Him.

* The late Canon Liddon.

(3) *His Intimacy with the Heart of God.*—"Which is in the bosom of the Father." At a Jewish table the guests reclined on couches in such a way that one might easily lean back his head on another's breast. Of this privilege the beloved Apostle availed himself at the last opportunity which offered. The breast is near the heart. By this tender and sacred clue he helped himself, and has helped myriads in succeeding ages, to realize the deep love, the close intimacy, the perfect acquaintance, subsisting between the Word and the unseen God; so that He is well able to declare Him. "I know Him" (viii. 55). The preposition "in" might be rendered "into," as if there was an ever deeper and closer approximation.

(4) *His Human Nature.*—"The Word was made flesh." He was the Son of God; but throughout this Gospel He speaks of Himself repeatedly as the Son of Man. *Not* A Son of Man. *Not* the Son of A Man. But, as if He were the child, offspring, and representative of the entire human family—*the* Son of Man (iii. 14). Whilst, therefore, as the Son of God, He was able to know God perfectly, as the Son of Man He was able perfectly to express, unfold, and reveal Him; so that all might understand the deepest thought and being of the ever-blessed One.

II. THE MODE OF DECLARATION.—This is very wonderful. He spoke about God; corrected men's false conceptions; confirmed their vague and visionary hopes; and poured floods of light upon the mysteries of God's nature, which had been hidden from ages and generations.

His choicest revelations were made to the little inner group that gathered closest around Him. He gave them God's word. He manifested the name of God to the men who had been given Him out of the world. In tender, glowing words He made known to them all that was concealed from other eyes in that ever-blessed word, which the Jews dared not pronounce, Jehovah (xvii. 6, 14, 26). All that language could convey was conveyed in the words of the Word.

But He did more; He so emptied Himself, He became as to his human nature so utterly dependent on his Invisible

Companion that the life of God declared itself through his. He did nothing of Himself, but what He saw the Father do. He lived by the Father. He spoke only what his Father said to Him. He made known only what He heard from his Father. His words were not his, but the Father's that sent Him. The very works He did were disclaimed by Him. Remember his emphatic declaration: "The Father which dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works" (v. 19; vi. 57; xii. 50; xiv. 10).

And thus, when Philip said to Him on one occasion, "Show us the Father," the demand elicited a sad and heart-weary reply, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?"

This then was our Lord's way of declaring God. God wrought and spoke through his human life, that as men beheld its grace and truth, they were able to study as through a veil, or from a reflecting mirror, the very nature of the unseen God. In blessing little children; in welcoming the lost and desolate; in lessening human pain; in weeping true tears of sympathy; in bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows; in dying for our sins; in seeking and restoring an erring disciple, as a gardener might lift up a flower bent downwards by the storm —in all these things, Jesus declared God, just letting the God that was in Him live through Him in each lovely act and tender word.

III. The Declaration.—"The Father." From his first talk with the woman by the well to that other talk with women at the sepulchre, the one choice word with which he designated God was—Father (iv. 23; xx. 17). In that name He came. Of that name He spoke. By that name He taught us to commence our daily prayer. Into that name we must be baptized. Within that precious name, as a rampart of sure defence, we are to live. He is the Father's gift. Heaven is the Father's home. True worshippers are the objects of the Father's search. Humble hearts are the chosen dwellings of the

Father's love. All who belong to Him are dear to the Father's heart. God is his Father, and the Father of all those who have received Him, and in doing so have obtained the right to become sons of God. Other men, as Paul said, may be his offspring ; but they are sons.

Not orphans or desolate are we ! Never lonely again ! Never pining for a love which mocks our yearnings and evades our reach ! Never roaming the universe to escape God, or dreading Him as unknown and unknowable ! Never again shrinking from life for its solitudes, or from death for its mystery, or the hereafter for its terrors ! But nestling ever in the strong, tender arms of a Father who pities us, and whose love is as much more sensitive than that of any earthly father—as his nature, thoughts, and ways are higher and better than ours ; or as the fire is greater than the straw which is lit at its blaze (Eph. iii. 15).

What a blessed lot is this ! Let us bathe our tried, fearful hearts in these rays of sunshine, with which Jesus has lit up life and death, earth and heaven ; and, as the little child, in the dark tunnel or on the turbulent waves, forgets its alarm with its father's voice in its ear, its father's heart as pillow, its father's arms as encircling walls, so, amid the problems and perplexities of life and death, let us trust the Fatherhood of God, soft as a summer zephyr, deep as ocean depths, and be at peace.

VI.

Three Memorable Days.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."—JOHN i. 23.

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." JOHN i. 29.

"The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." JOHN i. 37.

BETHABARA lay beyond the Jordan from Jerusalem. The river there has a breadth of one hundred feet, and, except at the time of the winter floods, a depth of three to seven feet. It would, therefore, exactly suit the purposes of the great preacher, with his baptism of repentance. The almost tropical luxuriance of the valley is in striking contrast to the wilderness of sand and hill around.

The attention of the nation was as much arrested by his look as by his words. The spare form attenuated by fasting and austerity; the flashing eye, full of living energy; the unshorn Nazarite locks; the rough haircloth garment; the independence of much that other men hold needful; the thrilling herald voice, piercing like a two-edged sword to divide and discern soul and spirit. It is no matter for wonder, then, that the whole community was stirred; and that crowds poured forth to him from the neighbouring metropolis, as well as from the towns and villages clustering at the foot of the Lebanon.

This time of success and fame lasted for, perhaps, twelve or eighteen months. And then there happened the memorable events described in this paragraph, and which transpired on three following days (29, 35).

The greater number of those that flocked to hear the Baptist returned to their homes to discuss his words or to live out their new vows; but several of the flower of Israel attached themselves to Jesus permanently. Amongst them was the writer of this Gospel; and he was, without doubt, a witness of the events which he describes, the crisis of his own life, and the culminating point of the ministry of his earliest teacher.

I. The First Day: Self-Abnegation (19-28).—As the influence of John's preaching spread, it became impossible for the religious authorities to ignore it. The Sanhedrim especially, which is constantly referred to in this Gospel as *the Jews*, and which held itself entrusted with the religious interests of the nation, was compelled to take action. A deputation of Priests and Levites, principally derived from the Pharisee party (24), was therefore arranged to go to the Jordan, make inquiries, and report. Their inquiries were to be twofold: first, who he was; secondly, why he baptized. The former question interested the whole council; the latter, the Pharisees, who were the ritualists of their day.

Imagine a vast circle. On the one side stands the herald of the new age, surrounded by the chivalry of a noble youth; on the other the grey-beards, representing an order of things old and ready to vanish away. How breathless was the silence which followed the first inquiry! "Who art thou? Art thou the Christ?"

Thousands would have been glad to believe he was, and at a word would have unfurled the old standard of the Maccabees, and rallied to rid the land of the usurper. They had not, however, long to wait. Without a moment's vacillation he confessed, and denied not, but confessed:

"I am not the Christ."

"Who art thou, then? Malachi told us in his closing words, which have lit our path through the gloom of four hundred years, that the great prophet of Horeb should announce the Messianic day. Art thou Elijah?"

Had they asked if he preceded the Messiah in the spirit and

power of Elijah, he must have answered in the affirmative ; but to the question as they put it, there was only one reply :

"I am not."

There was yet another suggestion. "Moses said that God would raise up a Prophet like unto himself. The Prophet art thou?" "The abruptness of the question," says Bishop Westcott, "is remarkable."

And again, amid the hushed suspense, the Baptist, with increasing brevity, answered "No."

Each response must have been followed by the murmur of many voices discussing it. And the ardent disciples of the great preacher would have felt some little disappointment and chagrin. It seemed as if he were deliberately spurning the nation's homage, and missing the greatest opportunity of his career.

The suppositions furnished by the generally received Messianic programme were now exhausted ; and it only remained to put some general question which should force the Baptist to define his own position. "Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?"

Then came an utterance, sublime in its humility : "I am only a voice crying amid the uninhabited places of the wilderness, Prepare a way for the King."

And this humility was characteristic of John, though he was the greatest of woman-born. He knew that He was *not* the Light, but sent to bear witness of it ; *not* the Sun, but the star that announces the dawn, and wanes in the growing light ; *not* the Bridegroom, but the Bridegroom's friend ; *not* the Shepherd, but the porter to open the door into the fold (iii. 27–30 ; x. 3).

This humility is as rare as it is fascinating. We are all so apt to use our relationship to Christ as a means of enhancing our own importance, and attracting attention. Though we formally ascribe the supremacy to our Lord, we are elated when our name is on every lip, and our work in every thought, even though we should never have been heard of had it not been for Him. But there was nothing of this in John. He had the lowest possible conception of himself. Whilst all men

mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ, he was ever heralding the Coming One. As they magnified the worth of his baptism, he declared that it was inferior to the Messiah's, as water is to fire in cleansing properties. When they trembled before his searching words, he spoke of the great Husbandman, who, fan in hand, was about thoroughly to purge his floor. The motto of his inner life seems to have been, "I must decrease." Repeatedly he avowed himself unfit even to loose the sandal-thong of Him whose herald he was.

Two things led him to this blessed condition.—In the first place, he realized that a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven ; and that therefore all popularity, gifts, and influence, are precious talents to be administered with the best possible stewardship (iii. 27). And in the second place, he had seen the Lord, as was clear from the answer he gave to the further inquiry of the deputation concerning his right to baptize.

"It is quite true," said he, in effect, "that I am not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor that Prophet ; but listen ! Though ye know it not, the Messiah is already come, and I have seen Him. He has stood on these banks. He has mingled with these crowds. He has descended into these waters. He is standing amongst you now. The new era has dawned. And therefore I administer baptism, the sign and initiation of that long-expected time."

What awe must have settled down on the people ! How they must have looked on each other, wondering of whom he spake ! Could it be that at last the day had come of which kings and prophets and righteous men had spoken, but died without seeing ! And can we wonder at the humility of the speaker ?

We need to cultivate more of this lovely spirit, content to stand in the shade and cast a light on the blessed Lord ; to be voices witnessing for Him, whilst the speaker's form is draped in gloom. But probably nothing but close friendship with the Bridegroom of souls will ever bring this about. We must live nearer to Him, catching the glow of his love, baptized into its furnace heat. Oh, to love Him, to listen for his footfall with

a lover's hushed spirit, to find our heaven only in his love, and in the thought that He is loved! Then we shall be timid of attracting a single thought to ourselves which might have found its way to Him. Then we shall be eager to hoard up all the love and devotion which men give us, that we may cast them as crowns at his feet. Then we shall be willing to be pedestals from which his beams shine the farther; as the slender, graceful curves of the lighthouse tower are unseen, whilst from its lantern the reflectors flash beams of light far out to sea. It is only to those thus humble as little children that God reveals the true character of his Son. Thus it was with John the Baptist.

II. The Second Day; Christ-Designation (29–34).—"The next day John seeth Jesus coming to him." He was probably coming straight from the scene of the temptation. For forty days He had been alone, with no companionship save that of wild beasts, amid the sterile hills which stretch for miles on either side of the Dead Sea. Directly John saw Him, he knew Him. "This is He of whom I said, He that cometh after me is become before me, for He was before me." How did John know Him?

It is probable that, though cousins, they had not met till some six weeks before. John had spent his years in the seclusion of the deserts, Jesus in the highlands of Galilee. Therefore John said, "I knew Him not." Was it one of the providential arrangements of the only wise God, that the Christ and his forerunner never met until Jesus came to Jordan to be baptized of John, lest it should be said they were acting in collusion? Or even if John may have known Him as his cousin (*i.e.*, after the flesh), yet he knew Him not as the Baptizer with the Holy Ghost, or the Son of God. But He who sent him to baptize with water had revealed to him a sacred sign by which he should recognise the Lord whom he announced. For that sign he had watched and waited patiently for a long time. Thousands passed through his hands; but as yet he had not beheld it, and the months seemed long, as they slowly passed away.

At last Jesus presented Himself at the Jordan. John would have hindered Him, indeed "was hindering Him." He, doubtless, knew of the events which had preceded His birth; had heard of "that Holy Thing" which had been born; was familiar with his blameless, holy life; and desired, therefore, to debar Him from a rite which implied confession of sin. He felt that he had himself more need to be baptized as a sinner, than to administer the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins to Him, who was, so far as observation went, sinless.

His objections were, however, silenced by the appeal to him to do his part in bringing in the everlasting righteousness, which Daniel identified with the mission of the Messiah. "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

It was probably the custom that the candidate for John's baptism, either audibly or silently, should confess his sins ere he submitted to the sacred rite. But in this case, having no sins of his own, our Lord would probably make a vicarious confession, confessing the sins of the nation, with which, there and then, as the sacrificed lamb He identified Himself. It was the Jewish custom to set apart four days before the lamb was to be sacrificed in the Passover; and thus there may have been an anticipation of this solemn act of our Lord's baptism in the river Jordan, the river of judgment.

As He emerged from its waters, the long-expected sign was given. The Spirit descended on Him from heaven like a dove. We cannot but recal the ancient record of the deluge, and the ark, and the dove which found no place for her rest. Here at last there was a home in which the dove-like Spirit might take up an abode. Here, at least, was one heart in which He, who had been long an exile, might settle. From the waste of waters He came to the sacred Ark.

Twice over we are told that "He abode on Him." No fitful enduement this! No transient baptism! No ephemeral experience! For us, too, as for Him, there is an abiding experience to be enjoyed—an experience of spiritual grace to break on us; not to wane, as in the case of some of the Old Testament heroes, but to increase in ever-growing power from year to year, until we are filled unto all the fulness of God.

We may not stay to note the energy with which the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness to be tempted. How marvellous that union of brooding gentleness and irresistible driving force! As if the blessed Spirit—who had waited with the patience of God for four thousand years, while, in one dispensation after another, man was continually overcome by the tempter—now that the Second Man was come, impelled Him to the victory which He foreknew. It was from this conflict that He returned on the second of these memorable days.

For six weary weeks the Baptist had eagerly scanned the faces of the crowds to discover that face. But hitherto in vain. At last he descried it—worn with conflict and fasting, but radiant with victory; and as he saw it, he announced the Christ: "This is He of whom I spake. The same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth away the sin of the world."

Dean Milman suggests that when John, beholding Jesus as He came to him, said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" he alluded to flocks of lambs, intended for the forthcoming Passover, then passing from the rich pastures of Perea to Jerusalem by the ford near the scene of the Baptist's labours. But surely there is a deeper thought. John was clearly a deep student of Isaiah's prophecies. He cannot but have been quite familiar with that chapter which reads like a fifth Gospel, as it foretells how the servant of the Lord would be led as a lamb to the slaughter, an allusion which, of course, was based on the offering of the morning and evening lamb, and on the great Paschal Feast, which lay at the foundation of the national history.

We cannot stay to trace the complete analogy between the lambs and the Lamb, between the Passover and the supreme event of our Redemption. The points of likeness and contrast are deeply interesting. But we must let that witness of the Holy Ghost, through those human lips, have its due weight with us. Evidently the main aspect in which we are to view our Divine Lord, is in His sacrificial character. "The Lamb as it had been slain" must be *beheld* both here and hereafter, in this world and in all worlds. Not his character, however fair;

not his words, however much light they cast on the mysteries of life and death; not his miracles, however strong their testimony to his Divine mission: but his appointment to bear the sin of the world, *this* is the primary aspect in which we are to behold Him.

Look into these words; the Gospel glistens in them, as the whole sun in a single dewdrop. They tell us that the sacrifice of the cross is the outcome of the thought and preparation of the infinite God. Jesus is the Lamb of God. They remind us that his propitiation for sin is not for ours only, but for *the whole world.* They give a clue to the cause of that mysterious anguish which at times overwhelmed Him. They describe the attitude which we should ever adopt of beholding Him—an attitude by which we are able to appropriate the nutriment of his flesh and blood, of which the paschal supper was a type. O blessed Lamb! what shall we say *of* Thee or *to* Thee? Words fail us. Thou wast made sin for us. Thou hast washed us from our sins in thy blood. Thou hast put away sin by the sacrifice of Thyself. Thou art longing that every soul of man should know and rejoice in thy yearning love, thy glorious work. We praise, and adore, and worship Thee. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!

But remember ever to unite the double burden of John's preaching. We need not only blood, but fire. It is much to be justified, but we need to be sanctified; much to know of the atoning death, but we need union with the Lamb in his resurrection life; much to have the blood sprinkled on the inner shrine, but we need that the Shekinah fire should burn there with quenchless power; much to have the baptism of water, but at the best that is negative, and we need something positive, searching, quickening, and God-like.

After all, John was right. Christ is the greater Baptizer. Beyond death and the grave He received the Spirit, that He might shed Him forth. And now He stands among us whom He has redeemed, eager that, having washed us in his blood, He may complete what He has begun with that holy baptism of which John spake, and which is as much our privilege as the cleansing of the blood. Ah! brethren and

sisters, *we have need to be baptized of Him.* Not the blood without the fire; not the fire apart from the blood. Not the Christ of Calvary only, but the Christ of the throne. Not pardon alone, but deliverance and salvation.

But let us remember that just as Jesus could not be manifested to Israel, until John had come baptizing in water (31); so it is still. John the Baptist must still do his work in the soul. And only when there has been repentance and confession of sin, which submission to John's baptism signified, is a sinner prepared to receive the Saviour. There is profound truth in that saying of McCheyne, "Only a broken-hearted sinner can receive a crucified Christ."

This suggests a very serious question to many who have no clear consciousness of Christ, no glad realization of his presence, no rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory. May not this lack arise from their not having entered into the meaning of those preliminary conditions which were represented by the Baptist? Only as we know the sinfulness of sin, and the preciousness of the atoning blood of Christ, can we apprehend the power of his resurrection and rejoice in the hope of his coming and his kingdom. May God the Holy Spirit make us a people prepared for the Lord (Luke i. 17).

III. The Third Day; Disciple-Desertion (35-37).—On the third day John again looked wistfully and eagerly on Jesus as He walked. It was perhaps the last time those eyes were to behold Him. Again he designated Jesus as the Lamb of God; but there was a significance in his words which was instantly detected by the two disciples who stood beside him. He meant by those words to transfer their allegiance from him to his Lord. Henceforth they were to behold *Him.* So at least they seem to have understood him. "They followed Jesus."

As the preacher looked on their retreating forms, and realised that his work was done, and that henceforth all the crowds would follow them and ebb away, did he have a feeling of jealousy or regret? Evidently not. Or if there were a momentary sense of desolation and loneliness, it must have

been instantly wiped out by a great sense of joy. To quote his own matchless words, "This my joy therefore is fulfilled" (iii. 29).

It is sad to see the crowds depart ; to note the drying of the brook whose waters were so sweet, the ebbing of the tide, the waning of the day, the falling of the leaves ; but, where the soul has learnt to live in Jesus and for Him, it is not so hard to die to all these things, because the Lord has become its light and its salvation, the strength of its life and its everlasting joy.

VII.

The Son of Man.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

JOHN i. 51.

THIS chapter abounds in striking names and titles for our Lord. They are a study in themselves. The Word; the Light; the Life of Men; the Only-begotten of the Father; the Christ; the Lamb of God; the Master; Son of God; and King of Israel. But the climax, with which this marvellous enumeration closes, is as wonderful as any: *The Son of Man.* It occurs eighty times in the Gospels, and is always applied by our Lord to Himself.

It is a glorious word, brimful of hope to every member of the family of mankind. To be Son of David, or Son of Abraham, would limit Him to a family or race; but to be Son of Man is equivalent to being the second Adam, and to have a relationship to every man. He was the epitome of humanity, sin excepted. All can find a response in his nature. The one Man, the Man of men, the supreme flower and glory of the human family, the Divine Man—such was the Son of Man, who as such stands now amid the supernal glory of his Father's throne (Acts vii. 56).

The nature of our Lord Jesus is infinite in its extent. On the one hand it touches the heights of Godhead, on the other the depths of manhood. To use his own comparison (51), it resembles the mystic ladder, which in the dream of the wanderer, linked the far distant depths of sky—where, more brilliant than sun or moon, the light of the Shekinah shone—with the moorland, strewn with huge boulders of stone, on which he lay. At one end is the title, Son of God; at the

other, Son of Man. And there is not one of the human family too frail or sinful to pass upward through the blessed Lord, his birth and death, his resurrection and ascension, from the lowest depths of degradation to the further heights of blessedness.

Here, probably for the first time, our Lord used this title of Himself. It is possible that its full meaning will only be disclosed long ages after we have entered the meridian light of eternity.

I. The Son of Man attracting Men.—He had just come victorious from his encounter with the devil. With an imperative of spiritual energy, which human lips had never addressed to the tempter before, He had made the prince of this world slink behind Him. The next step was to lay the foundation of a society, through which He might carry forward his victories, opposing the kingdom of darkness with a kingdom of light, until that has been realized for the race which He realized on the mountain brow for Himself.

In the Apocalypse, John beheld the completed city, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven ; and was able to study its foundations, as he could not have done had it been earth-born. They seemed like the breastplate of the high priest in colour, though greatly multiplied in extent. There were the blue sapphire ; the green emerald ; the dark-red sardonyx ; the brilliant topaz ; the hyacinth ; and the amethyst. And on each the name of an Apostle. In this chapter we find the Master-builder quarrying the stones, which seem common enough in their origin, but which, under his touch, shall glisten as slabs of jewels in the foundations of his Church. There is no forecasting what will be the outcome for the simplest believer who once is willing to let Christ have his way with him.

Christ attracted men largely from the lower ranks.—Macaulay tells the story of the famous cathedral window, constructed by the apprentice from materials which his master threw away, and which was so much more beautiful than his that he made away with his life in jealousy. And it was out of those orders of society which the great men of the time

held in contempt that Jesus began to construct the society against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. "The common people heard Him gladly." "Then drew near the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." The true David recruited his army from the lapsed and lost, and chose his officers from the ranks of publicans, and fishermen, and artisans (1 Sam. xxii. 2).

Christ attracted men of very different make. — In the Apostolic band there were at least three groups, besides minor varieties. The *Boanergic*, comprising those of largest gift and strength of character—Peter and Andrew, James and John. The *Reflective*, who were apt at questioning and slow to believe—Philip and Thomas, Nathanael (or Bartholomew) and Matthew. The *Practical*, who superintended the business arrangements of catering for the rest. All these varieties were attracted to Jesus. He needed them, and they Him.

Christ attracted men to Himself.—He published no manifesto; elaborated no system of doctrine; insisted on no theological examination. His person was his theology. He appealed to the craving of the human heart for love, and offered Himself to supply its needs, pledging Himself to lead his disciples from the "Come and see" of the first interview, to the vision of "those greater things," which include the Sermon on the Mount; the Sacrificial Death; the Resurrection and Ascension; the Descent of the Holy Ghost; and which extend also to those marvellous discoveries of Divine truth which fill the Epistles. "Not the Man through the doctrine; but the doctrine through the Man." Not first the head and then the heart; but first the heart and then the head. The trust of the soul in One who gathers up our intellectual assent as He bears us forward into all the truth.

Men were attracted to Christ in very different ways.—Some by preaching, as when the Baptist proclaimed Him on the Jordan bank to the disciples standing beside him. Though that sermon failed on the first occasion, on the second it was the means of converting his entire audience: "And they followed Jesus."

Others are brought through human relationships. God has bound us together in families, that these human relationships may become a very network of communicating wires, through which to send the sparks and impulses of his own love. The Bible does not say how many souls Andrew brought afterwards to Jesus; but it does say, he *first* found his own brother Simon. As boys they had played on the silver sands; as youths they had sailed the long night through in their father's yawl; as young men they had left their homes drawn by a common impulse to the Jordan. And when Andrew found Christ, he had an irresistible influence over Peter and won him. The little taper lit up the great light. Have we all used our home ties enough for the winning of souls to our Lord?

Others were brought by the Master's direct influence. "He findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me." I love to think of the thousands who owe their all to the direct touch of the love of Christ, falling on them as the light of an infinitely distant star through the tube of the telescope, photographing itself for ever on the prepared paper. Far from the sound of the church-going bell, amid the deep silence of the night watch in the bush or on the prairie, or tossing on the bosom of the deep, the Love of God still finds men.

Others are brought to Christ by the call of friendship, following on long courses of previous preparation. Often must Philip have left the shores of his native lake, and crossed the hills for Cana, where Nathanael dwelt; and the two would earnestly discuss the signs of the times, the desperate straits of their country, the preaching of the Baptist, the advent of the King. And for long periods the guileless Israelite would be lost in deep reverie as he sat beneath his favourite fig-tree, pondering the things which Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write, and engaged in earnest prayer. It was not difficult to win such an one, when Philip broke in on his retirement with the news of his discovery.

Jesus Christ is God's magnet put down amongst men to attract them to Himself.

II. The Son of Man Reading and Revealing Men.—

The Spirit had been given to Him without measure; and by his indwelling He knew what was in man, read men as we read books, and interpreted them to themselves that they might know themselves and Him.

He knew the yearning for love that dwelt in the heart of John, who clearly was one of the two who first followed Him with timid footsteps, longing to know some of the secrets of his inner life: "Master, where dwellest Thou?"

He knew how timid and weak was the soul that lay beneath the burly form and impetuous self-assertion of Andrew's brother, and He called him by a name which well became him—Simon Bar-Jona, the son of a timid dove.

He knew where to find Philip; the qualities which were worth finding in him; and the magnetic sentence which would bind him for ever to his side: "Follow Me."

He knew the guileless simplicity and purity with which Nathanael's soul was filled, untainted by the luxurious tastes with which the Romans were enervating his native land; and had seen the devout thoughts passing through his heart, before Philip called him. The tree has never grown which could conceal a soul from the eye of Jesus.

So He reads us still. He knows our downsitting and our uprising, and understands our thoughts afar off. We lie before Him naked and opened, as the sacrificial victim before the priest. What though the sharp two-edged sword be in his hand, yet He is not a High-priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities!

> The Lord who dwells on high
> Knows all, and loves us better than He knows.

III. The Son of Man Completing Men.—Whatever we need most, we can find in Him. He is the all-sufficiency for all human need; the supply of every lack; the answer to every inquiry. Not his gifts, but Himself. Do we need purity? He does not simply give us purity, but He is in us "that Holy Thing." Do we want life? He does not merely impart it, but He is Himself our life. Do we require strength? The Lord is the strength of our life. As the rest of a circle is the

complement of a segment, however small, so is Jesus the complement of all who believe.

Andrew is always ranked with Peter, James, and John ; yet he was excluded, not arbitrarily, of course, from three memorable scenes, where the others witnessed the glory of their Lord. He reminds us of men of large gift, who yet fall short of the first rank by some defect in ardour, dash, enthusiasm. O ye Andrews of the Church, come to the Son of Man ! that He may supply that missing link ; breathe into you that lacking power ; baptize you in his sacred fire : "so that ye come behind in no gift," waiting for his coming.

A very different man was *Peter.* Liking to gird himself ; foremost to speak, to act, to deny ; the born leader and spokesman of the rest ; ardent in love, but sadly needing stability ; essaying to walk the waves, and sinking ; meeting with God-given answer the Master's challenge as to His nature, and within a few moments becoming an offence ; flashing his sword in the moonbeams with terrible execution, and denying with oaths ; plunging into the lake for the shore, where in the grey dawn the beloved form was standing, but presently silenced by "What is that to thee?" A strange mixture of strength and weakness, of ardour and inconstancy ! Such are some of us. But when men like Peter come to the Son of Man, He completes them, and impregnates them with the strength of his own rock-like character ; so that they become rock-men in their degree, as mossy nests are turned to stone beneath the drip of the limestone caves.

John's nature reminds us of the lakes, which, like his own Galilee, lie among the hills. On calm days the placid and pellucid waters mirror the curtains of the heavens, whether blue, or dark, or star-bespangled. But when the wild winds rush down on them, they are lashed into fury, and no boat can live. John was filled with an almost divine power of loving. This won the love of Jesus ; led him to lean on that sacred breast ; secured the trusteeship of the beloved mother ; and enabled him to read the secrets of the Redeemer's character hidden from the rest. But, withal, he would sit on the right or left of the throne, and call for fire from heaven

on offending villagers. Evidently, such a nature needed to be softened and toned, and taught how long-suffering, and forbearing, and pitiful, Divine love could be. Some of us also need to take our love to Jesus that it may be rid of earthly elements, and attempered to his own.

Nathanael made use of such fragmentary hints as were within his reach, and arrived at one of the sublimest of conclusions; but there were great gaps which needed to be filled up, like the blanks in the maps of Africa some twenty years ago. He saw something; but he was capable of seeing more, and he was told that he should see greater things than any that had come within his ken. He recognised in Jesus the Son of God, the King of Israel: but he had yet to learn that Jacob's ladder was a sign of blessing beyond the limits of his own children; that it was a type of Jesus the Son of God, who was not only King of Israel, the nation, but Son of Man, the race.

This is Christ's invariable mode. There is always more to follow. On every blessing which He puts into our hands He writes this inscription, "Thou shalt see greater things than these." If conversion, adoption; if adoption, heirship; if heirship, the throne; if grace, glory.

I know not how many maimed and incomplete hearts may be reached by these words. But it may be that hundreds who will read them have been wearily conscious of heart-ache and heart-need; waiting for some one who never comes; watching for a light which never breaks; bemoaning a lack which lies at the bottom of the heart, saying *Give*, *give*, but is never satisfied. "Blessed are ye that hunger; for ye shall be filled." But the filling can come from no human or earthly source. In Christ alone can we be replenished and satisfied. Take the infirmity, the deficiency, the yearning, the sense of maimedness, to the Son of Man, whose nature will flow into yours, as an ocean into some new dock or reservoir, adapting itself to the shape of the receptacle, and filling it throughout. "Ye are complete [R.V., made full] in Him."

VIII.

The First Miracle.

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on Him."—JOHN ii. 11.

THIS is one of those precious memories which the mother of our Lord pondered in her heart, and doubtless often recited in that home to which this Evangelist led her from the cross. Several incidents in this Gospel may be traced to that fellowship in love and sorrow which, until her death, must have linked his mother and the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Is it not wonderful that this was our Lord's first miracle! Had we been asked to select the one which seemed most appropriate to stand as the frontispiece of his earthly ministry, we should have selected the raising of Lazarus, the calming of the storm, or the feeding of the hungry crowds; but who would have chosen this? The inventive genius of man would have conceived an introductory scene which combined the chief features of the Transfiguration and of the giving of the law. How different is the simplicity of this incident!

In the previous chapter we are told that the Apostles beheld in Jesus Christ the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father; and when we ask one of those eye-witnesses to give a sample of its choicest manifestations, we are conducted to a little village in the highlands of Galilee, at the distance of an afternoon's walk from Nazareth, where the Master sits at a simple marriage feast amongst his friends, and makes wine out of water to supply their lack.

The miracles of this Gospel are signs (xx. 30), carefully selected as bearing upon the special characteristics of our Lord's

person and work, which the Evangelist had set himself to portray. There was a distinct purpose in his performing this miracle as his first, and in its being set so prominently at the front of this narrative. We are told that He manifested forth his glory; and we reverently ask, How? As we strive to answer that question, may we again sit at his table, and hear Him speak!

I. It was his Glory to show that true Religion is consistent with ordinary Life.—There is a common tendency to associate the highest type of religion with rigorous austerity of life, as if the human were too common to be divine. We fancy that he whose thoughts commune most deeply with the Eternal must be a stern, silent, and solitary man. This type of the religious life was exemplified in the old prophets, who dwelt in the solitudes of unfrequented deserts and hills, withdrawn from the common joys and engagements and ties of human existence; only emerging now and again to pour on the ears of awestruck crowds the burning words of the living God. Such had been John the Baptist. The deserts, his home; the locust and wild honey, his fare; the camel's cloth, his dress. And we might have expected to find the Son of God more rigorous still in his isolation; rearing Himself in severe and solitary grandeur, like the Jungfrau among the Alps.

But no. His early years are spent, not in a desert, but a home. He comes eating and drinking. He moves freely amongst men as one of themselves. He interweaves his life with the life of the home, the market-place, and the street. And in pursuance of this purpose He wrought his first miracle at a peasant's wedding.

Travelling by easy stages from the Jordan valley, He had reached Galilee. Finding his mother gone from Nazareth, He followed her over the hills to Cana, and for her sake was invited with his six new-made followers to the simple feast. It was a time of simple-hearted enjoyment. "The bridegroom crowned with flowers with which his mother had crowned him in the day of his espousals; the bride adorned with her jewels,

sitting apart among the women." And though He was the Son of God, no cloud would veil his face or cast a restraining spell upon the guests.

This is the harder type.—Easier, like the anchorite, to be separated from the world, than, like the Saviour, to be in it and not of it. Easier to decline an invitation to the house of the great than to go there and behave as the Son of God. Easier to refuse the things of sense than to use them without abuse. Easier to maintain a life of prayer far from the haunts of men, than to enter them maintaining constant fellowship with God in the unruffled depths of the soul. Nothing but the grace of the Holy Spirit can suffice for this. But this is sufficient if daily and believingly sought.

It is most honouring to God.—The idea of the ascetic life is that every human feeling is a weakness, and every natural instinct a sin. No woman's caress, no childish voice, no tender love, none of the jewels or flowers of existence, may soften the rigours of that lot. But is not all this a libel on God's original creation? Has He made so great a mistake in creating us that we must thwart his ideal at every step, ere we can rise to our true manhood? Must we make ourselves other than men before we can be saints? Surely, to reason thus is to dishonour the wisdom and love of God in our original creation. And the Incarnation teaches us, as does this miracle, that God does not require an emasculated, but a fulfilled and purified humanity.

It is most useful to the world.—Of what use is salt, except in contact with the corrupting carcase? The holiness which builds three tabernacles amid almost inaccessible rocks is of little help to the breaking hearts of devil-possessed men in the valley below. This, at least, is not our Saviour's message. "Go," says He, "to Jerusalem and Samaria, to the crowded cities and homes of men. Live amongst them, kindling them with the passion of your holiness. Suffer little children to come to you; publicans and sinners to draw near to you; crowds to follow you. All I ask is that whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, ye should do all to the glory of God."

II. It was his Glory to teach the Beauty of Waiting meekly for God.—If ever there was a being who might have claimed to act on the prompting of his own spirit, it was surely our blessed Lord. But there never was one who lived in more absolute and entire dependence on the Father from the first. It comes out very clearly here.

His advent with his friends threatened the whole family with a disgrace which to the hospitable mind of the Jew would be irreparable. The wine ran short. Mary, who seems to have had considerable influence in the house, was made aware of the fact, and quickly guessed its cause. She could not endure the thought of inflicting, however unconsciously, so great a mortification on that kindly circle; and she suddenly conceived the hope of helping them through Him whom she had been wont to count her obedient son. Why should He not now assume the position which had been predicted from his birth? She could not have been deceived in all that had been told her; but it had been long and hard to wait. Yet surely the salutation of the Baptist and gathering of disciples were omens of an approaching change. Why should He not now blossom out into all that splendid glory with which Jewish anticipation invested the Messiah?

Her implied request must have appealed closely to the tender heart of Christ. All that she felt, He felt also. But He could not take his commands from her entreaty, or even from the warmth of his own emotions. He addressed her with a title consistent with the most perfect tenderness—indeed, He used it from his cross; but, waiving her suggestion with a common Aramaic expression, went on to announce that henceforth his eye would be, if possible, more closely fixed on the dial-plate of his Father's will, following the index-finger of his purpose, waiting till it should reach the hour, and the alarum for action should ring out. "Mine hour is not yet come."

It was so that He waited or acted throughout his life. The Gospels abound in references to his hour. Before it struck He was calm and peaceful, however pressing might be the apparent need for action. When it struck He acted instantly and decisively. Afterwards, He returned unto his rest. This is

almost the hardest lesson in Christian living. We listen to the advice of friend ; the threatening of foe ; the pressure of circumstance. We think we must do something. Like King Saul, we force ourselves and offer the sacrifice. We pray hurriedly and throw ourselves into the breach, to discover, when too late, that we have run without being sent, and have defeated our own object by too much haste. "My soul, wait thou," might often be addressed to ourselves by ourselves. Not a moment behind God ; but not a moment before Him. Ready for his hour to strike.

III. It was his Glory to show the Inwardness of true Religion.—In the entrance-hall six stone waterpots were standing, "after the manner of the purifying of the Jews." Their superstitious dread of uncleanness made it necessary to have large supplies of water ever at hand. Without washing no one ate (Mark vii. 3). The feet of each guest were washed on arrival (Luke vii. 44). The washing of cups and jugs and bottles, says the Talmud, went on all day. And in this we have a symbol of that religion which consists in external rites, and is content if only these are maintained.

But the Master turned the water of outward ceremonial washing into wine for inward drinking. Surely there is deep symbolical meaning here, in illustration of which we recal two sentences, the one from the Old Testament, the other from the New. "Thy love is better than wine"; and "Whoso . . . . drinketh my blood hath eternal life."

The most spiritual men in the old Jewish system were constantly emphasising the impotence of mere ritual to save and sanctify the soul. David felt it (Psa. li. 16). Isaiah felt it (Isa. i. 13). Micah brings it out in clear relief (Micah vi. 7). And here our Lord in this striking miracle seems to say, "The days of ceremonialism are past ; the system which was sent to teach spiritual ideas by material substances and external rites is at an end ; the tedious routine of outward ablutions, which has diverted men's attention from the inner life and the befitting garb of the soul, must be laid aside ; I am come to teach men to love, to live by faith, to array themselves in robes

washed white in my blood, and to rise through close participation in my death to a life of stainless purity and flawless beauty. Not water, but blood. Not washing, but drinking. Not the outward cleanliness, however fair and right ; but the purity of the heart, the deliverance of the spirit from the polluting taint of evil." We are not surprised to learn next that He cleansed the Temple, and that He told Nicodemus that even he must be born again.

IV. It was his Glory to awaken us to see the Divine Power in the ordinary Processes of Nature.—The world is full of miracles ; but they are so gradual and quiet that we are often blinded to their wonderfulness, till the flash of a sudden "sign" awakens us from our strange neglect.

It seems doubtful whether the Lord changed all the contents of the six stone jars, or only that which was drawn from them. The latter would more resemble his way, who gives us, not granaries of grain, but daily bread ; and who deals out supplies of daily strength. But, even if He had turned all the water into wine, there would be no obstacle to our faith. The sin of drunkenness was not the sin of Palestine, as it is of London ; and therefore did not require the special methods of prevention which the principles of his Gospel now lead us to adopt. And we must remember that the light wines of the Galilean vintage were very different to the brandied intoxicants with which we are too familiar.

But this is the interesting point : that we see compressed into a single flash the same power that works throughout the wine-lands every summer, transforming the dew and rain into the juices that redden the drooping clusters of the vines. The superficial man looks at this miracle and cries, " Oh, wondrous day that beheld so great a deed ! " The spiritual man looks at it, and, whilst not underrating its marvel, walks the world with a new reverence, because he knows that the same Divine power is throbbing all around. The power revealed in feeding the five thousand is required to cover the autumn fields with grain. The power needed to raise the dead shows how much

is constantly demanded to keep us living. The power that quells the storm indicates how much is being exercised to maintain the stable equilibrium of the world.

This is the glory of the miracles of Jesus, that they have taught us to look on the world around us with new and opened eyes. We hear his voice in the summer wind, and amid the roar of the pitiless storm. We catch sight of his form awakening Nature from her wintry sleep by his touch, as once the daughter of Jairus from her couch. We stand spellbound before his power, as once they did who saw the wonderful works of his hands. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. In Him all things consist. And as for this world, it teems with the miraculous :

> And every common bush afire with God ;
> But only he who sees takes off his shoes.

V. It was his Glory to show the ascending Scale of God's Gifts.—The devil ever gives his best first ; and when the appetite is somewhat palled, he puts on his worse, even to the worst. Gold at the crown, clay at the foot. Feasting with harlots, then famine with swine. Goshen with its pastures, followed by Egypt with its fetters. Ah ! you who read this page, and are living a heartless, worldly life, make the most of it, it is the best you will ever have. After you have "well drunk," there will come coarser tastes, more depraved appetites. That which has satisfied will fail to satisfy ; and in its stead will come forms of sin and temptation from which at the first you would have started back, crying, "Do you take me for a dog, that I should ever come to this !"

The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, is always giving something better. As the taste is being constantly refined, it is provided with more delicate and ravishing delights. That which you know of Him to-day is certainly better than that you tasted when first you sat down at his board. And so it will ever be. The angels, as his servants, have orders to bring in and set before the heirs of glory things which eye hath not seen, and man's heart has not conceived, but which are all prepared. The best of earth will be below the simplest fare

of heaven. But what will heaven's best be! If wine in the peasant's house is so luscious, what will be the new wine in the Father's kingdom! What may we not expect from the vintages of the celestial hills! What will it be to sit at the marriage supper of the Lamb, not as guests, but as the Bride! Oh, hasten on, ye slow-moving days; be quick to depart, that we may taste that ravishment of bliss! But for ever and ever, as fresh revelations break on our glad souls, we shall look up to the Master of the feast and cry, "*Thou hast kept the best until now.*"

IX.

The Temple of the Body.

"He spake of the temple of his body."—JOHN ii. 21.

WHAT is your body? An inn, thronged with busy traffic! A library, whose shelves are being gradually filled with the gathering stores of knowledge! A counting-house, dedicated to money-making, in which the amassing of wealth, or the maintenance of a competence is the one and all-important object! A playhouse, used for no higher purpose than pleasure-seeking! A stye, where swinish passions revel! "But He spake *of the temple* of his Body."

The conception was full of beauty.—As the temple at Jerusalem, with its marble pavements, its pillared cloisters, its terraced courts, its rich adornment, was one of the fairest spectacles under the sun, so is the human body, designed and built by the Divine skill, worthy of its Creator. Consider those ivory pillars of bone; those alabaster walls of flesh; that many-toned organ of speech; those long corridors of brain and nerve, through which thought and emotion move; those storied archives where memory resides as the custodian of the records of the past: and tell me if you do not see an exquisite beauty and delicacy in the Lord's comparison, as "He spake of the temple of his Body."

The conception was as new as it was beautiful.—Men had been wont to consider the body as the seat of evil, and the principal impediment to a saintly life. The Epicurean, like the "fleshly school" of the present day, gave himself up to obey its wildest impulses, as though a rider should throw the reins on the neck of a fiery steed. The Stoic sought to crush out and starve all natural instincts. And this has been the motive of asceticism in all ages. "I fear that I have ill-treated my brother the ass," said St. Francis of Assisi, a few hours before

his death, as he looked with a kindly and half-humorous pity on his worn and emaciated body, prematurely exhausted by vigil, fasting, and maceration.

At the most, men were prepared to give to God a part of their being, one room out of many to be his shrine, the organ of veneration, the attitude of worship, the hour of morning prayer. But the Son of Man said that the body was not in itself evil, and that it might be the shrine and home of God; the temple of Him who dwells in the high and holy place; whose Being fills the immensity of the universe, but who makes his dwelling-place with loving and contrite hearts. He said, moreover, that not one organ but every organ; not one attitude but all; not one engagement but each—should be pervaded by the thought of worship and dedication, cleansed in the blood of atonement, made fragrant with the perfume of incense, and included in priestly ministry and service.

And the conception became characteristic of Christianity.—Wherever the religion of Jesus went, men conceived a new idea of the sacredness of the body. Had He not worn it? Had He not carried it through death into the light of Easter, and the glory of the throne? Had He not spoken of it as a temple? The natural instincts could be neither common nor unclean. And it must be possible so to order and rule them as that they should be the willing servants of a holy will and consecrated purpose; not impeding the symmetrical beauty of the loftiest characters, but promoting it; and doing the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven.

From this source the Apostle derived the motive-power with which to nerve his converts in their conflict with the evils of their time. Writing to those at Corinth, one of the fairest in the sisterhood of fair cities with which Greece had adorned herself, the beauty of whose temples was only equalled by the voluptuousness and impurity of the worship which defiled the loveliest achievements of human art, he said emphatically, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17; vi. 19; 2 Cor. vi. 16.)

Is it not significant that, in his first miracle, our Lord hastened to put honour on marriage at the wedding feast; and in his second public act, by a single word, reinstated the body in its rightful place as the help-meet and shrine of the consecrated soul, a thing which may be presented as a sacrifice unto God, holy, and acceptable, and reasonable (Rom. xii. 1)? Surely thus it became Him as Son of Man! "He spake of the temple of his Body.'

I. The Time of his Speaking.—It was the month of April. The land was green with pastures, and carpeted with myriads of flowers; the air vocal with the singing of birds, and laden with sweet scent; the thoroughfares thronged with pilgrims for the Passover, and with flocks for the Paschal Feast. Jerusalem was in her glory. And at such a time there seemed nothing extravagant in the panegyric of the patriot Psalmist, when he sang, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion, the city of the great King."

After the miracle at Cana, our Lord went down to Capernaum, with which most of his disciples were associated, and which thenceforward became his home. But He did not stay there "many days," as the time had come for Him to inaugurate his public ministry in the metropolis of his people, and at the very heart of their religious system.

II. The Place of his Speaking.—It was in the temple that He who was Himself the temple of God, spake of the body as a temple. And there was a special fitness in the coincidence. The temple had three divisions. The outer, which lay beneath the gaze of Israel; the inner, or Holy Place, where the white-robed priests went to and fro on their sacred ministries, awed by the sense of the nearness of God's manifested presence; and the innermost, or Most Holy Place, where the Shekinah, in Solomon's temple, shone between the bending forms of the cherubim.

Similarly tripartite is the nature of man. The body is its outer court. Next to that is the soul, the seat of consciousness, of thought and will, of emotion and imagination, a family of priests meant to minister to God, in robes of stainless purity,

under the sense of his presence, their every movement music, their every act worship. But beyond this wondrous play of soul-life is the spirit; that in which man is most like God, and by which he is capable of becoming God-filled and God-possessed. For it is through the spirit that man's nature opens out into the world of spirit, of the infinite and eternal, and becomes the residence and shrine of God (1 Thess. v. 23; Heb. iv. 12).

The nature of man is a trinity in unity. Three constituent portions make up each individual unit of the human family. All are not temples, but all may be. In many, alas, the most sacred chamber, with its marvellous capacities for God, is untenanted and unexplored, given over to darkness and neglect. At regeneration the Divine residence is inaugurated. The Holy Ghost is distinctly described as dwelling within the believer; not therefore always patent to our consciousness, because deeper than the sphere of emotion, and in the spirit.

In our second birth marvellous possibilities present themselves. Almost immediately the soul, which is the seat of consciousness and choice, must elect whether it will permit itself to be most largely influenced by the body or the spirit. If it choose the former, saved though it be, it will inevitably become carnal, and unable to digest God's deep and secret teaching (1 Cor. iii. 2); but, if it choose the latter, it will become increasingly spiritual—the light of the Most Holy will stream with growing intensity into the holy place of thought and feeling, until the whole tenor of the inner life is ennobled and purified. And thence the waves of blessed life will pass outwards to the body, till every member experiences the sacred influence, and begins to sparkle and glow; as when the light of the Shekinah brake through all curtaining restraints, and bathed in glory the entire fabric, standing in its earliest completeness. How perfectly this was illustrated in the Transfiguration, in which the body of the blessed Lord shone as the sun, and even his clothes were white as the light!

You will never be able to govern the body by the unaided power of the soul. Go deeper than the soul-life, however fervid its love or strenuous its resolves. Avail yourselves of the

indwelling grace of the Holy Ghost. Let the parting veil be rent and withdrawn. And then, through the recipient soul, the life and light and love of God will stream forth to ennoble and irradiate the entire nature.

III. The Occasion of his Speaking.—The hills of Moab were hardly purple with the dawn before the highways were crowded with throngs hurrying to the temple. But the tortuous streets were rendered almost impassable on account of the traffic and business caused by the vast concourse of people. There were sellers of trinkets and souvenirs ; drovers of sheep and oxen with their charge ; exchangers of the coins of all the world for the half-shekel, which must be paid by every Jew in temple currency. Had all this hubbub been confined to the adjacent streets, it had been sufficiently objectionable ; but, for purposes of gain, it had been permitted to intrude into the lower temple court, that of the Gentiles. There, steaming with heat, and filling the sacred edifice with stench and filth, were penned whole flocks of sheep and herds of oxen ; while drovers and pilgrims stood around in eager contention as to price. There, too, were men with cages of doves, the offerings of the poor. And beneath the shadow of the arcades, sat the money-changers, each behind his little table, covered with piles of coin. A very shambles, with the noise of an Eastern bazaar !

An apt symbol this, not only of the intrusion of the world-spirit into the Church, but of the harbouring of darker and sadder evils in the heart. Not alone amid the ruins of heathen fanes, but in the secrets of our hearts, do vultures build their filthy nests, and unclean creatures make their lair. Traffic in the forbidden ; the forms of brutelike passions ; the rattle of unhallowed gain ; the sweltering press of care and worry and rush—have crowded God out of our life. Mammon, Beelzebub, and Satan, have usurped his place. With us, as in Ezekiel's vision, the walls of the chambers of imagery are covered with delineations of obscene creatures, before which we offer incense. With us, as with Job, our increasing knowledge of God is gauged by a deeper abhorrence of ourselves : " Behold, I am vile."

But when the Lord Jesus enters, He cleanses.—Hastily knotting together a number of small cords, gathered from the litter at his feet, He advanced to the traffickers, and bade them begone. They looked at Him aghast. Who was He, that He should issue such a decree? But they quailed beneath the glance of that flashing eye and the commanding attitude of that spare form. Sin is weakness. The evil-doer cannot stand before the servant of God armed with no weapon save the force of a blameless character and the energy of a quenchless zeal. So, moved by a sudden and irresistible impulse, they slowly and sullenly began to retire, driving their charge before them, and uttering the deepest maledictions against an authority they dared neither dispute nor resist. The dove-sellers followed them, carrying their wicker cages; whilst the money-changers, after a scramble to collect what coins they might amid the ruthless overthrow of their tables, and the pouring forth of their stores, also hastened away. And the temple-court was clear.

Would you be rid of darkness? let in the light! Would you cleanse the stable? let in the river! Would you be delivered from impurity of heart and life? let in the Saviour! He will cleanse the temple. This action was deeply significant of what He will effect in us.

Many would meet Him at the threshold and make terms; but this will never do. You may wish Him to pass into the upper courts without noticing the lower. You may desire to know before admitting Him what He will consider wrong and contraband, and to enter upon a discussion of the whole matter. You may seek to bribe Him into inaction or acquiescence. But it may not be. Jesus must be Lord or nothing. He will have his way, or not enter. He will only take from us what we would be the first to renounce, did we know all that He knows. He will do it gently, if we will let Him, taking away the evil desire, giving us something better, extracting the cancer under chloroform. But He must be free to act.

Sometimes, when He cannot attain his end by gentleness, He uses *a scourge of small cords.* Very small things aid Him in his work of purification. A child's remark; a case

in a newspaper ; a sentence in talk, or from a book ; a disappointment ; an illness ; a loss ; a sarcastic rejoinder ; any one of these may be a strand in the cord, or a cord in the scourge, employed to drive out evil. But better these than hornets (Exodus xxiii. 28).

There always will be remonstrance.—The Pharisees challenged his right to act thus, and demanded a sign. His answer foreshadowed his violent death and the perfecting of his body through resurrection. These allusions were a dark saying even to his disciples, till after they were fulfilled. His words were angrily referred by the Jews to the fabric of the temple, and were never forgotten. At his trial, and at his cross, they were repeatedly flung against Him as a taunt. But they have been abundantly verified. In destroying his body so far as death could do it, they in effect destroyed their temple, and struck the death-knell of their system, whilst his risen body is now seated on the right hand of the throne of God.

But over all remonstrances the zeal of Christ must triumph.—Ah, that blessed zeal, which ate up his life in three short years ; which quailed not at its task, and shrank not back though the path it trod led straight to the cross ; which set against the opposition and malice of men the vision of the accomplished purpose of God ; and which conquered by the fire of its own pure passion ! It cleansed the temple courts, not once only, but again. And will it do less for us ? We too are the house of God ; and the zeal that led our Saviour to cleanse the temple, because it was his Father's, will lead Him for the same reason to do as much for each of us.

Present your being to Him. It matters not how strong the evil, how deeply, or how long entrenched. Only open the portal of your life for His entrance in mingled love and power. He will not fail nor be discouraged till the work is done. Only trust Him. Only abandon yourself utterly to Him. Only work out what He works in. Amid failure, and the rising of your corruption, and untold opposition, his zeal will live and work, until the whole temple is rendered worthy of its Divine Occupant. "He is the Saviour of the Body."

X.

A Psalm of Life.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."—JOHN iii. 6.

BORN! That is true of us all. We were not asked if we would be born, or of whom we would be born. But we awoke gradually from months of almost unconsciousness to find that we had been born. And birth was the gate into life. Through birth we entered the blessed kingdom of life.

But what Life? There are many kingdoms of life, rising one above another. Into which of these were we born? The lowest is the kingdom *of vegetable life*, with fungus and palm, with lichen and oak, with hyssop and cedar. But our kingdom is higher than this. The next is the kingdom *of animal life*, separated by an impassable gulf from that beneath it, embracing all living things, from the microscopic organisms of deep-sea dredgings, or the invisible kingdoms that exist in drops of water, to the noblest forms of creature-life around the throne of God. But our kingdom was higher than this. The next is the kingdom *of mind and soul:* in which there are the faculty of reason; the rudiments of conscience; the sparkle of wit; the aurora-glory of the fancy; memory as librarian; poetry as minstrel; hope, as fresco-painter; love (to use Spenser's exquisite simile) as mother of all. Into this kingdom we were born, when in our first birth we passed into the light of life. If we were to adopt the phraseology of the New Testament, we might call this *the kingdom of the flesh*; for the flesh is employed in a very wide and special sense, and includes the whole drift of human life, even to its thoughts, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Rom. viii. 6, 7).

But above this kingdom there is another—the kingdom of *the*

spiritual and eternal. This is the supreme realm of life, the element and home of God. Our Lord alludes to it twice in the same breath as "the kingdom of God" (3, 5). The kingdom into which we are born as babes is filled with bright and beautiful things; but it is shut off from this by a gulf as vast as that which severs the vegetable from the animal, or the animal from the moral nature of man. As easily might the water-lily become the spaniel that dived for it, or the spaniel the poet Cowper, who sings his exploit, as that which is born flesh become spirit. As there is no entrance into the kingdom of the flesh-life save by natural birth; so there is no entrance into the kingdom of the spirit-life, save by spiritual birth. Only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. And this made our Lord so emphatic in repeating his announcement, "Ye must be born again."

Nicodemus was an admirable type of the world of men outside the kingdom of the spirit-life. He believed in God, having no sympathy with the cold infidelity of the Sadducees. He was, probably, like another of the same school, blameless in all the righteousness of the law, and irreproachable in moral character. He would be classed among the high-churchmen of his time. Courtly, thoughtful, inquisitive; willing to consider the claims of any new system; prepared to acknowledge Christ as a teacher; perplexed at spiritual truth; thinking that it was only needful to know in order to be—how apt a type is he of the children of the flesh!

See him as he muffles his face in his cloak, and steals along in the shadows cast by the full Passover moon, startled by his own footfall, fearful lest the watchman on his beat should recognise the magnate of the Jewish Sanhedrim in the suppliant for entrance at the door of the humble lodging of Jesus of Nazareth. A nervous, timid old man this, defending his friends on general principles; not liking to identify himself too publicly with a dead enthusiast; fonder of asking questions than of arguing points (John iii. 4, 9; vii. 50, 51; xix. 38, 39).

To such a man Christ said, "Ye must be born again." When Christ says *must*, it is time for us to wake up. He is so gentle, winsome, tender. He is always persuading, inviting,

entreating. He so seldom uses the imperative mood. When, therefore, He speaks thus, it becomes us to inquire into the matter on which He insists so earnestly.

I. The Nature of this Life.—It is "eternal life." This is the epithet perpetually applied to it throughout this chapter and the writings of the beloved Evangelist. Our Lord was the first so to describe it (15). The Holy Ghost repeats the words as though to stamp them on our minds (16, 36; iv. 14, 36; vi. 54; x. 28; xii. 25; 1 John v. 13). Surely they cannot simply mean everlastingness, the duration of a never-ending existence. To have that alone were to gain nothing by our second birth. Nay, it would repeat the mistake of the old Greek myth, in which the goddess obtained for her lover immortal life, but forgot to claim also immortal youth, so that his years became an insupportable anguish. "Eternal" refers rather to the quality than the quantity of that life, and tells us that it is altogether removed from the conditions of space and time, and partakes of the blessed, timeless, glorious, spiritual, nature of God.

This life is never shadowed by dread of condemnation (18); it suns itself in the very light of God's face (20); it does the truth (21); it finds its true nest and home in the very heart of God (13).

II. The Source of this Life—God. "The Father hath life in Himself" (v. 26). To use the sublime language of the Psalmist, "In Thee is the fountain of life." All life finds its source and origin in the nature of God; as the verdure of an oasis in the desert, or of a valley among the hills, is entirely due to the presence of a perennial fountain, which makes music through the years. Drain away the fountain, and the glade slowly fades into desert. Blot out God, and the universe becomes as devoid of life as the moon.

From the firefly that flashes through the forest glade to the firstborn sons of light—the seraphs, who burn in ceaseless adoration before the throne—all the life that exists throughout the universe is due, if I may say so, to the spray of the Divine fountain of life. And this is specially true of spiritual life. Underived, independent of supply, original and ever-flowing, all spirit-life has its centre, home, and fountain-head in God.

III. The Storage of this Life.—If we may use the words, the Father stored his life in the human nature of our Lord. It dwelt in Him in its fulness, and it pleased the Father that it should be so. By a deliberate act, He gave to the Son to have life in Himself. And so at last that life was manifested, and men saw it, and bore witness of that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to them (Col. ii. 9; John v. 26; 1 John i. 2).

Of course we know that, as the second person of the ever-blessed Trinity, our Lord Jesus shared from before all worlds in the inherent life of God; but when He became the Son of Man, it was the Father's special bestowment that stored up in his human nature all the marvellous life of which we speak. It was as if our God yearned to make us partakers of his Divine nature; but, since the fountain-head was in his own being, and He knew that it would be inaccessible to us, therefore, in tender pity and condescension, He brought it within our reach in the human nature of our blessed Lord. Who need be afraid of Jesus? What little child may not venture to his arms? what penitent not kiss his feet? what trembling one not lose all terror in his presence? Thank God that He has put his best gift on so low a shelf that the weakest and smallest of his children may go and take it for themselves!

But it was not enough simply to store the life in Jesus. It had to be made accessible to us through his death, resurrection, and ascension. There is, therefore, special significance in the repeated references of this chapter to the Son of Man being lifted up on the cross (14, 16). That precious death was the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sin of the whole world, through which alone our sins can be pardoned, or we accounted worthy to stand in the presence of the holy God. But, at the same time, it made Him able to pass on to others that life which was in Himself; and, as He passed through death into resurrection, He became the author of eternal life to all who are united to Him by faith.

He was filled, that out of his fulness we might be filled. He died that we might live. Having overcome the sharpness of death, He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

IV. The Communication of this Life.—"Born of water and of the Spirit." All the world of Judæa was ringing with talk of John's baptism. At this very time he was baptizing in Ænon, because there was much water there. This then was our Lord's point, when He spoke of *water*. He clearly referred to the work of his Forerunner, and all that it meant of repentance and confession of sin. It was through John that men were to come to Himself. The porter must open the gate of the true fold. And the Lord Jesus would not for a moment allow this man, ruler though he were, to escape the wholesome ordeal of taking his place with every other sinner on the Jordan banks, and of thus becoming one of the people prepared for the coming of the Lord. In every soul there has to be a process analogous to that signified by the baptism of John. First the baptism of water, then the baptism of fire. First repentance, then remission of sins. Born of water and of the Spirit.

But at the most this is only part, and, though necessary, the less part, of the process. We need not only to turn from the old life, but to become possessed of the new. And this is the express function of the Holy Spirit. He is significantly called "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 2).

Faith is receptiveness. Those that believe are those that receive (i. 12). Now the one spot in all the universe where faith is most easily and constantly called into operation is at the cross of Jesus. When the soul beholds that mystery of love, the Son of Man dying for its sins, uplifted on the cross, as the serpent on the pole, it yearns after Him with a passion which is God-begotten; it cannot refrain from faith; it opens towards Him the deepest recesses of its being: and *that* is the blessed moment of the impartation of the germ of the new life through the agency of the Holy Spirit. We may not say which precedes the other. They are simultaneous, as the simultaneous movement of the spokes of a wheel, or as a child's first cry with its first breath.

We may not have been conscious of this gracious overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, our hearts may have been too much occupied with love and penitence and ecstasy to think

of aught else than of the death which atoned for sin and made us nigh to God; but in after years we must look back to that moment as the birthday of our eternal life, the hour when we passed from death unto life, and became alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Ah, august and glorious experience, never to be forgotten, never to be excelled in all that may transpire through untrodden ages, by which we were translated from death into life, from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son!

V. The Laws of that Life.—(1) *Mystery.* As the wind (8). Whilst our Lord was speaking with this inquirer, "trusting Himself to him," as He did not to the majority of those who sought Him (ii. 24), the night-breeze may have passed over the city, stirring the vine-leaves as they drooped over the casement, and breathing through the open window. "Mark this wind," said our Lord; "how mysterious it is! You cannot see it, though you can feel it. You know not from what scenes it comes, or to what it hurries; its laws and ministries; why it is now a hurricane, and again a zephyr, now laden with the softness of the western sea, and again hot and feverish with the fire of the desert waste—of all this you are ignorant; and do you think that you will be more able to understand the nature or laws of that new life of which I speak?"

It must be always so. No kingdom can understand another kingdom. You must be born into life to know life. It is only by what you experience of life in yourself that you can judge of it in others. This is the contention which the Apostle enforces in words that burn with undimming flame, though almost two thousand years have elapsed since they were first penned: "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. ii. 11–16).

Those, therefore, who hear us talk of the new birth may well marvel, as did Nicodemus; and it is almost useless to try to make these mysteries plain. As well ride on the wind, or follow the rush of the tide as it drives its foaming steeds up the estuary. But we who have it know it. We are conscious of its throb, its pulse, its ecstasy. We have traced its parentage to

the nature of God. We hear its music as it rises up like a fountain towards eternity.

Thank God that, with all its mystery, the wind is all-pervasive. No lung so consumptive, no mine so deep, no orifice so small, no court so fœtid, but it will enter to purify and heal. So, unless we seal ourselves hermetically against Him, the Divine Spirit will enter our natures, ridding them of the miasma which has gathered there, sowing the germs of life, and inspiring us with the very nature of God.

(2) *Knowledge.*—Though we do not come to the Lord Jesus primarily as Teacher, yet we cannot receive the new life without turning naturally to Him as its Teacher and Guide. Come to Him as Teacher, and you only marvel. Come to Him as Saviour, and, being saved, you learn, whilst sitting at his feet, not earthly things only, but heavenly (12).

It is passing wonderful how soon the new-born babe begins to understand things which baffle the wise and prudent. That which the intellect cannot receive is welcomed by the loving humble spirit. We receive the Spirit of God, and we come to know the things that are freely given to us of God. They are revealed by the Spirit, who searches the deep things of the Divine nature. Oh for more time to spend bending over these translucent but infinite depths, beneath the teaching of such a Master!

(3) *Growth.*—As the Baptist said of the Lord, using the third *must* of this chapter, "He must increase, I must decrease." This also is true of the Christ-life within. It is destined to grow and increase, from strength to strength, from grace to grace, till Christ is perfectly formed within us.

The growth of the Divine life is in exact proportion to the denial of the self-life. Bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Learn what it means to be crucified with Christ in daily acts of unselfish love and pity. Mortify the deeds of the body in the power of the Eternal Spirit; and as the mould is broken, the true ideal will emerge in the perfect beauty of eternal life.

XI.

The Shadow of the Cross.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."—JOHN iii. 14.

IN a well-known picture, a modern painter has given us an imaginary incident in the youth of our Lord. It is the carpenter's shop. Boards sawn for use are propped against the walls, the floor is strewn with chips and curls of wood and heaps of sawdust, various tools mingle in the confusion, or are placed in the rack ready for use. Mary is kneeling close beside the Christ, the level rays of the setting sun strike through the casement, and as the young carpenter draws Himself to his full height and extends his arms, a shadow as of one crucified is thrown on the opposite wall. Mary, at least, sees that shadow of the cross, and it recals the prediction of the venerable Simeon, which had for the moment chilled her motherly rapture, whilst he foretold the sword which should pierce her soul.

This, of course, is fancy; and yet it is without doubt that, to Mary at least, the anticipation of crushing sorrow, in connection with that wondrous Being with whom her own life was so mysteriously entwined, was an ever-present source of grief.

When did the first realization of his death break on the human consciousness of our blessed Lord? Of course, as the Son of God, He must always have anticipated it. From eternity it had been present to his mind. Before the mountains were brought forth, or the foundations of the earth were laid, in purpose and intention, He was the Lamb slain. He emptied Himself with the express purpose of becoming obedient to the death of the cross. But there was perhaps a moment when it first broke on his soul as the Son of Man.

Whenever that moment was, it lay far back before the day when He took up his public ministry; for from his earliest words and onward to his latest it is evident that He was living in the anticipation of Calvary.

The shadow of the cross rests on all the incidents and words of his public life. Nowhere does the sun of his life shine in a clear sky. The darkness is denser here and thinner there, but it is everywhere; "as the twilight creeps noiselessly into evening's sunniest nooks, and quietly masters all the land without the winnowing of its silken wing being heard or seen." Let us for a moment trace it. Calvary is a low hill; but it casts a long shadow.

In his first appeal to his fellow-countrymen from the court of the cleansed Temple, He spoke clearly of the destruction of his body, in which the destruction of their own Temple was foreshadowed (ii. 19).

In his first recorded conversation He said positively and unmistakeably that He must be lifted up, not simply to the right hand of the Father, but as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (iii. 14). Between Him and the bright Home whither He was going lay the blackness of the midnight of the cross.

He spoke of his flesh as given for the life of the world (vi. 51). He broke the full horror of his death to the inner circle of his adherents on the eve of his transfiguration, exciting their vigorous remonstrance (Matt. xvi. 21); He set his face to go to Jerusalem, knowing full well that the predicted hour had nearly struck (Luke ix. 51); He described the Good Shepherd as giving his life for the sheep (John x. 11); He accepted the gift of Mary's love for his burying (xii. 7); his last utterances were full of similar references (xv. 13); He went to meet the band which Judas led, knowing the while to what He went (xviii. 4).

And perhaps there is no scene in all his life more touching than when the question of certain Greeks, at the close of his public ministry, plunges Him into deep and heart-rending meditation; from the midst of which come the cries of his

human soul in agony, and He uses again these very words about the Son of Man being lifted up, adding to them a marvellous forecast of the effect that it should have on the minds and hearts of men throughout all lands and all coming years (xii. 32, 33).

I. The Heroism of the Son of Man.—He evidently foresaw all. The bodily torture—the shame and spitting; the racked muscle and quivering flesh; the slow agony of death—these were present to Him, and the bitterness of the soul, and the God-forsakenness of the spirit. He to some extent must have gauged the weight of the world's sin, which He was to bear away. And his soul was troubled beyond what words can tell, as He came within the penumbra of that eclipse. No eye would pity, no hand would save; lover and friend must stand afar off; the disciples would forsake Him and flee; the very heavens would veil their blessed light. He must be accounted as "sin," and go forth alone as the scapegoat. In front of Him He saw the winepress which He must tread alone. And yet He was not rebellious, neither turned away. He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; He hid not his face from shame and spitting (Isa. l. 6).

Who does not know the pain of anticipating some awful agony—a separation from some twin soul, an operation, an inevitable break-up of some blessed abode of human bliss? Under circumstances lik these, the life drags on its weary length in almost unsuppo able anguish, which gnaws it away, as the fret of the sea-billo does the base of the cliffs. At such times the very event we dread is almost a welcome relief from the agony of anticipation. And it is conceivable that the outward tumult of Calvary was positively this to the human nature of Jesus.

And yet He never faltered. Is there not a side light here on the heroic tenacity of his purpose, on the strength of his will! Gentle as a woman, He is mightier than the mightiest of men. Simple as a child, He is strong as God. Lamb though He be, He is Lion too. "For the joy set before Him, He endured the

cross, despising the shame." What wonder, then, that having overcome the natural instinctive dread of the pain of death in which all men, more or less, participate, He has been able to overcome the world, and its prince, and the power of darkness, and to save with a great salvation!

This Saviour of ours, my brothers, is no effeminate weakling, no creature of circumstances, no hysterical enthusiast; but a Man who knew what it was to endure the long strain of anticipated agony; who could suffer silently, locking up the secret in his heart; who could face without blanching the direst anguish that man ever bore. It may be that you, too, have some kind of prevision of the cross and shame which await you; but be strong, yea, be strong, because He has gone this way before you, and can make you more than conquerors. You can go through no darker rooms than He has traversed; and you may have what He could not have, the company of One who is touched with the feeling of your infirmities, because He has been tempted in each point like you. Let those especially who, through fear of death, are all their lifetime subject to bondage, understand how completely the blessed Lord can sympathise with them; and let them claim his heroism, and that He Himself should be in them that strength and confidence which they need.

II. The Nature of his Death.—*Evidently it was not a martyrdom.*—A martyr is wholly at the discretion of his foes. His main object, as the name denotes, is to give a witness to certain neglected and unpopular truths. He is engrossed with this, and does not specially address himself to the question of his fate. If he prove a hindrance and reproof to the men of his time, he must probably suffer the direst penalty they can inflict. But it is no part of his primary purpose to incur that fate; and he has no thought of expiating the sin of those who hound him to his death.

Far different was the main purpose of the Lord Jesus. True, He came as a witness to the truth; but most of all He came to be the sin-offering of our race, and to pass through death

into resurrection on behalf of a company which no man can number. Other men die because they have been born; our Lord was born that He might die.

His death was voluntary.—The Father sent the Son; but the Son came. He was not forced suddenly and unexpectedly into the scenes of death. He deliberately walked directly into them, fore-knowing and choosing all. Never for a moment did He admit that his life was taken from Him. He said that He laid it down of Himself, and that He had received this power from his Father. Never for a single moment did He swerve from the acquiescence of his will with his Father's. And can we doubt the voluntary character of his death, as we remark how safe He was until his hour had come, and whilst He remained among the hills of Galilee, or as we behold the marvellous display of his power which flung his captors to the ground on their backs?

No unwilling victim He! Not dragged to the slaughter! "Led!" From the depths of his steadfast soul the words rang out, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." He trod the path to the brow of Mount Moriah as willingly as Isaac had done in his innocence before Him; though He knew, as the lad did not know, that He was to be God's Lamb.

But if all were voluntary, how splendid the tribute to his love! A love that never faltered; that counted the gain more than the pain; that was prepared to bear all to win his Bride. Oh, love of the heart of Jesus, the more we think of thee, the more thou passest knowledge, whilst we stand baffled before thy depths and heights! A love that gave itself under the spell of some sudden impulse were much; but a love that could steadily face years of soul-gnawing agony, this is love indeed! Blessed is the spirit which will resign itself to the inevitable; but more blessed far the spirit which, for very love, will resign itself to the evitable, and stand at a stake, or hang on a cross, constrained, not by chains or nails, but by its own devotion.

His death was necessary.—The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, if it were not to live alone. I love that word *must.* If there had been another way it would have

been selected; but there was no other way. In no other way could the love of God have free course and be glorified. In no other way could the curse of Adam's sin be removed from the race. In no other way could our sins be borne, or our salvation achieved. In no other way could we obtain the life of God stored up in the human nature of Jesus. In no other way could He pass to his great reward. *Must*—God Himself had considered all other possible alternatives in vain, and this was the verdict of Deity. *Must*—in the very nature of things, it was peremptory. *Must*—it could not have been otherwise, if He would become the Saviour, Priest, King, Brother, and Life-giver of men. Oh, sad yet blessed necessity! *Sad*, because it cost Him so much; *blessed*, because it has brought us so much.

III. The Joy of the Son of Man.—Throughout all the long travail of his soul He was sustained and animated by one delightful anticipation. For the joy set before Him (Heb. xii. 2), He looked through the shadow towards the sun-glints on the horizon to which He went. The joy of doing his Father's will, of rolling away all imputation from his Father's character. The joy of undoing the work of the first Adam, and of becoming, as the second Man, the Head of a redeemed race. The joy of drawing all men to Himself, and of winning for Himself the Church as his Bride. The joys of marriage, and victory, and deliverance, all crowded into one long ecstasy. This sustained and nerved his spirit.

We may just now be near despair. The days are dark. There is much to depress in the slow progress of the Church. The angels must weary as they stand at the twelve open gates of heaven counting the driblets that pass in, while the multitudes reject the invitation of God's love. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold. But why should we falter or despair? *He* never did.

Let us keep our eye on the streaks of the breaking day. Let us keep our ears attentive for the first peal of the marriage bells. Let us cultivate his patience and his joy. "If we suffer with Him, we shall be glorified together." "O death, where is

thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Wherefore lift up your heads and rejoice, for your redemption draweth nigh.

Ah, what will not that day of redemption bring!—when the regions of the air will no longer be infested by wicked spirits, which rule the darkness of this world; when creation herself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, which was, perhaps, flung upon her by the sin and fall of Satan and his hosts; when the Bride of Christ, built up as Eve of old from her Bridegroom's wounded side, shall be brought to Him to share his authority and glory; when from our position beside Him we shall rule angels, and reign on the earth; when God shall have vindicated his wisdom and love in the permission of moral evil! Oh, day of surpassing blessedness; of light too dazzling for mortal eye; of rapture too intense for mortal hearts, we long for thee even as our Lord does! And for love of thee, will be content to wait till the mystery of iniquity has fulfilled its destined course, and we hear the voice that shall welcome us who have shared his sorrow to be partakers of his joy. "Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

XII.

"Sent."

"For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.—JOHN iii. 34.

WE pass but slowly over these earlier chapters of this marvellous Gospel, because they are so thickly strewn with treasures. And we need not grudge the time or labour; because they are the seed-plot of the whole. To understand them is to have a key to the inner life of our blessed Lord, and to gain the true standpoint for understanding not only this Evangel, but the other writings of the beloved Apostle.

The word which stands at the head of this chapter is full of the music rung out by the Christmas chimes. It was one of the watchwords of Jesus; and, with the exception of the word Father, oftener on his lips than almost any other; occurring twice in this chapter and more than forty times in this book, it challenges our attention. What does it mean? "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." This is an inquiry which is shrouded in deep and impenetrable mystery, dark with excessive light, before which angels are speechless; and yet it becomes us to know all we may, for employing one of his expressive parallels, on the evening of his first resurrection day, our Master said, "As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (xx. 21). In so far, then, as we can understand the true meaning of the Father's mission of the Son, we shall be able to understand also the Son's mission of that little band which included not the Apostles only, but the two who had arrived from Emmaus, together with several others not formally

included in the Apostolic circle (Luke xxiv. 33); and which thus represents the entire Church, of which we are part.

I. THE ORIGIN OF OUR LORD'S MISSION.—In his Divine nature our Lord was one with the Father and the Spirit in conceiving the marvellous scheme of man's redemption. In the essence of his being, the Lord our God is one God; and in the very depths of that absolute oneness, the plan of our redemption was conceived and planned, and its purpose executed. But it is also true that the whole Godhead was one with Christ in every act of his incarnation. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." "God was manifest in the flesh."

It is a mistake to describe the work of Jesus as if He stepped in between an offended God and a race of sinners, averting the thunderbolts which were being launched upon them, and interposing by his own action to appease an otherwise implacable wrath. It is undeniable that the holy nature of God is absolutely set against the wilful disobedience and ungodliness of sinful men. But, nevertheless, the loving nature of God yearns, with all the love that ever breathed through the being of our Saviour, over the fallen and erring children of our race.

The Roman Catholic errs in attributing more tender love and sympathy to the mother of Jesus than to her Son; and in calling upon her to intercede with Him for sinners, reminding Him of her motherhood. This we condemn, and rightly. We turn away, in spite of their consummate art, from the pictures in which the mother pleads with her enthroned Son, as from his throne He meditates vengeance upon the race that crucified Him. But let us take care lest we fall into a similar error, and suppose that the Son is more merciful than the Father; when, in point of fact, they are one in an indissoluble unity. Just as you may analyse the ocean brine in the creek that runs far up into the land, so you may analyse the nature of the Godhead in that marvellous inlet of Deity into the life of men, which we know as the Holy Incarnation. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

All this lies embedded in these most precious words : "He *gave* his only-begotten Son." "The Father *sent* the Son." At certain times, it may be desirable to accentuate the willinghood on the part of our dear Lord, which made his incarnation and death his own act and deed of unparalleled love. But just now it is befitting to emphasize the other side of the wondrous mystery, and to insist that the love of the Giver is not less than the love of the Given ; and that the compassion of the Sender was every whit as tender as that of the Sent. And in saying this, we surely gratify the heart of the Son, who repeatedly turned the thoughts of men from Himself to Him who had sent Him, as if He would attribute to Him any credit or praise which was due for so marvellous an interposition. "Neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me" (viii. 42). Just as the Holy Spirit deprecates the concentration of attention on Himself, lest aught should be diverted from the ever-blessed Son who sent Him (xvi. 14); so does the Son pass on our love and trust, which gather around Him so fondly, to the Father whose commissions it was his meat and drink, as the Son of Man, to fulfil. To use his own words, He sought the glory of Him that sent Him (vii. 18).

We often meet with those who concentrate all their thought and love on the Lord Jesus, but who have not yet learnt towards the Father that love which casteth out fear. To Jesus they pray. On Jesus they lean. In Jesus they rest. This is natural in the earlier stages of the Christian life. But it should not be ever so, or we shall become stunted and one-sided in our growth. As the Spirit reveals the Son, so we must ask the Son to reveal the Father, as He has promised to do to the weary and heavy-laden who come to Him ; and ultimately the Father will reveal Himself to the loving and obedient heart (Matt. xi. 27, 28; John xiv. 23).

II. Our Lord's Conception of his Mission.—We cannot tell what was in his thought when our Lord spoke so constantly of having been sent. Was there present to Him some parting scene in which the Father gave Him up to the work of our redemption? Is there an allusion in his words to a wrench, a

surrender, a sacrifice, like that which rends our hearts when we give up to some necessary but distant and painful expedition, the one who is dearer to us than life? When the mother gives up her boy to the service of his country; when the newly-married bride waves her heart-breaking farewell to the husband who sails on some distant and perilous enterprise, and the chords of nature are strained to breaking: is there not some faint shadow of the yet more stupendous giving up on the part of the Infinite God? Gifts are only worth the love that makes them; an infinite gift means infinite love; and such love is capable of infinite pain (x. 36).

But whatever it was that the Lord looked back upon, it is clear that the consciousness of his mission was one of the strongest and most formative factors in his human life. He realized that the Father had sent Him, not to condemn but to save the world (iii. 17); to be its Life, and Light, and Love; to reveal to men the hidden nature of the invisible God; to put down all rule, authority, and power; and to deliver back the kingdom to God the Father, so that God might be all in all.

He was utterly absorbed in this commission.—He had no thought of Himself, of his own glory, or of the esteem of men. To be about his Father's business; to do the works which his Father had given Him to finish (v. 36); to speak the words which He had heard from the Father (viii. 26); to fulfil the commandment enjoined on Him by the Father (xii. 49)—these constituted the programme and object of his life. Dear as was the salvation of the world, and the winning of the Bride of his choice, all was subordinated to a higher purpose, and included in the sweep of a wider plan, by the accomplishment of the purpose of his Father's will. Hence his judgment was unbiassed and just, because his motive was absolutely pure (v. 30).

Surely it would be well if we were animated by the same ardent passion. We set ourselves too low an aim, hence so much of the disappointment that comes in Christian endeavour. We set ourselves to seek the conversion of the unsaved, the building up of believers, the extension of the kingdom of our Lord; and are depressed unless the special aim on which we

have set our hearts is realized. But if only we could labour in the spirit of our Master, and understand that we are co-workers with Himself in his devotion to his Father's purpose, we should feel, that, if only we were true to that, we were fulfilling our life-plan, even though some pet ambition remained unrealized and unfulfilled. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength." The sun includes in his march through space, the motions of his satellites; and to live to do the will of God includes all those other motives which enter into the life of men.

Our Lord believed that the Father's supplies were adequate to the needs of his commission.—God never sends us to do a work for which He does not equip and enable us. And in doing his work, it is wise constantly to be falling back on his resources. The one thing of which we need to be assured, and the only thing concerning which we should be at all anxious, is the assurance that we are where God would have us be, and engaged on his work. Where this is clear, we need have no care for anything beside. God is pledged to find the stuff for every tabernacle which He commissions us to build. He expects no soldier to conduct a campaign at his own charges. If we go down the mine, He will hold the rope, and send down all supplies.

This was our Lord's attitude. As Son of Man He had emptied Himself of those inherent attributes which were his as the equal and Fellow of God; they were always within his reach, but He forbore to use them; and elected to live a life of complete dependence, yielding up his holy will, and receiving by faith, as we should, all the reinforcements and supplies required in the execution of his commission.

He lived by the Father (vi. 57); He was ever conscious of his Father's companionship, robbing life of its loneliness (viii. 29); He expressly denied that his works or words were his own, and insisted that they were all given, as He needed them, by Him who had sent Him forth (xiv. 10–24). Remember how He said, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent Me" (vii. 16); and how He hastened, amid the gathering

shadows, to work the works of Him that had sent Him (ix. 4). It was his sufficient justification to the accusation of his foes, that He was only working out what the Father had wrought within Him, up to that very moment of time, Sabbath though it were (v. 17).

It is a lesson which we need in this busy life to ponder deeply. There are three stages in the dying of self. First, we must die to self as being able to achieve our justification; then as being able to effect our sanctification; and lastly, as being able to accomplish any efficient spiritual work. We must learn to die to the energy of the self-life in our Christian activities. He who sent us must give us the plan, and supply us with the power. The doctrine we teach, the words we speak, the works we do, must be received by us from Him who has sent us, as his were received from the Father who sent Him. Then a great peace would settle down upon us, born of a great faith; and we should be able to say, with the saints of a former age, "Thou wilt ordain peace *for* us; for Thou hast wrought all our works in us." He whom God hath sent has only to speak the words of God.

Difficulties are absolutely nothing to the man who knows that he is on the mission on which God has sent him. They are only opportunities for Him to show His power; problems to manifest His skill in their solution; thunder-clouds on which to paint the frescoes of His unrealized tenderness. Oh to live as Jesus did, putting Him in that place in our lives, which his Father occupied in his own life; so as to say, The living Saviour hath sent me, and I live by Him, eating of his flesh, and drinking of his blood, depending on his help! (vi. 57).

III. The Hidden Power of Our Lord's Mission.—"God giveth not the Spirit by measure." What a word is this! It is said that Solomon gave up the task of enumerating the wealth of treasure that he put into the house of the Lord; and our Father puts no limit on the supply of his Spirit to those whom He sends forth.

As the Son was sent forth to do a work unparalleled in its scope, its sufferings, and its results, the blessed Spirit was

bestowed on Him to a commensurate extent. Conceived of the Holy Ghost in the pure virgin ; anointed by the Holy Ghost at his baptism ; driven by the Spirit into the wilderness ; nerved, empowered, sustained by the Eternal Spirit in his sacrifice on the cross ; raised by the Spirit of Holiness from the dead ; and ever receiving from the Father new supplies of the Spirit in his ascension and mediatorial reign : let us be glad and rejoice, for if such measureless supplies came down on the head of our Aaron, we may gladly anticipate some droppings for ourselves as they run down to the fringe of his skirts.

That Spirit which rested on Him is ours. And we may have all of Him that our exigencies demand or our faith can take. There is absolutely no limit save that which we ourselves impose. The oil will go on running so long as we can bring vessels, and will only stay when there is not a vessel more. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

On the one hand is our life mission to do the will of Jesus, who has sent us, and who waits to show us what He wants us to do ; on the other hand is the unmeasured supply of the measureless Spirit that empowered his earthly life. He is our life-blood, our inspiration, our bond of connection with our Head ; nothing shall daunt, nothing overmaster us ; the works that He did we will do, yea, greater works than these, because He is gone to the Father, and with added power shall do through us by his Spirit what even He, in his earthly life, could not effect.

XIII.

Life as a Fountain.

"Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."—John iv. 14.

HIS nine months' tour in Judæa was too successful to please the Pharisees; and it became necessary for our Lord to transfer the scene of his ministrations to Galilee, where the authority of the Sanhedrim was less rigorous, and the people were liberalised by the larger admixture of Gentile residents. There were two roads thither from Jerusalem, the circuitous one along the Jordan valley, and the more direct one through Samaria. Jesus selected the latter for reasons which dated from the council-chamber of eternity.

It was the month of January. The weather bright and warm; the copses vocal with sweet-voiced birds; the brooks murmuring along their beds; the pasture-lands bright with flowers; and all the land astir with the sounds of industrious toil. After a morning's walk, about noon, the little band reached the neck of a narrow valley that lay between the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim. And there the embrasure of an ancient well lent a ready resting-place for the Master; whilst his disciples went forward to the town of Sychar, lying some mile and a half further up the valley, to purchase food.

He sat there, deeply musing on the beauties of the scenery and the historic associations of the place, and in fellowship with his Father. Few came to the well at that hour, though later it was thronged with women, bringing their pitchers to obtain a supply of water for their homes. But, presently, the solitude was broken by a woman of Samaria, who, avoiding her sex,

came at an hour when she would be unobserved, and escape the taunt, the sneer, the averted look, of those who had not fallen, perhaps because they had never been tempted, as she had. To this woman, on that spot, our Lord spake words which are immortal.

That well-head is, indeed, a pulpit from which He addresses all who wearily seek after life and joy and blessedness, bidding them to Himself.

I. The Contrasts of this Chapter.—He is evidently under constraint, for the word *must* (4) is applied to Him; yet He speaks with the accent of unlimited prerogative.

He is weary; yet He proposes to give rest from heavy burdens and wearisome pilgrimages (15).

He asks for a drink of water; yet He offers to set flowing wells and fountains of water (10).

He is a suppliant for the gifts of another; yet He talks of being able to give with unlimited munificence (14).

He is an obscure stranger; yet He is greater than the venerable patriarch whose name had lingered for long centuries round that spot (12).

He hungers; yet He eats of meat of which no one knows, and finds sustenance in the act of doing the will of his Father (34).

He is surrounded by the signs of sowing time; yet He proclaims that He is amid the joys of harvest (35).

But chief among these contrasts is the one drawn by Himself between the cool, deep, dark depths of Jacob's well, about a hundred and fifty feet below, and the springs or fountains which He was prepared to open up in the heart of this woman, and of whomsoever else He could induce to accept them.

The "living water" should be a fountain.—At the best the water in Jacob's well was stagnant; but *this* should rise up with all the spontaneity and freshness of a spring, whose sources lie far up among the hills, and which is ever flashing up with graceful beauty from the surface of the ground.

It should be within.—The inhabitants of Sychar, like us, had to go out to get their supplies. Like the woman, they all

went *thither* to draw; they have thus become types of all the world (for it is the universal habit of men to go outside themselves for their delights and pleasures); but *this* should be within, like those springs of water in the castles of Edinburgh and Dover, which are beyond the reach of the invader, and flow with perennial blessing for the beleaguered garrisons (14).

It should be eternal.—Jacob's well would dwindle in its supplies, choked with stones and *débris*; but *this* would rise up in the hearts where it was opened, unaltered by the flight of years, unstanched by summer's heat or winter's frost, descending from the timeless life, and returning to it again, eternal as the nature of God (14).

It should be satisfying.—"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again," is a legend that might be engraved on the low stone wall of Jacob's well; and equally on every theatre, and other place of worldly amusement or sin, the votaries of which get sips, not draughts: but this would satisfy. In the failure of human love, in the absence of blessed friendships and companionships, in the subsidence of every Cherith brook, those who received what He longed to bestow should never thirst.

Oh, brother-men, have ye received this blessed gift, with its fresh spontaneousness, its inner hidden blessedness, its eternal timeless essence, its power of entire satisfaction? If not, why not seek forthwith from Him by faith a boon so inexpressibly precious, to have which were to make wildernesses flower and deserts sing? How foolish to barter this for jewels, pearls, or gold; for earthly delights; for worldly success!

And if you ask me what it is which He describes under this charming imagery, I reply, It is true religion; nay, better, it is the love of God in the soul; nay, best of all, it is Himself. Jesus in the heart—living there by the power of the Holy Spirit; descending thither in great humility; and rising up in us ever fresh, ever refreshing, ever fertilising, amid the droughts and desolations and wildernesses of our mortal life.

II. The Independence of Christ.—(1) *He is independent of race.*—It was of no consequence to Him that this woman

was a Samaritan, He being a Jew. At one bound He overleaped the barriers of national prejudice, and offered his most precious wares to an alien. He is the Son of Man, and deals with that one human heart which beats under all breasts alike. In Him is neither Jew nor Gentile. His Gospel, like bread, water, spring flowers, love, is independent of race.

(2) *He is independent of religious bigotry.*—In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, these mongrel Samaritans had sought to be included with the Jewish people; a proposal which met with strong rebuffs. They resented the affront; built a temple of their own at Gerizim to rival that at Jerusalem; claimed for their mountain a superior holiness to that of Zion; favoured the Romans because the Jews hated them; and even defiled the Jewish temple by scattering bones there at the time of the Passover. The Jews therefore had no dealings with the Samaritans, and held that salvation was only from themselves.

But the Lord Jesus brushed all this aside, as a man might a cobweb swinging across a garden pathway. What were these distinctions to Him, so long as those who sought the Father did so in spirit and in truth? (24). The flock was more to Him than the folds; the army than the device on the banner of any single regiment. And so it will be with us, in proportion as we partake of his spirit. Surely the time is coming when we shall see Christians of all schools drawing into an outward unity, and viewing with comparative indifference the various names by which they have been tarred.

(3) *He is independent of character.*—The people who possess a character of which they are proud, who can produce first-rate testimonials as to their flawless conduct, and who can trace back a long pedigree of religious ancestry, do not stand so good a chance with Him as this woman did; because, though hitherto she had been abandoned and fallen, yet of late there had been gleams of desire for better things, which proved her capacity for the richest bestowments that He could make. It is to the worthless, and sick, and hopeless, that our Lord is primarily sent.

(4) *He is independent of payment.*—"The water that I shall

give.' The white-robed company clustering around the throne cannot give it, nor the morning stars that rejoiced over the birthday of the young world ; nor the venerable elders ; nor the living creatures with their ceaseless chant. But the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne pours forth its ceaseless floods from the very heart of that throne. And He can give, because He gave Himself up to the death of the cross. By the agony that issued in the cry, "I thirst," He was enabled to open fountains adequate to banish thirst from the universe of God.

(5) *He is independent of apparatus.*—"Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." Yes, it is deep—deep as the nature of God ; as his deep things ; as the excellent height of glory ; as the bottomless pit of human need ; but He needs nothing with which to draw the waters. He speaks, and it is done. He utters his voice, and the earth melts. He breathes a wish, and life pours into the sea of death, and sweeps it away for ever.

III. The Probing of the Sinner's Heart.—"Go, call thy husband!" What a train of memory that word evoked! Beneath its spell, she was back long years ; again an innocent girl, courted by him in the sunny vineyards of Gerizim ; going with him to his home as his loving wife. Then perhaps there came a growing coldness, leading to alienation and dislike, ending in infidelity. That husband might have died of a broken heart. She had tried to banish his memory and his face, though they would haunt her. What a spasm of remorse and fear seized her, as she remembered that grave within her heart, where her first love lay buried, trampled down by the unholy crew of wilder later passions!

But why awake such memories? Why open the cupboard door and bid that skeleton step down? Why unsod that grave? Why lay bare that life-secret? It could not be otherwise. The wound must be probed to the bottom and cleansed, ere it could be healed. There must be confession before forgiveness. The sin had to be called to remembrance, ere the son could be raised from death by the prophet's hand. This woman must

judge her past sins in the light of those pure eyes, ere she could know the bliss of the fountain opened within the soul.

So it must be with us, if we would have the living water. Go, call thy husband; pay back those dishonest gains; make up that long-standing feud; recal those violent, uncharitable words; summon husband, wife, child, that bright-eyed boy whom you misled, that pure fame you tarnished, that nature, like virgin snow, which you trampled under foot. Call them, I say. Will they not come? Then call them louder and louder yet. Ah, they cannot come; they will never come till summoned by the archangel's voice! But, though *they* come not, Jesus says to thee, "Come hither." At his feet there is forgiveness and plenteous redemption. His hands can scatter benediction. His lips are laden with messages of comfort and peace.

But there must be complete confession.—"The woman said, I have no husband." It was quite true; but there was a further truth. She was living in illicit union with one not her husband, having had five husbands. Ah these fatal secrets which no man has the right to pry into!—shame bids us hide them; but in dealing with the great High Priest we must not hide or cloak one of them.

If we will not do this of our own accord, He will do it for us, extracting the whole black story from our lips by questions; or Himself telling us, as He did this woman, the naked story of the past. Nothing that has ever occurred in our lives has escaped the keen notice of Christ, or been forgotten by Him; and here or hereafter we must hear every detail told with circumstantial clearness by his lips. But it is a thousand times better to hear it now, when the dread recital may be followed by the loving announcement: "Thy sins, which were many, are all forgiven thee."

How we wince when our Lord comes into such close quarters with us!—as the bloodshot eye dreads the light, or the broken limb evades the touch, or the bankrupt hides his ledgers. Like this woman, we start some old worn-out theological controversy, to put Him off the scent (20). There are plenty of people who spend their lives in theological disputes and

refinements, because in this way they dexterously manage to pass muster as religious people ; though, all the while, they dread anything like definite appeals to their hearts.

But when the ordeal has been borne, and the confession made, the soul receives the blessed inrush of the living water ; and, unable to contain itself, speeds to tell the wondrous story to those who have been most familiar with its former life ; and, as it narrates the marvellous experience of what it has discovered Christ to be, a whole cityful of people are stirred with the throb of genuine revival, and hasten to the feet of Him who is Priest and Prophet both—Prophet to tell us of all things that ever we did, and Priest to absolve.

XIV.

Daring to Act in Faith.

"Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him."—JOHN iv. 50.

SPEAKING after the manner of men, our Evangelist is very particular in his selection of the incidents in the life and ministry of our Lord which he records. For the most part, he avoids those given by the Synoptists; and chooses fresh and unique illustrations of the outflowing of that fulness which it pleased the Father should dwell in Him.

But, in addition to this, he selects those that suggested conversations and discourses which he desired to record. In nearly every case there is an evident object in the recital of any given incident, because of the deep and blessed spiritual lessons to which it gave rise; the kernel in the shell; the apple of gold in the picture of silver.

It has often, therefore, been a matter for question, what specific purpose was served by the introduction here of the story of this pious nobleman. It is an exquisite incident; and no doubt chronologically it belongs to this period of our Saviour's ministry. It may have been one of those stories which the mother pondered in her breast, from the day when she first heard it fresh from the lips of those who were immediately concerned. But is there no further reason for its insertion here? Surely there is. And we can but adore the grace of the Holy Spirit who arranged that there should be placed on record so graphic and touching an illustration of what faith is, and how it takes and appropriates God's best gifts.

We all know what it is to ask for blessings which the heart craves, as flowers do sunshine, and children love. For some of these we are able to quote a definite promise, in which God has pledged Himself to give what we need. When this is the case, it is not enough to plead for an answer in a perfunctory, careless way on the one hand, or in a half-despairing tone on the other. But to *claim* the answer, and take it from the open hand of God, not always feeling a sensible communication pass between Him and us, but sure that it has done so, and that we have the petitions we desired of Him ; the basis of our confidence being our certainty that He will keep his word. At such times, though there may be no single sign of an answer to our prayer, no cloud, small as a man's hand, presaging the great rain, yet we are able to go down the mountain slopes, thanking God in anticipation for the blessing which we have received from his fatherly bounty.

There are other cases in our inner history in which we are unable to cite a specific promise, or an analogous case, from God's Word ; but a conviction is wrought into our hearts by the Spirit of God. It cannot be accounted for by natural or constitutional causes ; it thrives amid the most searching self-scrutiny, and gathers strength as we pray about it through the years ; it is corroborated by the trend of spiritual principles, and the circumstances of daily providence. Concerning any such matter, it is also possible, not only to beseech and pray, but to reckon with an assured faith—a faith based on the character of God—that He will do according to the Word on which He has caused us to hope. The cases of the conversion of beloved friends, and of restoration to health, amongst many others, may be included in this second class of claiming prayers.

It is obvious that many of our prayers do not come under either of these two headings. They are not based on promise ; they cannot stand the tests which have been just suggested. And, as a consequence, we cannot exercise faith concerning them ; or reckon on the answer being forthcoming ; or give thanks as those who are sure that the blessing has been consigned, even if not delivered. Such prayers after awhile

will fade and die away on the lips which once uttered them most passionately. The man who lives near God cannot exercise faith for, and will soon leave off praying for, or desiring, the things which it is not God's will to grant.

Dismissing, then, these latter prayers, which are born in the unreclaimed wastes of our inner life—as the *ignis fatuus* in the swampy morass, and which vanish before the increasing light of the perfect day—we have to deal with those prayers concerning which we are authorized to exercise a faith that cannot be misled. And in all such cases it is clear that we are called upon, not only to offer up prayers and supplications, with strong cryings and tears, unto Him that is able to save and help, but *to take deliverance*, and go on our way sure and glad; not looking for our warrant to any set of emotions, but to the unchangeable word and character of the Eternal God.

This is precisely what this nobleman did. News travelled fast through the crowded populations of Galilee. With lightning speed the tidings spread that He whose boyhood and manhood had been spent among their hills, whose first miracle had been wrought in one of their village homes, and who had already attracted the notice and hatred of the leading dignitaries of the metropolis, was again among them, and at Cana. The Galileans received Him with open arms, "for they had seen all things that He did at Jerusalem at the feast."

Amongst others, the tidings reached this nobleman, perhaps Chuza, Herod's steward, or Manaen, his foster-brother. It was a sad time with him; for his son was at the point of death. But there was suggested a sudden hope; and he started at once to use every endeavour to bring this wondrous Miracle-worker to his home. He never supposed that the Master could as easily heal from a distance; or that He could, if need were, raise the dead; but he had faith to believe that where He came disease must flee.

Our Lord, with unerring accuracy, detected the weak point of his faith: it needed so many outward signs and encouragements; it must have the assurance of the outstretched hand, the audible voice, the physical presence; it craved the assurance which the outward and physical, the sensuous and emotional,

supply. And in the absence of these it was in danger of expiring. But faith like this hardly merits the name, though, alas! it is too common with us all. We are brave at swimming so long as we are in our depth. We are grand soldiers so long as we stay within the castle enclosure. We believe so long as we can see or feel.

But wherever our Lord finds faith He sets Himself to mature and foster it. There was a germ of it in this suppliant's heart, capable of expansion into a noble growth; and He beheld it with eager joy, and immediately sought to develop it by the only means through which faith can ever grow—namely, by trial. "Jesus said unto him, thy son liveth." That was all. No sign, no renewed assurance, no appeal to emotion or sense; just the assurance of those majestic lips, and it was enough. Without another word, and apparently without hesitation, "the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and went his way."

Comparing the length of time occupied on his homeward journey with the distance between Cana and Capernaum, the conviction forces itself home on our minds that he made no particular haste back. Why should he? The boy was living, doing well. The home was already astir with glad surprise. He was sure of it, probably had thanked God for it, and could not be more sure though he were to see the bright smile of his darling. And it is quite likely that he stayed for the night at some wayside inn to sleep off, in a long, deep, child-like sleep, the effects of long watching, intense anxiety, and the swift journey to Cana. There was nothing extraordinary in this. Faith, when it is as it should be, is as restful and glad for a promise as for some evident deliverance. Could there be a better illustration of the simple faith which believes the promise of God, and acts upon it, reckoning on the accomplished purpose of its prayer? We may apply this in several directions.

(1) *For forgiveness.*—Suppose you come, as a penitent, to the great High Priest, conscious of a very heavy load of sin. It may be for the first time or the thousandth. You tell the sad, dark story, not hiding or extenuating aught; not excusing or palliating; not trying to shift the blame on others; not lumping

all sins together, but naming each alone, as brought to mind by the Holy Spirit. And when the confession is complete, you naturally look up and ask for forgiveness. But you have a perfect right to go a step further, and claim it; yes, and be thankful for it, even though as yet you have not caught a glint of light from his face.

He who said to the nobleman, "Thy son liveth," says that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Oh that we would believe this word which Jesus speaks, and go our way, restful and satisfied that so it is! Instead of this, we try to *feel* forgiven. Now, suppose that the nobleman had tried to feel that his son lived before he started home. In all probability he would never have started. But the question of what he felt does not seem to have entered his mind. It was enough to him to have heard the voice of Jesus, and he started with buoyant assurance.

It is a mistake to wait for feelings. Believe the word of God. Will to believe it. Take forgiveness. Thank the Lord for it. Reckon that it is so because He has said it, even if you do not experience a thrill of emotion. And if you dare to step out in faith, you will discover how blessed are they that believe; for there is always a performance of those things spoken by the Lord.

(2) *For victory over known sin.*—How many fail because they are always praying for deliverance, without claiming and giving thanks for it! They go to the Lord Jesus each night with the same story of defeat, and each morning utter the same almost despairing cry for help—a cry that seems to strike against the irresponsive heaven, for it brings no deliverance. Yet the Lord has promised to save his people from their sins, and to keep them from falling. It is not enough, then, to ask Him to do it. We may, and should go further, and say, "Do as Thou hast said."

Claim victory, take victory, thank for victory before even you go into the fight, in the assurance that Jesus will be around you as a wall of fire, an invisible but real defence. He said, "I give you power to tread on all the power of the enemy, and nothing

shall by any means hurt you." There it is waiting for you; appropriate it, and go your way, saying like David as he entered on his conflict with Goliath, "The Lord saveth, for the battle is the Lord's."

(3) *For all the priceless gifts of the Christian life.*—How shall we take that gift of living water of which our Lord speaks, which quenches all thirst and pacifies all desire, and makes the inner life like a garden of the Lord, and even issues forth to water and refresh others? We cannot feel it enter. There is no flow of purling streams in liquid music. But we can take the priceless boon by faith.

The heart, for instance, may be aching for "the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still." It thirsts. But it goes to Christ, and lays open its need, and claims the all-satisfying draught. Instantly Christ meets the claim, and fills the longing soul with goodness. "My peace, my rest, my satisfying joy I give thee, dear heart," says He; "be comforted." And the soul believes the word which the Master has spoken, and goes its way, not feeling any strong surge of emotion, but assured that it has received great spiritual bestowment; and as the days go by, in its power to endure, its patience, its calm joy, it knows that it was not a vain thing to wait on God.

And so it is with all God's promised gifts, and especially that of the Holy Spirit. If we wait to feel them, we shall miss them. But if we dare to claim them, taking them by faith, and uttering words of thanks, it shall be to us according to our faith.

It is not always possible to exercise this faith which claims. At such times it is useless to fix our attention on the faith, for faith is the result of other things. And if it is deficient, it will be wise on our part to turn our thought on these, and question where we are wrong.

Of course, God will never allow us to believe for anything which is outside his purpose to give. Very often we lack faith, not because the object we seek is outside God's purpose, but because our spiritual life is at so low an ebb. The thing is there on the shelf; but our faith cannot reach high enough to

lift it down. Let us not rebuke ourselves merely as deficient in faith; but let us adopt that regimen on which alone faith can wax strong.

There are three conditions for the faith that can claim all that God is ready to give.

It must be associated with a good conscience (1 Tim. i. 5–19). So long as the conscience is uneasy and perplexed, conscious of evil not judged, and of a perpetual struggle to pacify itself, faith is as impossible as a mirror of the heavens on the sea when it is being swept by violent winds.

It must feed on the promises of God. Abraham is said not to have considered the physical difficulties in the way of the accomplishment of the Divine promise, but to have looked steadfastly towards, and reckoned absolutely upon, the word of his Almighty Friend. So must it be with us all. We cannot live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

It must dare to act in the absence of emotion, stepping out as bidden on the yielding water, in sheer faith, and finding that it becomes a sheet of rock beneath the feet. To such a faith nothing is impossible.

XV.

The Divine Master Workman.

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."—JOHN v. 17.

AN interval of some months lies between the previous chapter and this, in which many of the incidents in our Lord's crowded Galilean life took place. Our evangelist does not touch on them—first, perhaps, because they had already been fully described by the other three; and secondly, because he wanted to concentrate all his force on the great contest which his Master waged in the very stronghold of Jewish prejudice, and which led, step by step, to the terrible final catastrophe of his death.

This visit to Jerusalem was, without doubt, crowded with incidents, of which a single specimen only is given here, because it introduced one of those startling disclosures of our Lord's inner being which roused undying opposition among his foes, but constitutes for ever a mine of spiritual wealth to those who love Him.

We must pass over the touching pathos of the incident itself, in order to fix on the salient feature, that our Lord not only healed the sufferer after thirty-eight years' deferred hope, but did so on the Sabbath, and bade him carry his bed home. This bidding clashed with Jewish custom and Pharisaic ritual; but the man rightly inferred that He who could work so great a miracle was supreme in the spiritual sphere, and could set aside the petty and vexatious exactions of the religious leaders of the time.

It was impossible, however, that the Pharisees and others could silently acquiesce in this assumption of a superior

authority to their own; and they seem to have cited Jesus before the authorities on the formal charge of Sabbath-breaking. But his judges were little prepared for the line of his defence, which convulsed the assembly in paroxysms of religious fury, and revealed some of the deepest facts in our Lord's life and consciousness. His opening words contain the text and pith of all that followed: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

I. Our Lord's Consciousness of Deity.—"He said that God was his Father," or, as the Greek might be rendered, "His own Father" (18). At another time He addressed God as *our Father*, and the Jews heard Him without scruple. But, when He spoke thus, they felt that He claimed God as Father in a unique sense, and they sought the more to kill Him; not only because He had broken the Sabbath, but because, in saying this, *He had made Himself equal with God.*

It is most important that we should not read our western notions into our Lord's references to his Sonship. We must understand them as they were understood by those to whom they were first addressed. In their judgment they conveyed the assertion of equality. And He who uttered them knew that it would be so, and carefully picked these very words because they meant so much. "He thought it not robbery to be equal with God."

To my mind that is almost the strongest proof of the Deity of our blessed Lord. Not primarily that He wrought marvellous works, or rose from the dead; but that his holy, humble spirit thrilled with the consciousness of his Deity. On these grounds I would be prepared to argue the whole question of our Lord's Divinity. By friend and foe alike, He is held to have been the holiest that ever trod our earth. *But the holiest must be the humblest.* He will not strive, nor cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; He will not assume anything which He is not; He will curtain, so far as He can, the intrinsic splendour of his nature. And yet, for all that, see how this meekest and lowliest of men accentuates his oneness and equality with God. This, indeed, was the charge on which He was condemned to die. Silent in reference to all other charges,

when He was solemnly challenged as to *this*, He saw no incongruity between his desolate, suffering, rejected condition, and the claim to be, in a unique (and, to the Jewish mind, a blasphemous) sense, the fellow and equal of the Eternal (Matt. xxvi. 63, 64; John xix. 7).

But the Holiest must also be the clearest and most certain in all spiritual insight. Could it be otherwise? Our perception of the truth of things is dimmed and obscured by the grossness of our flesh, the earthwardness of our dispositions, the evil of our hearts. But when these are removed, we no onger see through a glass darkly, but face to face. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is a commonplace of moral philosophy that character means vision, insight, knowledge. We cannot but believe therefore, that, even apart from his divine self-consciousness, our Lord could not have been deceived when He announced Himself as his Father's equal. To his perfect human soul all truth lay revealed as a summer landscape beneath the eye of the sun; and especially this truth, rearing itself prominently from among all the rest.

All other holy beings refuse in horror ascriptions of Divine homage and worship. Apostles and angels join in crying, "See thou do it not." Consider, then, how great this Man was who, though holiest and humblest of men, forbade none who would prostrate themselves before Him, falling on the ground and praying to Him as God.

Clearly, then, the Son of Man is competent to fulfil all the functions of God. Is untiring energy working ceaselessly through the ages characteristic of the living God? So it is of the Son of Man: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (17). Is it the prerogative of the Father to raise the dead, and quicken them? So it is of the Lord Jesus; listen to the majestic words: "The Son quickeneth whom He will" (21). Is it the peculiar right of the Creator to be the Judge of men, because He understands the mechanism of their inner being and weighs their opportunities? This also is the Redeemer's right: "The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son," and his voice shall summon the dead from their graves to his bar (22). Is it the peculiar attribute of God to be the fountain of life, so

that life, inherent, underived, perennial, is ever rising up in his mighty being, maintaining here an angel and there a humming-bird? This is also an attribute of our blessed Lord. The glorious possession of inherent life is his also; it has been given Him to have life in Himself (26). The entire sum and totality of the attributes of Deity are resident in the nature of the Son of Man.

Obviously, then, men should honour the Son as they honour the Father (23). Nor has this been lacking. When He ascended to his throne, there followed Him from the heart of the Church a tide of adoration, which has only become deeper and wider with the lapse of time. In the first days of the Church, believers were known as those who called on the name of the Lord Jesus. To Him, the ascended and glorified Master, were addressed the prayers of the infant Church about to select an Apostle; of the first martyr, in the moment of his mortal agony—a moment which must ever test the habitual practice of the soul; of Ananias, who talked with a holy familiarity, which gives a glimpse into his prayer-closet: and these are but specimens of myriads. The records of early Church history teem with hymns, and prayers, and dying words, and fervent ejaculations, written on parchment, or scrawled in rude hieroglyphics on the walls of catacombs and prisons, all to the same effect.

The instincts of the Christian heart are not then hopelessly at fault when they prompt prayer to our ascended Lord. He does not scruple to ask for such honour as men give to God. He insists that they who do not honour Him withhold honour from the Father. He claims that every knee should bow to Him, and every tongue acknowledge that He is Lord. He does not chide the threefold circle of adoration, by which his throne is ceaselessly surrounded, as elders, saints, and angels fall down and worship the Lamb with the same devotion with which they adore the Supreme.

II. The Fellowship between the Son and the Father during our Lord's human Life.—And as we study it, let us remember that golden key to the unlocking of the treasures

of this precious Gospel, that we are to be to the Lord Jesus all that He was to his Father, and that He is willing to be to us all that his Father was to Him. And as we con these wondrous statements of that inner fellowship between Father and Son, we shall see that the after parable of the vine was founded on a union which already subsisted ; and shall learn how close, and intimate, and all-embracing our Lord would fain have our union with Himself to become.

"*He did nothing of Himself*," *i.e.*, He originated nothing, did nothing at the prompting of his own will ; but always leant on his Father for direction and inspiration (19). No vine ever clung to its trellis-work, and no child to its mother, as He to his Father. Though all his Divine attributes were within his reach, and might at any moment have been called into operation, He forebore to use them, that He might learn the life of dependence and faith, the life which was to be ours towards Himself. This is why the sacred writers speak of the faith of our Lord Jesus (Gal. ii. 20 ; Heb. xii. 2).

He was ever conscious of his Father's love and presence.—He lived in the present tense of his Father's love, which was so real as to rob his life of all sense of loneliness (20 ; viii. 29). He knew that his Father heard Him always, as his spirit rose in perpetual fellowship and communion, unhindered by the densest clouds of human unbelief (xi. 42). Yea, there was something deeper still in his habitual realization that the Father dwelt in Him ; so that his words, and works, and influence, and plan of life were the perpetual working out of what his Father was working in (17 ; xiv. 10). And why should not we live in a fellowship equally hallowed and close? It was his one desire that his relationship with his Father should be the model of our relationship with Himself (xvii. 21, 23). And thus it shall be by the grace of the Holy Spirit who, Himself God, is (if I may use the term) the all-pervasive medium between the Father and the Son, and who links all whom He fills into that same sacred oneness.

He was perpetually engaged in reading the open book of his Father's will.—He had no will of his own to seek, no object of his own to serve (30). He had come, in his Father's name,

to do his Father's will, and to glorify his Father's name (30, 43; xvii. 4). It was the passion of his being to do God's work on God's plan. And his eye was thus ever kept on the movement of the cloud of his Father's unfolding purpose. The Father showed the Son what He was doing. And the Son, having seen it, translated it into the language of daily human life (20). But what a model for ourselves! If He whom we worship as Lord took on Himself so absolutely the form of a servant, how fair would our life be if we more deeply received of his spirit; and, through obedience here, prepared ourselves to sit by his side in the glory, and reign with Him!

These are glimpses of what our life may become. There will be pain to suffer, a conflict to maintain, a work to do, in face of opposition which may grow ever more violent; but, amidst it all, there may be unbroken fellowship with the ascended Lord by the grace of the Holy Spirit, through whom alone it can be originated and maintained. Ah, that clear heaven of azure blue, unflecked by cloud—what a reflection it casts on the face of the quiet, upturned heart! This is the spiritual equivalent of the land that drinketh water of the rain of Heaven!

III. The Plan of our Master's Work.—Our Lord was as careful of the promptings of his Father as a jeweller of gold leaf. If the Father wrought within Him up to any given moment of time, He never hesitated to give free play to the holy impulse, though it should bring Him into collision with the religion of his time. "See," said He, "Sabbath or no Sabbath, my Father moved Me to this miracle. I could do no other than yield. Ye must reckon with Him" (17).

He waited for the Father to show Him what next He would have Him do. The pattern of his life was gradually outspread before Him, as that of the tabernacle was unfolded before the great lawgiver, shut up with God. He seemed ever a learner in his Father's workshop, making all things on the pattern shown Him from hour to hour. This made Him so still, so calm, unmoved by difficulty, unperturbed amid a hail of murderous stones (viii. 59; ix. 4). And it would bring rest, and unity, and power, into our own lives, if it were the one purpose of our being

to discover and do only the good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Better do less that we may do more. Better stand still than run without being sent. Better withdraw oftener from the valley to the brow of the Transfiguration mount, than, by fussy activity, miss the radiant vision, and the bitter need which waits for us at the mountain foot.

And thus our Lord's life-work was ever on an ascending scale. From making water wine, to making blood the ransom price of souls ; from raising the daughter of Jairus, to the calling of Lazarus from a three days' death-sleep ; from cleansing the temple, to works of redemption, resurrection, and judgment. God was ever showing Him yet greater things. The plan of his life was ever becoming fuller ; its stream deeper, its current swifter. Nor will it be otherwise with ourselves. Be true to the power you have, and it will increase. The limb becomes defter by use. And he who yields his 'prentice hand to be nerved and used by the great Master Workman, shall find, as the years pass by, that he will be able to accomplish results, the mere dreams of which had never visited him in the most ecstatic moments of his youth.

O glorious Servant of God, and worker for men, breathe into us thine own spirit ; that following in thy steps we may at last participate in thy rest and reward !

XVI.

The Will of God.

"I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me."—JOHN v. 30.

THE passionate desire of the heart of the Lord Jesus was to do the Will of God. As He stepped down into our world, He appropriated David's words, with a significance that David could never have put into them, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me; I delight to do thy will, O my God." As often as He asked for daily bread, He prayed that that will might be done on earth, and doubtless in his own life. And He clung to it as a handrail down the steep dark staircase by which He went to his death, saying, as He descended into the gloom, "O my Father, thy will be done!"

It is evident, though we cannot penetrate the mystery in which the whole subject is enshrouded, that our Lord, as far as his human nature was concerned, had a will, which could be denied and subordinated to the will of his Father. We cannot fathom or explain, but we cannot ignore his repeated references to *his own will*. It was the perfect expression of his holy, glorious nature; but it was a distinct and special force in the mechanism of his inner life. "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father"; "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me"; "Not *my* will, but thine be done" (John v. 30; vi. 38; Luke xxii. 42). He subordinated his own will to God's; and so came, as all do who begin by choosing it, to delight in it as altogether lovely.

To do God's will meant, in the experience of our Great High Priest, obedience to death, even the death of the cross; it meant shame and spitting, a breaking heart, a soul exceeding heavy, as laurels bending low under a weight of rain; it meant the cry of forsakenness. But He was ever nerved and sustained by the thought that it was the will of his Father. He did not look at the Fatherhood through the cross; but at the cross through the Fatherhood. Never for one moment did He lose faith in the infinite love which was leading Him through darkness into light, through death to life.

There are many thoughts given us in our Lord's acceptance of his Father's will.

I. It is the Sufficient Purpose of Life to do the Will of God.—Among the aims of our Saviour's life we may enumerate his desire to save the lost; to put away sin; to purchase for Himself a people; to win for Himself a bride; to destroy the works of the devil. But all these were included in the sweep of a wider, grander purpose than any, as the orbits of the planets are included in the march of suns; viz., the sublime aim of doing his Father's will.

Nor is there anything loftier or more inclusive throughout all worlds than this; for the will of God is the perfect expression of his character, which is infinite love, strength, and wisdom, woven in perfect unity. But do we not often sink below this level, and, missing this high purpose, involve ourselves in disappointment?

Not infrequently do I receive letters from discouraged Christian workers in which they complain sorrowfully of the lack of conversions in their ministry, and questioning whether it would not be better for them to abandon their positions for some other calling. Now, it is right and Christlike to yearn with soul-travail over the lost, and to track them in their wanderings through the wild; and, if there is a cessation of salvation work in our service, it should lead to solemn questionings and searchings of heart. But neither this, nor the ebbing away of people, nor the appearance of failure, is a true indication that we should forsake our post. We cannot

explore the Divine purpose, or know the special function which God is fulfilling by our means. The one question for us is, Are we where God would have us be? We may be pawns standing for hours on the same square of the chessboard; or sentries at outpost duty far from the camp: but if it is the will of God for us to be there, it is enough. We can laugh at what the world deems failure; we can exist without the fulfilment of our chosen gauges of success, if only we are in the current of our Father's will.

The ground is hard; the outlook unpromising; helpers few; success rare as a gleam across the sea on a stormy day. But God has put us where we are; and it is enough, abundantly enough.

We know God's will by several unmistakeable signs; by the sure impression of his Spirit on our heart; by the teaching of his holy Word; by the unerring indication of the circumstances in which we are placed, and by which we may be bound or tied or nailed to a certain post. We may suffer keenly; heart and flesh may threaten to fail; our life-blood may seem to be ebbing drop by drop from our heart: but, if God shows us no way of escape, and no path of retirement, we must take it as his will that we should keep just where we are. It is his will, and it is enough. His blessed will! His lovely will! The will of our Father! Hush, my heart, there can be no mistake! He has not forgotten thee. And some day it will be a sufficient reward to know that He was satisfied.

II. The Blessed Results of Doing the Will of God.

(1) *It feeds the spirit.*—An hour before, the Master had sent his disciples to buy food, and He, too exhausted to accompany them, awaited their return beside the well; but now that they have hastened back, He seems indifferent to the bread they bring. "Hath any man brought Him aught to eat?" No. But He has been fed in doing. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish his work" (iv. 34).

So is it ever. Not only in the devout study of the Word, or in attendance on some public ministry, but in doing the will of

God, though it may only lead to a wayside talk with a wayfarer, the soul is nourished and fed. Obedience to God's will can never take the place of communion with Him; but it is a valuable adjunct. Do what lies to your hand, not because you must, but because you discern God's will in it; and you will discover that to expend is to expand; that to give out is to increase; that to feed crowds is to accumulate baskets of provision; and that to water others is to be watered.

(2) *It clears the judgment.*—How often are we perplexed about our course! We stand where many roads meet, not sure which to take. We waver and vacillate, and finally run to this friend or the other, or adopt some questionable method of ascertaining our path. Why all this difficulty? Much of it arises from the intrusion of self-will, which deflects our judgment, as the masses of iron on a steamship deflect the needle from the pole. Our eye is not single, and therefore our body is not full of light. "My judgment," said our Lord, on the other hand, "is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me."

Our God must have a purpose for each of his children, and in everything. In his mind there must be an ideal of what we should do under all circumstances of daily living. And He is not unwilling to show it to us; it is there held out for us to see; and if we fail to see it, it is probable that there is some obliquity in our vision. Beware of this; search your heart to see what it may be which prevents you from apprehending God's purpose. It will not be long ere you discover some lurking reluctance to have God's will done completely; and only when this is dragged to light and judged, will you descry the Star of Bethlehem glimmer out in the morning sky to guide you.

There are cases in which the will is unbiassed by self-will, and yet it seems impossible to discern God's will: then we must wait; the lesson is evidently patience, and there is no alternative but to stand still, in spite of all remonstrances to the contrary, till a path is cleft through the mighty waters.

(3) *It gives Rest.*—What an agony must they suffer whose life seems at the mercy of some cruel fate, or iron destiny, or

implacable, unalterable law! They beat their breasts against the bars of their cage till they fall panting, dying to the floor. Many an imperturbable face hides a broken heart, or one eaten through with unrest. But as soon as the soul has learnt to recognise God's will in all the events of life—in the falling of a sparrow to the ground, and of a hair from the head; in what God permits as well as in what He appoints: in the coming of a Judas to betray, as much as in the advent of an angel to strengthen—then there is rest. The current of the life which had dissipated itself in many side channels settles down to an even and steady flow towards the sea, which draws it to itself.

If you would look up, though with tear-blinded eyes, and recognise that it is your Father's will for you to be fixed in that difficult position; to be separated from that twin soul; to drink that bitter cup; to be exposed to calumny and hate; to do that uncongenial task; that it is the will of One who loves you infinitely, and is making all things work together for good—then you would find rest to your soul. This was Christ's way. The doing of the Father's will was the yoke He took and bore, and has consecrated for ever. So take your side by Him in the long, difficult furrow, yoked with Him. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me," said He, "for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest to your souls" (Matt. xi. 29).

(4) *It is the key to certain knowledge.*—We want to know. All around us stretches the great unexplored continent of God's nature, in which we have appropriated but a few acres of clearing. To know God would surely bring into our lives deeper draughts of that eternal life to drink of which quenches the inner thirst. But how shall we know Him, and how be sure of aught we think we know? There is no hesitation in our Lord's majestic answer: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself" (vii. 17).

The cause of much of the ignorance of men is traceable to the will. They are not willing to know or to retain God in their knowledge. But when they renounce their prejudices,

and put their wills on God's side, and become as little children, content to be taught, the true knowledge begins to steal into their being, and grows unto the perfect day. Then they no longer need books of evidences or arguments to prove the truth of Christ ; they have seen Him for themselves, and know that the Son of God is come, and has given them an understanding, that they may know Him that is true.

In dealing with professed sceptics or seekers, or those who seem unable to believe, it is of the highest importance, therefore, to probe their will, and see if they are holding to anything which is inconsistent with this attitude of entire acquiescence with the will and ways of God ; until this is the case, neither conversion nor regeneration is possible.

(5) *It introduces to a large family.*—Our Master knew what loneliness was in his family life ; for, with the exception of his mother, his nearest refused to believe in Him. What ecstasy, then, must He have felt on that day when, after his friends had endeavoured to stay Him from getting into deeper collision with the Jewish leaders, "He stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said, Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

And is this really the case, that those who live in the will of God may claim the kinship of all in all worlds that live for the same? Are there bonds, invisible as air, yet firm as adamant, which bind us for evermore in family ties with all holy souls, and which knit us, above all, to Him, the Royal and Divine Man? Then isolation is impossible. Gulfs are bridged. Barriers are pierced. Space is annihilated. Christ and we may be one ; and we may be one also with redeemed spirits, and bright angels, and all great souls that have been, are, and shall be, in so far as we and they participate in the fixed resolve to do or suffer in all things the will of God.

III. An Exhortation to Choose the Will of God.—Refuse it, and it will crush you. Take it grudgingly, and it will chafe you into sores. Withhold from it some portion of your life, and you spoil your obedience in all the rest. But

why all this reluctance? The will of God must be infinitely lovely and beautiful, because He is that. To put it away is to put Him away. To refuse it is to refuse Him. Stand out no longer, but yield!

So many make the mistake of trying to like the will of God, or of working themselves up into a state of resignation and stoical indifference. This will never do. Begin, not with it, but with Him. Distastefulness passes out of the will of those we love and trust. Choose Him, and you will come to choose his will. Will his will, and you will come to delight in it. Tell Him that you are willing to be made willing, and leave Him to bring every thought into captivity to Himself.

The will of God may lead into the garden of Gethsemane; but the path to the Easter dawn lies there. There is no other way, and there is no danger of being lost (vi. 39); but the certainty of an ever-deepening sense of blessedness, and serenity, and heaven, the law of whose perfect joy is that strong angels do his will, hearkening unto the voice of his Word.

XVII.

The Father's Name.

"I am come in my Father's name."—JOHN v. 43.

HOW much there is in a name! A palace lay wrapt in mysterious slumber. The king asleep on his throne; his counsellors strewn in various attitudes on the highly-polished floors, each grasping tightly the symbols of his office, but all beneath the spell; the maidens twined in various attitudes by fountain and loom, which for many a year had stood unused. And what was needed to awaken all that sleep-bound palace, save the speaking of one word, the right word, the word which should untie the mystic spell? Many essayed to speak it, but in vain. Yea, themselves succumbed to the charm they failed to loose. And all around them crept the briar-rose. Until one came, before whose tread the thorns were changed to myrtles, and the thickset hedge to honeysuckle. He spoke the word which broke the spell of slumber, and again filled the silent palace with the hum of many voices and the stir of life.

It is a parable. And yet it is a truth. It is true, to a limited extent, in the case of individual hearts and lives, wrapt in lethargy until one voice shall speak that single word which shall arouse to animation, and kindle the glow of life and love. But it is a true picture also of the moral condition of the world. The hearts and consciences of the majority of mankind were drugged in fatal stupor, waiting through the ages spell-bound and torpid. Many a philosopher and teacher, reverend and grave, essayed to awaken the ear and heart of men; but all failed, till One came for whom all were waiting, though they

knew it not, and He spake the great word which broke the silence of centuries, and shed life on death, light on darkness, love on despair. Do you ask what that word was? I answer: it was the name so constantly applied by our Saviour to God—FATHER.

But, after all, a name may mean comparatively little. It may tell us something of the person who bears it, but not much. Call a man Jacob, or Moses, or Peter, and we infer that he is crafty in character; or was drawn out of a watery grave; or has a rock-like nature, in the clefts of which weaker men may hide. Yet, at the best, it is only a spar from a ship; a brick from a house; a flower from a garden. And the man is labelled, but not known.

So the Son of God was not content to speak of God as the Father; that name had been guessed in the previous centuries. Did not David sing that God pitied us, as a father pities his children? Did not Isaiah address God, saying, "Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us"? It was not quite a new name, though it was spoken with new force, and reminted as it passed through those gentle holy lips. But our Lord spent his life in showing how much that name "Father" connoted, or meant, when it was applied to God.

To understand this, let us imagine two young men standing together in some gathering of men for the interests of art or science or literature. Presently the attention of all is directed towards one standing to speak, who wins breathless hearing by his face and voice, "Who is that?" whispers one to the other. "He is my father," is the proud reply. But how little do the words mean to his companion! Then, as the two pass out together, the son begins to explain to his friend how much, in this case, lies behind that title, "father." It may mean so little. It may mean nothing more than the progenitor of life. But in this case it means brother, friend, teacher, adviser, all that men love and revere in one. So Jesus Christ was not satisfied to say that God was a Father. He set Himself to show what sort of Father He was; and what heights, and depths, and breadths, and lengths of meaning lay hidden in that one sweet, tender, though common and oft-spoken, word.

This is what He meant when He said, "I am come in my Father's name."

Men are apt to speak lightly to one another about the Fatherhood of God, and to ignore the ministry of Jesus in explaining what that phrase involves. But in ignoring Him, they trample under foot the one torch which can illumine the sculptured glories of this wondrous title, Father. "No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matt. xi. 27). We can only know the Fatherhood of God through the teachings of Jesus; just as we only know the Lord Jesus through the teachings of the Holy Ghost, who makes Him real and present and precious. And, in fact, the man who talks of God the Father, and rejects Christ, proves that he knows nothing of the Father. "If God," said He on one occasion, "were your Father, ye would love Me; for I proceeded forth, and came from God" (John viii. 42).

Many will read these words who do not know God as Father. They cannot look up into his face, and say, with a child's lisp, Abba. They are Christians; but they lack the consciousness of this benignant side of the character of God. He is rather the Judge, the Almighty, the Supreme. Such have need to know what Jesus meant when He said, "I am come in my Father's name." They have need to drink in the meaning of those words, with which our Lord summed up his earthly ministry to his own, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world" (xvii. 6). They have need to learn the whole force of that promise with which our Lord forecast his posthumous ministry, and with which He closed his intercessory prayer, "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (xvii. 26).

I. The Manner in which our Lord declared his Father's Name during his Earthly Life.—*Sometimes it was by contrast.*—He would recal some trivial instance of a father's love and pity in giving bread, or fish, or eggs, to some suppliant child. And when his audience were listening with

rapt attention, whilst tears glistened in the eyes of some, He turned quickly on them, and said, "God is just like that, only as much more delicate, and tender, and responsive, as his ways are higher than your ways." It seems as if the Lord loves us to rise heavenwards from the commonplaces of our homes, and as each tiny incident transpires, to say to ourselves, "This is a little snatch of the love of God; a clue to the labyrinth of his infinite nature; a glimpse through an aperture, small as a pin-prick, into his very heart. Yea, our heavenly Father would do much more than this." And the Apostle Paul brings out the same idea, when he tells us that every fatherhood gets its meaning and value from God, as torches lit from the sun (Eph. iii. 15).

Sometimes it was directly.—He would point to sparrows lying for sale in the market, of which two were sold for a farthing, and five for two farthings, one being thrown into the bargain, and He would say, "You see how little men think of one sparrow; but it cannot fall to the ground without your Father." Admire, said He, your Father's taste; He clothed these flowers. Mark, said He, your Father's care; He provides for these birds, winging their flight overhead. Behold, said He, this little child; its angel beholds my Father's face.

Here are some of the direct statements He made: The Father is perfect in his forgiving love (Matt. v. 48); He knows what things ye need (vi. 8); He is merciful, and longs to give you the kingdom (Luke vi. 36); He sees in secret, and will most certainly reward (Matt. vi. 4); He is the Husbandman of souls (John xv. 1); his hand is great enough to hold all his sheep, and to keep them safely (x. 29). Living in the heart of God, and between the heart of God and man, He was continually telling men what He saw there (viii. 38).

It was also by his life.—His life was one long denial of his intrinsic glory; as we are called upon to deny our fallen evil selves. And why? Why did He refuse to speak his own words, to do his own deeds, to follow the promptings of his own will? (xii. 49, 50; v. 19; vi. 38; viii. 28). The reason is to be found in his intense desire that the Father should shine through his human life; that the glory of God might be thrown on the

canvas of mortal flesh; that the Deity might be translated into the familiar speech of men. So, when Philip asked Him to show the Father, He answered him in amazement, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (xiv. 9). In his life, and especially in his death, Jesus showed what meaning was hidden in his Father's name. To understand these things is to see stars invisible to the naked eye, and to drink draughts further up the stream than is granted to others.

And there is here a deep lesson, too; whatever the name Father was to Jesus, that the name Jesus should be to us. It is in that name we pray. Through that name the Comforter descends. By that name we are called. On that name believing we have life. And we are chosen vessels to bear it. We have not only to hold it fast; we are called upon to declare it. By lip and life, by precept and example, by what we say and what we are, we are called upon to lift up treasure after treasure from the unsearchable riches concealed in the sweet name Jesus, until the appetites of men are whetted with a strong zest, and they are attracted to Him; as the Queen of Sheba was to Solomon by the report which reached her in her own land. "The Name" was the common epithet for Christianity in its earliest days (Acts ii., iii., iv., R.V.).

II. The Effect of Christ's Declaration to his Father's Name.—*It closed his mouth in self-vindication.*—He stood there in that Jewish court charged with Sabbath-breaking. There were many grounds on which He might have based his claim to be exonerated of any heinous crime; but He forbore to use them. He expressly refused to establish his right to act on his own motion, or the prompting of his own will. "If I bear witness of Myself, my witness is not true" (31). It would almost appear that He thought that He would have been false to his mission, if He had spoken a word on his own behalf.

It stayed Him from summoning witnesses.—He could have summoned into that court John from the dungeon, where he was lying; and the Jews would hardly have been able to refuse his

testimony (33). He could have summoned the long lines of healed ones, who had been the subjects of his miraculous power (36). He could have summoned page after page, and line after line of the writings of Moses (46). But He only touched on these things very lightly; as if He mentioned the names of his witnesses, and then refused to subpœna them. And this was his dread, that the attention of men should be diverted from his Father to Himself. And as He took every opportunity to reveal his Father, so here, with no thought of Himself, He set Himself to his wonted task. In utter self-oblivion, in distinct refusal to come in his own name, in passionate eagerness that men should understand the great ocean, God, by this creek which had run up into a human life, He said, "I am come in my Father's name."

But in doing this, He has set up the best vindication of Himself. He refused to vindicate Himself; but his vindication of God is the strongest proof that He had been from all eternity in the bosom of the Father He lived to reveal God; but in doing so He best revealed Himself. He refused honour from all but from God alone; and such honour has come to Him, that heaven rings with the acclaim, "Worthy art Thou to receive...honour."

So it is ever. If you love your life, you lose it. If you lose your life for his sake, you find it. We are too careful of our reputation and standing and honour, and what men say and think. Oh for that divine self-forgetfulness, that self-effacement, that self-oblivion, which finds its one all-sufficient aim in making men think better of Christ, without realizing that there is a backward reflex result in the vindication of the faithful servant. Anything which reflects light shows that it is itself polished.

III. Christ's Posthumous Revelation of the Father's Name.—Notice these wondrous words: "The time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father" (xvi. 25). And again, "I will declare it" (xvii. 26). These passages can only point on to his post-resurrection ministry, when, through the Holy

Spirit, He continued the teaching which in his earthly life He had commenced (Acts i. 2). It is of this ministry, also, that He speaks by the mouth of his servant, saying: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee" (Psa. xxii. 22; Heb. ii. 12).

Whenever in a congregation of the saints, there is an outburst of genuine song, you may detect the voice of Jesus singing with them, and identifying Himself with it. And He still teaches us by mystic influences and infallible tokens the deeper meaning of the Fatherhood of God, leading us, not to anything outside the boards of the Bible, but to a deeper appreciation of what is there. So also He will do for ever.

O souls of men, do ye not long to know the Father, to hear his voice, to feel his touch, to be canopied by his love, so that all life may be a residence in his home? It is gloriously possible, if you are really born again, for only such have the right to call God, Father, after this inner sense (i. 12); and if you are willing to let the Master teach you some of those things which are prepared for the lovers of God, and which He reveals by his Spirit.

And as we know more of the meaning of God's Fatherhood, we shall experience more of the love of God, and of the indwelling of the Lord Jesus. In his own emphatic words He has taught us that the amount of the one will be the measure of the other; *that* "the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

XVIII.

The Father's Gift to the Son.

"All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."—JOHN vi. 37.

IN these chapters we are engaged in catching up some of the favourite thoughts and words of the Redeemer, thinking them over again, and trying, so far as we can, to look at them with his eyes and from his stand-point. And we cannot leave this marvellous chapter without accentuating an expression which comes into prominence here for the first time, but is destined to re-appear more than once or twice—that expression is, *those whom the Father giveth Me.* And may it be that all who read these lines shall be included in that casket of very precious jewels which the Father has given to his Son! There is nothing higher in this world or the next to which any human being can aspire.

I. WHO ARE THEY?—We may not look into the Book of Life, and read the names written there from before the foundation of the world. One only can take that book, and break its seals, and look upon its mysterious pages. The Lamb alone, whose blood purchased each individual mentioned there, may scan its records. But it is not necessary that that book should be opened or read ere we know its contents. There is another method of ascertaining the names it records.

The verse quoted above contains an identical proposition. Its extremes may be reversed in their order, for each is the other's equivalent. And if, on the one hand, it is true that all the given ones shall come; it is also true, on the other hand,

that all who come are included among the given ones. Would you know whether you are one of these? Ask yourself if you have truly come to Christ, or believed in Him as Saviour, Friend, and King; for if you have, you may rest assured that you were included in that Divine donation which dates from the eternity of the far past, and shall be a theme of praise in that which is to come, world without end.

This is Christianity. It does not consist in the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God; though Christians do accept it to be such, and account it the stable foundation of their hopes. It does not consist in the belief of a creed; though Christians necessarily hold certain definite beliefs. It is not adhesion to any visible church, or body of Christians; though Christians do for the most part associate themselves together. It is *coming to Christ*. And it is evident from comparing the parallel clauses of the thirty-fifth verse, that coming to Him and believing in Him are one and the same thing.

To come to Christ is to lift your heart to Him; if not in prolonged prayer, yet in trustful confidence, in desire and aspiration, in mute expectancy. To come to Christ is to despair of yourself and all others, and to venture all on Him. To come to Christ is to turn your back on the sinful past, and your face towards a glimmering streak of dawn, now visible on the horizon, but destined to grow into a great light. Have you so come to Him, who, though the meekest of men, proposes Himself as the panacea for the world's ills, the bread for its hunger, the satisfaction of its need? If so, then you are certainly amongst the given ones.

Look at that stone, agitated for ages in the depths of primeval oceans, and rounded by the attrition of the currents of unnumbered centuries; or at those hills composed of the remains of infinite myriads of infinitesimal organisms, falling through the still depths of untroubled seas; or at the moon, which bears the evidence of the terrific convulsions to which she has been exposed: and, as you consider any one of these, you are almost overwhelmed by the thought of their antiquity. Yet know, O soul of man, that, before any of these were made, before the silence of eternity was broken by the first angel-voice,

in the infinite azure of the immeasurable past, you were named, and passed in deed of gift by the Father to the Son. There was no surprise, therefore, when you came to the Son of Man—this had been anticipated before time began ; and it was the answer of your life to the summons of the foreknowledge of God. You have come in time, but you were given in eternity.

Suppose that a geologist, amid his explorations of the traces of earth's earliest life, were suddenly to come across a slab inscribed with his own name and a prediction of the precise date of his coming. With what amazement would he scan that mysterious tablet, and with what awe recognise the Divine omniscience ! He did not come because he knew that he was expected, but because of what, as he thought, were the promptings of his own sweet will ; but, having come, he discovered that his advent had been long anticipated. So we come to the Saviour under a sense of sin or the stress of sorrow, unaware of any mysterious influence at work : but, having come, we find that we have been the subjects of the drawing grace of the Father (44) ; that the very grace to come had been given by the Father (65) ; and that we were included in the Father's gift, so that of us the Son could say, "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me, and they have kept thy word."

In dealing with the unconverted, we have only to reiterate the invitation, "Come to Him." This is the one legend that stands over the doorway of the House of Mercy. But, having entered, we learn that all who enter have been given, as a flock of sheep, to the care of the Good Shepherd, whose name is branded on them, defying time and age to erase it (x. 29 ; Gal. vi. 17, R.V.).

II. Their Privileges.—It is a marvellous list ; and, as we write and read, it is through a blinding mist of tears, because we have made so little of our marvellous prerogative—ours by an inalienable right.

(1) *They obtain Eternal Life.*—Outside this charmed circle there is existence, but no life (53). Men may live in pleasure,

but they are dead while they live (1 Tim. v. 6). Eternal life is as much above the ordinary life of men as that in turn is above the brute's. It partakes of the nature of that world which awaits us, unseen and eternal, in those glorious ages which we are nearing with every heart-beat. So that of the regenerate it may be said that they are already the children of eternity.

Christ gives eternal life. He not only has life in Himself, but He has received from the Father authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to those whom He has given Him (xvii. 2). The life which man forfeited in Eden is given back in the second Man, the Lord from heaven. He is the tree of life, to eat of whom is to become impervious to death; and no sword now turns every way to hinder us from taking and living for ever.

We cannot explain the mystery of the imparting of this eternal life; and we know as little of the life itself. We are sure that it cannot be acquired, but must be given. We are sure that life is not the result of knowledge, but knowledge the result of life. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (xvii. 3). We are sure that to have it is to drink draughts of blessedness with which no earthly joy can compare. And we know that by this the religion of the Bible is distinguished from all other religions whatsoever, that it provides for the communication of this life to all who believe. Whatever a man professes and knows, without this life he is no Christian; but, with this life, the humblest and weakest believer is a child of God, a member of Christ, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. And this is the life which Jesus gives to all who come to Him, at the first moment of their coming.

(2) *They are safe for ever.*—Notice how He reiterates this, as if to exclude the possibility of mistake. *I will in no wise cast out.* The Greek is very strong, "I will never, never, cast out." So great was the pressure brought to bear on the Patriarch that he was obliged, though against his will, to cast out the slave-girl and her child; and they nearly perished in the desert-wastes. But no pressure shall ever avail with Christ to cast out one who has come to Him. No matter how weak and sinful; though a

wreck through sin, with only a fragment of a life to give, He will never, never, cast out. Once inside, there is no putting out. Again, He says that it is the Father's will that He should lose nothing of all that He has given (39). In fulfilment of that will, He stood forth in the garden, accosted the armed band, as their swords were flashing in the gleaming torchlight, told them that He was the object of their search, and bade them let the terror-stricken band of disciples go their way (xviii. 8, 9). An image this of how He stands between us and all assailants, whether they be the righteous demands of the Divine law, or the dark and malignant powers of hell. Ever like this He is inserting Himself between our enemies and ourselves; covering us with his feathers; acting as our shield and buckler; and receiving into his own royal heart the blows meant for our worthless selves. We cannot be lost, unless we be very Judases, who deliberately open our hearts to admit the prince of hell (xiii. 26; xvii. 12).

And as if to make assurance doubly sure, the Lord speaks of those whom the Father had given Him, as enclosed not only in his own hand, but also in the grasp of his Father's hand (x. 29). There we lie within the double safeguard: first of the hand of the Son of Man, and then of that of the Eternal Father. No member of his body can be amputated. No sheep of his flock can be torn by the lion of the pit. No Jonah shall be cast out to lighten the ship of the Church. We are *kept* by One who neither slumbers nor sleeps, but guards his flock with ceaseless vigilance; exercising his gracious oversight, not by an iron restraint which we cannot resist, but by a sweet persuasiveness of love from which we do not wish to escape (xvii. 11, 12).

(3) *They are the subjects of his intimate solicitude.*—For these He gives his flesh and blood to be meat and drink indeed (54). To these He gives choice revelations of his Father's name (xvii. 6); and passes on the very words which He receives fresh and living from his Father's voice (8). These He leads into a certain and settled belief in his Divine mission (8). For these He specially prays, excluding at times the very world from his thought, that He may concentrate all his attention on their interests (9). For these He prognosticates a unity like that between Himself and the Father. Concerning these He

wills that they may be with Him where He is, so as to behold his glory, and to receive those further communications concerning the name of God which shall lead to their fuller reception of the love of God, through the untold ages of the hereafter (24, 26). Oh, destiny of surpassing wonder! Oh, mystery of love! Oh, rapture of delight! And does all this hang on our coming to Jesus? Who then will delay? Ah, purblind race, to hesitate, and miss privileges so exalted, bliss so supreme!

(4) *They shall be raised up at the last day.*—That expression, *the last day*, was frequently on his lips (John vi. 39, 40, 44, 54; xi. 24; xii. 48). It is an indefinite expression for those final scenes in which the history of our race is to be consummated through resurrection and judgment. Our Lord does not discriminate between the successive scenes in the last great act; but bulks the whole together, leaving the Holy Spirit to show the various stages through later writers.

It is, however, noticeable how much stress He lays on the Resurrection as essential to the completeness of his work on behalf of those who come to Him. Four times in this discourse He reiterates the assertion (39, 40, 44, 54). It is not enough to impart eternal life. That would bless the spirit, but leave the body untouched. And the Saviour will not rest until the whole of our complex nature shares the emancipation and blessing of his salvation. A transfigured manhood and a glorified body must be the crown of his work for his own; and so, by his mighty power, He will raise us up in the likeness of his glory, and make us the sharers of his royal and exalted state (Phil. iii. 21).

It seems incredible, and yet it must be so. Nothing less can explain those mysterious yearnings which thrill within our hearts, and which, unless the structure of our nature is in this single particular abortive, must have their satisfaction. And nothing less will undo the devil's masterpiece of mischief, and bring glory to God out of it all.

But in speaking thus of the given ones, let it not be forgotten that they are given, not for their enjoyment, but for service. The disciples to whom our Lord so often referred under this

designation, were the first preachers, teachers, workers, and martyrs of his church. To them, more than to any others, are due the sacred Scriptures of the New Testament, and the structure of the Church. And if we be in the same category, we must never forget, that though we are not of the world as to our calling, yet we are in the world for ministry; and that we have been given to the Saviour to be allied with Him in the service of men, He fulfilling through us the purposes on which He set his heart, and we sharing with Him the travail of his soul, and his ardent, patient, undiscouraged toil.

XIX.

The Bread which Gives and Sustains Life.

"As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me."—JOHN vi. 57.

THIS verse may fairly be said to be the pivot around which our Lord's words about Himself revolve. It certainly gives the secret of his inner life. And it excites our deepest wonder as we read it over and over, trying vainly to explore and understand its wealth of significance. It furnishes a clue also to the interpretation of those other words with which He met the devil, on his first assault, and told him that "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." But here He takes a further step, and says that He lives not only by the words of God, but by God Himself.

And there is a further interest in this verse, that it not only affords the clue to the inner life of the Son of Man, but contains an admonition for each one of us to do as He did; exercising towards Himself the same dependence of spirit and attitude as he did towards his Father.

There was a sense, of course, in which, as the Second Person in the Holy Trinity, all power was his in heaven and on earth. But of this, to use the expressive phrase of the Apostle, "He emptied Himself" (Phil. ii. 7, R.V.), and voluntarily took up a life of momentary dependence on his Father; living on his plan, by his strength, for his glory; losing Himself utterly in his all-sufficiency, and appealing to Him in every episode and emergency of his daily life. His spirit was as dependent on Him as his body was on bread; and clung to Him as the vine to the trellis-work on which it is reared. Such is the character of the life which He bids us live towards Himself. "He that eateth Me shall live by Me."

I. Our Lord as Bread.—We might discover many ingenious analogies to please the fancy and delight the mind, but be diverted from the main conception pressed on us, with repeated emphasis, in this discourse.

Bread contains life.—It is made of fine flour, but in the grinding of the flour the life-germs of the wheat are not destroyed, and it is their presence which makes bread the life of our life, the true fuel of our fire. In bread, the life of nature, that living principle which underlies all vegetable growth, and which is due to the direct operation of the living God, is reduced to such a form that it can conveniently become the raw material out of which we weave the texture of our being. And in the human nature of the Lord Jesus there is stored the very life of God. "As the Father hath life in Himself, He gave to the Son to have life in Himself"; so that the Son has brought to our world, incarnated in his wondrous nature, the underived, infinite, and ever-blessed life of the Eternal.

It is the presence of life in bread which causes it to sustain physical life; it is the presence of life in the words of the Bible which renders it a book for all ages and of endless application; it is the presence of life in Jesus Christ which makes Him the food of men. Hearken to his majestic words: "I am the life"; "I am the Resurrection and the Life"; "I am the living One" (xiv. 6; xi. 25; Rev. i. 18).

Bread is all-sufficient for life.—It contains in itself all the elements needed for nutrition. Though a man have an unlimited supply of flesh, he cannot find in such a diet, however plentiful, certain qualities required to build up his frame. But on a bread-diet man will thrive; and he will thrive in proportion to the number of original elements left when the processes of its preparation are complete. Nor is it otherwise with Jesus. In Him there is everything that we need "for life and godliness." He is a hiding-place in a storm of wind; a covert from the tempest; rivers of water in drought; the shadow of a great rock in scorching heat. For the polluted, He is purity; for the irritable, He is patience; for the faint, He is courage; for the weak, He is strength; for the ignorant, He is wisdom. God, who knew the needs of our bodies, stored all nutritive

qualities in the corn for us to assimilate as we need. And knowing the needs of our spirits, He stored all the elements required for our spiritual nutrition in our blessed Lord, leaving us to appropriate them as we will.

We cannot understand that wonderful inner mechanism, in virtue of which each part of our nature comes to the bread as soon as eaten, and carries off from it the special particles it requires. But we may all learn the lesson of their participation, and take to ourselves just those things in the blessed Lord which we want most.

Bread must be appropriated ere it becomes life-giving.—However much bread lies around, it avails not to appease hunger, or to do its work of nutrition, unless it is masticated and digested. And what digestion is to food, assimilating it with our bodies, *that* devout and loving meditation on the words and life and work of the Lord Jesus is to our spirits. By the one process there is brought about a union between our bodies and the bread; by the other a union between our spirits and the risen Jesus. In the one we extract the principle of physical life from bread; in the other the principle of spiritual life from the Lord of life.

No figure can unfold the meaning of all this. The only true clue is to be found in the personal experience of believers. They know what is meant, though they cannot tell the art of it to others. But it is a living fact with them, that by turning hearts and thoughts towards Jesus they are able to get strength to suffer and act in ways which, as they look back on them, appear almost past believing. O weak and suffering ones, the greater your need, the more imperative the necessity to eat his flesh! Deliberate eating and mastication are essential to good health; but not less so, after a spiritual sort, to all who would live in soul-health before God.

Yet we may illustrate what feeding on Christ is. A whole family may be fed by the words, and gentleness, and patience, of a single invalid, who thinks herself useless lumber. A generation of young men may be fed by the heroism, or intellect, or example of some chosen leader. An expedition may feed, through long privation and bitter disappointments, on the

undaunted courage and inspiring hope of some chivalrous captain. A nation may feed on the deeds or words of a Pitt, a Fox, or a Wellington. And so, in the higher sphere, we may all feed our spirits on Him who offers Himself as the true Bread of man.

The great need for us all is to feed more constantly on Christ. We are so fitful and irregular in our dealings and fellowship with Him. We do not sufficiently "handle the Word of Life." We pray in a kind of despairing way for help, but do not take Him by acts of assimilating, appropriating faith; going forth from fellowship with Him, not gauging by our emotions the amount of benefit received, but by the faith which knows that it cannot look to Christ for aught, without receiving that and more also.

But there are times in every life when, all unexpectedly and unannounced, there steals into our hearts some rich experience of the love and presence of Jesus. It is sent by One who forecasts a coming trial, and prepares us to meet it as He did; who gave his Apostles a rich banquet and an evident token of his power, ere He thrust them forth with his own hand into the very heart of the storm, which was even then gathering about the hills. They had been ill-prepared to meet the toils of that arduous night, had they not been previously so well fed by their Master's royal bounty. And often amid their perils they must have cheered each other by recalling their Master's power. Surely He who brake the loaves into food for thousands could hush the storm into a calm! God sends no crews to sea without first provisioning them. The miracle of the feeding of the multitudes preceded the terror of the storm.

II. The Teaching of the Manna.—The manna, of course, contained all the elements of true bread; but there was this peculiarity in it, that it was not produced by any natural process, nor did it grow from the soil of earth: as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." How it came, and when, no one knew; but each morning, beneath the hoar frost, round about the camp, lay the small round thing which angels might have made their food, and which heaven had dropped for the sustenance of the chosen hosts.

This is the food to which our Lord specially alludes. For purity and sweetness and sufficiency, the manna was a fitting emblem of Himself; but much more, because it came down, as He had done, from heaven (32, 33, 38, 42, 50, 51, 58).

What a marvellous tribute is here to the heavenly origin of man! His nature is fallen and degraded; but it refuses to be satisfied with anything less than that which comes down from heaven. Men try to content the hunger of their souls by husks from the swine trough and garbage from the dog-kennel, but in vain. And the fact that man, of all the living things on this earth, fails to find his satisfaction in the products of earth, proves that his origin must be sought outside the bounds of the earth-sphere. He whose nature craves heavenly food must himself be of heavenly origin. And God who made him what he is could not fail to provide the nature which He has given with the food of its native sphere.

There was, therefore, special reason why our Lord so repeatedly affirmed that He came down from heaven. He was something more than a son of man. His body might be an earthen vessel, but it held a heavenly treasure. He came down from heaven, and in those words lie the glory of his pre-existence, and the mystery of his incarnation. He came from God, and went to God. Heaven was his home, as, indeed, it had been the creation of his power in ages that lie beyond time's bourne or human vision.

III. Life-giving Through Death.—It is impossible for any one illustration to convey all God's thoughts to us. And though bread is only possible through the death of myriads of corns of wheat, yet this is not the primary thought which bread suggests to us. And, therefore, to emphasize the truth, that the power to communicate life can only be acquired through death, our Lord speaks of the bread which He would give, as *his flesh*, which He would give for the life of the world. Obviously flesh is that which has passed through death.

These are the words that proved so great a stumbling-block to some of his disciples. They said it was a hard saying, and they would not hear it. It was distasteful to them to hear their

Master speak of an inevitable death, instead of the thrones of glory on which they had set their hearts. "From that time forth many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." How little did they realize that the crown is only reached by the path of the cross, and that the only life which can be communicated is that which has passed through the grave! There is an evident allusion in these words to that approaching death, which was never far from our Saviour's thoughts, the death of propitiation and atonement. But He did not fail to see that what He was to suffer would be as the breaking of the shrine to let forth the imprisoned spirit of life to bless the world.

Death and resurrection and ascension must precede Pentecost. He must first descend, if He would afterwards ascend to fill all hearts, all lives, all worlds, with the aroma and power of his endless life. The life He had before his death was fair, but not communicable; that which he won in death and its defeat is fairer still, and capable of being given to all who hear and obey his invitation to come.

Doubly precious then is that life which He has given, and gives in unceasing supplies to those who feed on Him in loving lowly trust! It is a life which is death-proof; which has passed through Hades unscathed; which has acquired in the ordeal a virtue that renders it unique; and which, whilst it deals death to all that is of the flesh, enters us to abide, and to lift us to share his glorious life and endless reign.

IV. The Distribution of the Bread.—How significant the lesson of the miracle which served as the text for this discourse! It was the Passover at Jerusalem; but He had kept a royal Passover on those hillsides, which teemed with spiritual significance. To do all things decently and in order (10); to begin each meal by giving thanks (11); to expect something more than the bare necessaries of life at the hands of God (11); to guard against waste (12); to learn that giving is the true means of increase (13); these and other lessons were taught, as the wolds and vales were being carpeted with the first sweet green of spring.

But two lessons stood out conspicuously—first, that there was enough for all ; and secondly, that the fainting crowds must be fed through the ministry of his disciples. "He distributed to his disciples, and the disciples to them which were set down."

In all our Lord's miracles there is a marvellous economy of power. The servants must fill the water-pots with water before He makes it wine. Jairus and the mother must give their daughter something to eat when the Master has given her back to them. Others must roll away the stone, though only He can throw the life-giving word into the tomb. So here. He used the lad's loaves and fishes as the basis of the miracle ; and, instead of distributing the food by miraculous agency, He passed it through the hands of his disciples, giving them a memorable share in the joyous work.

Nor is it otherwise to-day. There is enough in our dear Lord to meet the demands of all that are in heaven and on the earth ; no man, or woman, or child, need go unfed. But if the precious Bread of Life, for lack of which men are famishing, is to be brought to them, it can only be by our hands, who stand around the Lord as a kind of inner circle. Oh, shame on us that we are so apt to feed ourselves, neglectful of the cry of the perishing ; and that we content ourselves with giving again and again to the same few ranks immediately around us, till they are surfeited, and the rest left without a crumb! What wonder that we cease to enjoy the provisions we misuse ; and that they fail before our eyes, leaving no basketfuls of fragments for coming days !

Say not that your knowledge of Christ is too small and fragmentary to be of any avail. Take it to Him ; beneath his touch a wondrous transformation will ensue ; and, as you give away your all, you will find it grow beneath your hand, because it has passed from his hand to yours, and the slender provision, which threatened to be too little for yourself, shall avail for multitudes.

XX.

The Words of Jesus.

"Thou hast the words of eternal life."—JOHN vi. 68.

IT was a touching question which elicited this reply. Only the night before it had been proposed by some enthusiastic followers that they should take Him by force, and make Him a king. And if our Lord had been the mere enthusiast that some men dare to term Him, and had vacillated for only a moment, the standard of revolt had been erected amid the littered fragments of the supper, and a movement had been started before which the Government of Rome must have trembled.

But our Lord had no ambition to be a literal successor of David and the kings. His kingdom was not of this world. He had told the devil so, at the beginning of His ministry; and now He held steadfastly to his plan. In a few moments the revolt was quelled. His disciples were forcing their little boat towards the other side, beneath frowning skies, and in the teeth of a rising storm. And the crowds suddenly missed Him, as He sped away towards the mountain heights, for a night of fellowship with his Father.

On those lonely heights He perceived the position in which He was placed. He was becoming surrounded by a motley crowd, who came to Him for what they could get, and hoped that He would serve the fierce passions of their revenge. It was needful clearly to undeceive them, and reveal the real character of his mission; and this must be done at once—*to-morrow*, though at the cost of his popularity. Henceforth his way would be as difficult as that of the tiny craft, which,

when the moonlight broke out now and again, He could see as a black speck on the turbulent waters beneath.

The following morning, on the further shore, saw a renewal of the excitement of the preceding evening. So our Lord withdrew into the friendly shelter of a synagogue, and spoke the discourse of this chapter, the most deeply spiritual of any of his discourses hitherto ; and it changed the whole aspect of his career.

We all know the interest given to the record of a speech by the parentheses, which tell us how it was received. And we are not left without symptoms of the effect of these searching words on the crowds around Him. In the 41st verse, the men who, a few hours before, wished to crown Him, murmured at Him. In the 52nd verse, they strove among themselves. In the 60th verse, many of his disciples, as they listened, said, "This is a hard saying ; who can hear it ?" In the 66th verse, many of them went back and walked no more with Him. And now, as the shades of evening were beginning to fall, the synagogue was almost empty ; and the Lord was left alone with the little company of the twelve, who had been the sorrowful witnesses of the shattering of their Master's popularity, and of the fabric of their own ambitions. He looked round on them, and put the infinitely pathetic question, "Will ye also go away ?" And it elicited from Peter, the ready spokesman of the rest, a reply which showed that in those very words, which others had felt so startling and terrible, he at least had found fuel for that inner fire which the Master had kindled by the breath of his lips.

Yes ; the words of Jesus are enough to prove that He is the Son of the living God. In their cool depths weary souls bathe ; through their pure glow, the dark passages of life are irradiated with heavenly lustre ; and by their fascination our wayward hearts are closely bound to Him who spake as never man spake. As He speaks down the long corridors of the ages, his words float towards us with undiminished beauty and force ; thrilling, soothing, teaching us, and shedding light on God, and life, and death, and the world to come.

His words are gracious.—So the crowds found them, as they

listened in breathless silence to his first sermon in his highland home (Luke iv. 22). And that tender grace has not passed away from them; as the fragrance exhales from flowers after they have long been gathered. They still distil as dew on tender grass, and drop as rain on mown lawns. Disciple as He was in the school of sorrow, He perfectly acquired the art of speaking words in season to them that are weary, words that heal the broken-hearted, and comfort the mourner, and bid the accused go to sin no more. Well may we look up from his words, which are as music issuing from an Æolian harp, into his face and say, "Thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever."

His words are authoritative.—So the people said as they broke up into little groups, and went wondering away from the mountain of the Beatitudes, when the spell of the speaker's voice was still fresh upon their memories (Matt. vii. 28, 29). He did not stay to prove the truth of what He said. That was entirely needless, for his words were self-evidencing. They were as incapable of demonstration as the axioms of Euclid; but they were as obviously true. The mind of man might not have been able to elaborate them for itself; but it instantly perceived their truthfulness when presented. Do you try to prove that a coin is genuine gold, when it rings? Do you need to prove that the strain of music which softly steals through Gothic arches is beautiful, when it entrances the listening soul? Do you need to prove that the friend is sincere, when you can detect the rhythm of his heart-throbs? And there is less need to prove the words of Jesus: the soul knows that what He says is true; it has within itself that which assents to every syllable; from its very base there rises a deep Amen, like the boom of the sea-waves in a hollow cavern far below the brink of the cliffs. And this constitutes their authority. Their authority is not in the reason, but in the soul.

His words make the deepest truths current coin.—The world's teachers have hedged themselves about with a narrow circle of disciples, leaving the masses to take their chance. The Pharisee says that the people which does not know the law are

cursed (vii. 49). Plato says that it is not easy to find the Father of all existence ; and when He is found it is impossible to make Him known to all. Celsus charges this against Christianity, that woollen manufacturers, shoemakers, and curriers had become its zealous supporters. But it is the glory of Jesus that He disembowelled truth's deepest mines of their golden ore, and minted it into common coin, which He threw in lavish handfuls among men. Only when they refused to hear did He hide his meaning in dark sentences ; but wherever there was willingness to receive, He was prodigal to bestow. Yea, He set Himself to enwrap his teachings in the fascinating story, the pithy proverb, the sharp antithesis, the methods of speech dear to the crowds of every age, never lowering the truth by its dress, but hallowing the dress, just as common articles are counted heirlooms because once used by the hands of a prince.

All through his ministry, the common people heard Him gladly. The publicans and sinners drew near to hear Him. The officers of the Sanhedrim beneath the power of his words were unable to arrest Him. Thousands would gather in the desert or on the hills, forgetful of all beside, and willing to stand the live-long day to listen to lips which dropped with honey. His words swayed the multitudes as vines swing in the autumn air.

His words are life.—The Master said so Himself, and so did his Apostle (63, 68). They gave life as they were spoken in the ear of death. Those who were in the graves of sensual and sinful indulgence heard Him and came forth ; just as those who are in the literal graves of mother earth shall do one day. As the tiny torch of life burns in every seed, so does the life of God Himself tremble in each word of Jesus. "Cast forth thy word," says Carlyle, "into the ever-living, ever-moving universe ; it is a seed-germ that can never die ; unnoticed to-day, it will be found flourishing, perhaps as a banyan grove, perhaps as an oak-forest, after a thousand years." How true this is of the words of Jesus ! Sow them in the scantiest, poorest soil, and leave them ; you will be surprised to see the result in the multiform manifestations of holy and useful life.

Those who most ponder Christ's words are most conscious

of the life that is in them. They are the best witnesses to verify the repeated references of this chapter to the *living* bread, given for the *life* of the world, of which, if a man eats, he shall *live* for ever. Oh that each reader would acquire the precious habit of feeding on these words, till they become in actual enjoyment both spirit and life!

They are the words of the Father.—It is very beautiful to notice how constantly our dear Lord refused to take credit for his words. He insisted that his doctrine was not his own, but his by whom He had been sent (vii. 16). He spake what He had heard, and had been taught, and had seen with his Father (viii. 26, 28, 38). He said that his Father had given Him a commandment as to what He should say and speak, by which He was absolutely guided. As the Father said unto Him, so He spoke (xii. 49, 50). His word was not his; but the Father who dwelt in Him spoke through his yielded nature (xiv. 24). He simply passed on words as they had been given to Himself (xvii. 8, 14).

What a condemnation and a lesson are here! The one, that we have spoken so many of our own words; the other, that we should henceforth wait more humbly and resolutely on Him, not seeking enticing words of man's wisdom, but waiting for the word from his lips, and warning men from Him.

To whom then shall we go if we leave Him? To Agnosticism with his negations? to Ritualism with its outward pomp? to the religions of the world, which are waning in the lands of their birth, because no longer able to satisfy the cravings of men? To turn to these would be to leave the fountain of living crystal for the broken cisterns, which, at the best, can hold but a few drops of brackish rain-water. No; we will not go away, but only ask that He would still speak to us the words of eternal life.

XXI.

Rivers of Living Water.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive."—JOHN vii. 37-39.

WHAT music there is in these words! We are transported to the banks of a mighty river, down the bed of which the waters are ever hurrying to the sea. There is very little sound. The great volume of water moves majestically and silently onward, with now and again a musical ripple on its broad and waveless bosom. Flowing from mountain ranges where melting snows feed its springs; replenished from a hundred rills leaping the crags in a veil of mist; purified by being torn and combed in its rush over many a cataract—that river is the perpetual emblem of fertility, freshness, abundance, and sufficiency of supply.

But this is not all. The Lord is not content with speaking of a river. He speaks of rivers. It is as if He bade us add the Missouri to the Mississippi, and to these the Amazon, and to these the Orinoco, and to these the Ganges, and the Danube. River added to river; stream to stream; torrent to torrent; and *all* to set forth the freshness and the abundance of the life that should stream from each thirsty soul, who, having come to Him, the Rock, should in turn become a rock; and, having received out of his fulness, should pass it on to a drought-smitten world.

Do you, my reader, know anything of this? Is your life comparable to a river, nay, to many rivers of holy influence? In the first place, do you know what it is to be satisfied? and in

the second place, do you know what it is to communicate to others what you are receiving from the risen Lord? If not, are you not living below your privileges, and would it not be wise to do what the present writer did on one memorable occasion—put your finger on these words, and claim that, in all their heights, and depths, and widths, and lengths of meaning, they should be realized? The world would soon cease to be thirsty if only each believer were to become like one of the ancient rivers of Paradise, which was parted into four heads.

I. THE SPEAKER.—To look at, there was nothing specially remarkable. Very meek and lowly was the King, clad in the simple homespun of the country, perhaps not knowing where He would sleep that very night. Often hungry, because the money was exhausted in the wallet, and thirsty beneath that hot Syrian sun. And yet He speaks of Himself as able to quench the thirst of men, from Himself.

It would seem as if He overleapt the intervening weeks, and thought of Himself as already back in his Father's glory, glorified and sitting on that throne from which the river of the water of life is ever descending to refresh and save. That river is Himself.

Christ is Christianity. In this He differs from all other teachers. They talk about truth, and set themselves to invent vast systems of philosophy which men must master. But our Lord has one panacea for all woes, all needs, all the infinite want of the spirit—and it is Himself. He stood and cried, as if the urgency of his spirit would brook no further restraint, "If any man thirst, let him come unto *Me* and drink. He that believeth on *Me*..."

Do we always believe this? We are conscious of almost infinite needs; we thirst and pine for happiness, for rest, for peace, for that indefinable satisfaction which seems so perfectly set forth in the sweet, deep word *love*; we turn from side to side for an answer; for a moment we think we have found it, as we see not far away some rock-hewn cistern, and make for it, only to find that it is broken and will hold no water. Human love fails to quench our thirst, though we drink deeply and

widely of its stores. But Jesus is all-sufficient. Rutherford's most rapturous words never told a thousandth part of all His sufficiency and fulness.

He is the Sun ; the heart that has learnt the art of basking in His beams may live without human love. He is the Ocean ; the life which is open to his fulness is preserved from ebb or fluctuation, and is independent of passing showers, with their pattering raindrops. He is the Man ; the Man of men, in whom all the strength of the strong and the sweetness of the lovable dwell in unstinted and infinite abundance : and the nature which has acquired the habit of living in union with Him can exist amid the failure and disappointment of all earthly friendships. All the fulness of God-head is in his vast and multitudinous nature.

Worlds cannot satisfy souls, any more than cart-loads of earth could fill the mouth of the Amazon. Alexander, the conqueror of the world, weeps with discontent, because there is nothing left to conquer. But Christ is always a brimming river ; nay, a fountain whose drops are oceans, and whose jets are rivers ; and whosoever will bare the soul to Him again and again, not trying to feel satisfied, but trusting for satisfaction, will find longings subside, the ache of disappointment anodyned, the fever-thirst slaked. Try it, O brother man !

II. The Invitation.—"If any thirst." "Any!" Those who are grimed with sin. "Any!" Those who have no claim but their exceeding need. "Any!" Those whom all the world and the Church spurn. "Any!" Publicans and sinners ; outcasts and dying malefactors ; persecutors and procrastinators. Richard Baxter used to say that, if his name had stood on this page, he would have feared that it referred to some other who bore it ; but, since the Lord said *any*, he knew that even he was welcome. The one and only qualification is *thirst*.

Coming to Him is believing on Him. It is the touch of the soul and the Saviour. It is contact ; the opening of the inner life to his entrance ; the willingness to be possessed ; the clinging to Him, as the drowning sailor to the outstretched hand or floating spar. With no emotion, or effort at

self-improvement, or endeavour to adjust the circumstances of the outward life, lift your eyes from this page to Him and say, "O Lamb of God, I come!" And instantly you are at the land whither you go. As you come on the earth side, He comes on the heaven side; you go to the utmost bourne of the visible, He comes to the same spot from the bourne of the invisible; and on the borderland you meet Him. Perhaps it were true to say that his arrival there is the attraction which, without your realizing it, draws you to arise and go forth to Him. The sun attracts sparks; the earth, asteroids; the ocean, rivers; and Jesus, souls. To answer that attraction, however feebly, is to come

III. The Supply.—"This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." During his earthly life, our Lord supplied so far as possible what each disciple needed by his personal care and oversight. He knew each sheep by name; anticipated by prayerful sympathy the temptations of each; and sought to supply the need of each out of his royal bounty. But even then, as an external presence, He was not able to meet and satisfy the inner restlessness and craving of their hearts. How much less could He do it for them, or for us, when He became invisible and exalted to the right hand of power! But this lack is more than compensated for by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus ascended He received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. And then a new era broke on the world. Before the Ascension, the Spirit of God had rested *upon* men, fitting them for service; henceforth He was to be *in* them. This is the glory of our present dispensation, the crown of redemption, the climax of our Saviour's work. "He abideth with you, and *shall be in you*" (John xiv. 16, 17).

In Regeneration the Holy Spirit does literally indwell the believer. His life may be stunted, dwarfed, repressed, as plants in a sickly atmosphere, and as streams choked with the *débris* brought down from the hills; but it can never again be lost. "He abides for ever." But what does He bring, save the life of Jesus? These two are identical. When we are

strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. If the Spirit of Christ be in us, Christ Himself is in us. It is a mistake to dissever these two. They are one.

This, then, is the sum of the whole matter. When weary, thirsty souls go to Jesus, He gives them instant relief, by giving them his Holy Spirit ; and in that most blessed of all gifts, He Himself glides into the eager nature. He does not strive nor cry ; there is no sound as of a rushing storm of wind, no coronet of flame ; whilst men are watching at the front door to welcome Him with blare of trumpet, He steals in at the rear, unnoticed ; but, in any case, He suddenly comes to his temple, and sits in its inner shrine as a refiner and purifier of the sons of Levi. Jesus Himself is the supply of our spirits, through the Holy Ghost, whom He gives to be within us and with us for ever.

IV. Conditions of Receiving the Holy Spirit.—He was not given to be an indwelling life till Jesus was glorified :—

Because the expiation of sins must precede our reception of the new life.—We must be justified before we can be sanctified. The prodigal must be reconciled with his father before he can sit at the table arrayed in festal robes, and admitted to the highest privileges that the home can yield. The second Adam must undo the results of the sin of the first Adam before He may give to his posterity the most priceless gift of heaven.

Because the power to give the Spirit could only be the reward of accomplished service.—It was only when our Lord had positively regained his Father's throne, standing where He did ere He started forth to the work of our redemption, that He had really finished the work which had been entrusted Him to do. And it was only then, when not only the Atonement of Calvary, but the Resurrection, the teachings of the forty days, and the Ascension leading captivity captive, had been accomplished, that He was able to claim the perfected reward which had glittered before his eyes amid the shame and sorrow of the cross.

Because the glory of the Lord Jesus must be perfected ere it could be communicated.—There is a sense in which, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord had all glory, underived, inexhaustible, and unchanging. But we are speaking of Him now as the wondrous Being who has taken human nature into eternal union with the Divine; who has, so to speak, created in death and resurrection a new unit of being in the universe of God; who has learned obedience by the things that He suffered, that He might be perfectly qualified to be a Priest. And it is surely right and true to affirm that, though, as regards Himself, there was nothing to desire, nothing to add; yet, as regards his office and the communication of his glorified life to others, He could not become all that He needed to be, and is, except through death and resurrection and ascension. But so soon as these were accomplished, He was able, as the perfected second Adam, to bestow his crowned and victorious life on men, and instantly the Spirit was given. The Spirit of Christ came to bring the life of Christ into our hearts; but He could not do it till that life was perfected in ascension glory. This done, the Spirit came.

There are some practical suggestions here for those who are longing for the Holy Spirit's fulness.

(1) *Exercise faith in the Lord Jesus.*—Do not concentrate your thoughts on the Blessed Comforter; but on Him who is exalted to bestow Him, and who constantly says, "I will send Him," "I will give Him to you." To receive the Spirit, we must believe in Jesus; that is, we must open our entire being to Him, expectant and believing.

(2) *Remember that, if you believe, you have received the Spirit.*—"The Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive." You could not believe or call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Spirit; and ever since you did these things, He has been within you. Do not then ask for a new blessing; but for more of that which you already have. Remove the silt and rubbish which have occupied his place. Put away the sins which have grieved Him. Deny self which has crowded Him out of your life. Keep your soul in an eager believing

attitude towards Jesus, and He will flood you with wave on wave of spiritual power.

(3) *Let the Lord Jesus occupy the place where God has set Him—the throne.*—The glory of Jesus is ever connected in Scripture with the reign of Jesus. There must be an ascension and an enthronement within ; all things must be put under his feet ; principalities and powers must own his sway ; and when we glorify Jesus in our hearts and lives, setting Him on the throne, then the Spirit fills us with successive waves of power.

XXII.

The Penitent's Gospel.

"And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."—JOHN viii. 11.

THIS passage has been the subject of more eager debate than any other in the Gospels. It is omitted by many ancient MSS.; it is rejected by several of the Fathers; it bears in its fabric, in the original, traces of the tremendous storm through which it has passed. And yet there is no possibility of accounting for its existence, save on the supposition that the incident really took place. It reveals in our Saviour's character a wisdom so profound, a tenderness to sinners so delicate, a hatred of sin so intense, an insight into human hearts so searching, that it is impossible to suppose the mind of man could have conceived, or the hand of man invented, this most pathetic story.

Our Lord, who had spent the night on the Mount of Olives, re-crossed the Kedron, and entered the Temple, probably as one of the first worshippers. When a sufficient number had gathered, He withdrew to a seat against the Treasury wall; and sitting down, began to teach the expectant people.

He had not proceeded far in his discourse, when a band of scribes and Pharisees, adorned with their customary badges of sanctity, and bringing in their midst one who had been guilty of flagrant sin, was seen approaching across the Temple square. Making their way through the opening crowd, they placed their trembling, shrinking prisoner before Him, and intimated that they had come there early for his opinion.

Immorality at that time had reached such a pitch, that the laws of Moses had fallen into disuse, for the very reason that it is impossible to legislate in advance of public opinion. If He confirmed the Mosaic sentence, and insisted on its execution, they would accuse Him to the people as a relentless censor, desirous of reviving the penalties of primitive Judaism. If He refused to confirm it, they could put Him to death, as an assailant of God's law. It seemed impossible for Him to show that tender pity to sinners, which had marked his whole career, and which had placed a publican among his chosen friends, whilst at the same time He maintained the sanctity of the ancient code. It was a shameful plot ; and some have thought that He stooped down to write on the ground to conceal the burning shame and holy indignation that leaped to his face.

The accusers stood there unabashed, holding the woman in their midst, and pressing their brutal question. They may have thought, indeed, that his very silence proved Him to be caught in an inextricable dilemma. But their triumph did not last long, for the Saviour raised Himself up, and spake a word which fell in their midst like a bolt from a clear sky : "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone at her." In a moment memory and conscience began to work, and at length the oldest man drew back in the crowd and vanished ; then the next, and the next, one by one, till the last was gone. And Jesus was left alone with the woman ; not alone in the sense of there being no one else present, but that there was no one save the woman left of all who had broken in on his blessed presence. "Woman," said He, turning on her those searching, tender eyes, "hath no man condemned thee?" She said unto Him, "No man, Lord." Then said Jesus, "Neither do I condemn thee ; go, and sin no more."

There are three ways of dealing with sin.

I. The Sinner's Way of treating Sin.—It is a terrible thing for a sinner to fall into the hands of his fellow sinners. Sin blinds them to their own faults, but sharpens them to detect the faults of others. They cover themselves beneath

the glistening robes of fair excuses, but ruthlessly strip them away from the offenders whom they drag into the light of day.

What a terrible spectacle is here! There is not one of these men who can plead his freedom from this very sin. As they drag this woman forward, each one remembers scenes in the past in which he played a leading part, and which strangely resemble this, with the single exception of not having been found out, or of having been condoned. But they have no burning shame in the presence of their sin; no pity for the sinner; no jealousy for the honour of God; no apparent desire to bring back the wanderer. To them the incident is simply a test-case, suggesting curious speculations, and affording a convenient net for entrapping the steps of Him whom they hated as darkness ever hates the day. They take a prurient pleasure in enumerating all the details—"in the very act." They hold the sinner up as a public spectacle—"setting her in the midst." They leave her to her fate.

There is little hope for the sinner at hands like these. They may send him to the judge and the officer; to the gaol or the reformatory. They may make the case one for light gossip and casuistical distinctions, studying it as an anatomical deformity. They may proudly gather up the robes of their virtuous horror as they sweep past. But there is no attempt to measure the anguish of the sin-stained heart, or the suffering which burns the heart of the Saviour. And the sinner is presently dropped as a curious specimen, when its special peculiarities have been duly examined and entered in a book. Ah, how many there are around us who had never come to what they are, had they not been driven to it by the way in which the religious people around them dealt with their first deviation from the paths of strict integrity! The first wandering steps were eagerly watched, not with the view of following and reclaiming the erring one, but for purposes of gossip or fault-finding. The special features of the sin were eagerly noted and discussed, whilst any palliating excuses were repressed. The sudden silence, the averted looks, the chilling, cutting manner, branded the sin as unpardonable; shut the door upon

repentance ; and plunged the sinner into deeper and more abundant transgression.

Would that each of us would lock the story of another's guilt in some deep chamber of the heart, until floods of tears had been shed and abundant prayers offered ; and, if mentioned ever to others, only told with the view of securing their co-operation in winning back the stray sheep to the green pastures and still waters of the fold. The world is full of sinners who are plunging into deeper sin, because they have been taught by their more religious fellows that there is no hope for such as they are. But they might be saved if they could only be freed from the religious world and left alone with Jesus.

II. The Law's Way of Treating Sin.—"Moses said that such an one should be stoned." It is with the moral, as with natural law—the least violation of its provisions is immediately and terribly avenged. It may be the first offence, or a very slight one, or one the commission of which was followed by floods of tears and an agony of remorse ; but the law at once lifts its heavy arm to smite. Its executioner is commissioned to do his work ; and the offender falls beneath its curse and penalty.

The function of the law is twofold. First it has to reveal our need of salvation ; to hold up the looking-glass that we may go for soap ; to convince us of our disease that we may hasten for the physician ; to make us feel the badness of our best till we are shut up to Christ. Next, it has to smite, and scourge, and punish us, when we go aside from the narrow thread-like path of perfect goodness. The sinner, therefore, has no hope as he stands beneath Mount Sinai. He cannot climb those cliffs. Nay, he is smitten down by the pieces of the broken tables as they leap downwards from crag to crag. And Moses, with one blow of his fist, so Bunyan tells us, completes the work.

III. The Saviour's Way of Treating Sin.—In that bowed head and hidden face we get a slight indication of how much it costs Him. Sin cannot change his royal heart, or staunch his pity, or freeze the fountains of his compassion.

Nay, it makes Him more careful to show his tender, pitying, pleading love. Was it not to Peter that He sent a special message from the open grave, on the resurrection morning? But though sin cannot alter Him, it makes Him suffer keenly, bitterly.

Have you not seen a woman dying by inches beneath the dissolute conduct of her son? She does not murmur, or chide, or blaze abroad his sins. No other hand than hers shall open that front door to him, as he comes home drunk night after night. And he never hears an upbraiding word from those gentle lips. But God alone can measure what those acts of sin are costing her. Her figure becomes more bent, her hair more white, her steps slower, her heart feebler. And shall woman's love suffer thus, and shall not the Saviour suffer as much more, as his love is more than hers? It is easy for us to come to Him for forgiveness, and to go our ways knowing that the words of complete absolution have been uttered; but do we think enough how much that sin, so soon confessed and put away, cost Him on the cross, costs Him now, and will cost Him, as the scar of it is borne by Him, "crucified afresh"?

The early Church was inclined to suppress this story, lest it might lead to sin. They did not realize how that averted face would make men bow their heads in shame, and beat upon their breasts; not for themselves alone, and not because of any thought of penalty, but because they had torn open his wounds, and woven again thorns for his brow. We go forth from that vision, by his grace, to sin no more.

He sometimes seems to wait ere He utters the words of peace. But this is from no tardiness in his love. He wants those ruthless accusers to drop away, and the soul to have time to realize its sin in his holy presence. And when all hope beside is abandoned, and the hour of self-despair has struck; when He can detect signs of genuine repentance and wistful yearning; when the soul turns from its sin to Him in a very agony of desire—He says, "There is now no condemnation; neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."

Oh, souls conscious of sin, do not wait to be brought into his holy presence! haste thither of your own free will. It is

the only place in all the universe where you will be safe. Accusing voices are hushed there, and accusing forms are banished. Wait! He will condemn thy sin, but not thee. And his condemnation will be more in what He looks and is than in his words. Yea, thou wilt accuse thyself a thousand times more than He will. And finally, by right of the propitiation of the cross, He will forgive thee, and send thee forth to tell others the story of a love which fails not, nor is discouraged, in its conflict with human sin; but sets itself to substitute for the reign of sin the reign of grace through righteousness unto eternal life.

XXIII.

The Light of Life.

"I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."—JOHN viii. 12.

ON either side of the temple court stood a huge golden candelabra. On the first and on each succeeding night of the week of the Feast of Tabernacles, these were lit, and became two immense globes of flame, pouring a brilliant flood of light over temple and city and the deep shadows of Olivet. And it was probably to these that our Lord alluded, when He spoke of Himself as the Light of the world.

Of course it would be quite legitimate to compare Him to the glorious orb of day, "of this great universe the eye and soul." What the sun is to the world of nature, Jesus is in the world of the invisible and spiritual. By Him all things consist in harmonious rhythm and order. From Him come all tides of life and beauty, which go to make us truly blessed. And his influence is exerted so noiselessly and quietly, that we can only compare it to those waves of transparent beauty, which break in their untainted loveliness on the world around; but no ear catches the music of their ripple or the throb of their tides. However, it will be better to turn away from this seductive comparison, in order to apprehend exactly what was in his heart when He said, "I am the Light of the world."

The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the march of the pilgrim hosts through the desert, fed by manna for their food; supplied with water from the smitten rock for their thirst; guided by a pillar of cloud which had at its heart a torch of fire, though this was only apparent when night had veiled the

glaring light of the sun, and it brooded tranquilly over the camp. Our Lord compared Himself to the first of these symbols in the sixth chapter; to the second in the seventh: and to the third in this. He declares that to all the pilgrim hosts of men, He is what the cloud with its heart of fire was to that race of desert wanderers.

Let us form a clear conception of that wondrous symbol, which God took not away from his people; the pillar of cloud, in which He went before them by day to lead them in the way, and the pillar of fire to give them light, to go by day and night (Exod. xiii. 21; Num. ix. 15-23).

I. As to its Nature.—In appearance it was probably like one of those white cumulus clouds which sail majestically and slowly through the blue of a summer sky; like some aerial snow mountain, which is to the heavens what the iceberg is to the seas. We have seen such in the process of being manufactured from the mists that lie low at morning in Alpine valleys; and at night we have watched them as they came to anchor, or were stranded on some rocky peak. The one point of difference lay in the Shekinah fire that shone in the heart of the pillar of cloud. It was always there, though only visible when daylight was gone. But that fire in the heart of the cloud was prophetic of our Lord's Deity, enfolded and enshrined in his humanity. The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among men, who knew not what He was, save when on the night of the Transfiguration the glory that dwelt in Him became evident, bathing his form in waves of light and fire.

And it was his consciousness of this marvellous union of the Divine and human elements, though the Divine was so carefully and constantly veiled from ordinary eyes, that enabled our Lord to speak of Himself as the source of spiritual illumination to all the inhabitants of this million-peopled world. There was no egotism, or self-assumption in his claim. It was the literal truth. He bare record of Himself, because He could say nothing less; and He knew whence He came and whither He went.

And there is a consistency between his claims and his powers which has stopped the mouth of objectors and critics. Though this assertion has stood upon the page of Scripture for eighteen hundred years, in a world quick to detect conceit and expose its hollow pretensions ; yet no infidel has ever thought of assailing Him in this, which is the weakest and absurdest assertion ever made, if it be not the deepest, truest, and most sacred. Is there not a secret conviction in the heart of men that Jesus is well able to be this which He professes to be? Does not his universal influence—which is confined to no one type of man, but touches equally European and Asiatic, the shivering Esquimaux, and the enervated South Sea Islander—prove that He is more than man, and that in his human nature there burns the fire of Deity? Nay, as the darkness has grown thicker over the world, and one light after another has died out, leaving Him shining in brilliant and glorious loneliness, has there not been abundant witness borne to the fire which is in the heart of the cloud?

Yes, Jesus is God ; in Him the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily, and it is because of this that He is able to light and guide the generations of mankind. The Life has ever been the Light of men. Not to believe that degrades the character of Christ below contempt, and leaves us face to face with an insoluble problem of how to account for his influence upon the world.

II. As to its Functions.—The work of the fire-cloud was threefold—to lead, to shield, and to illumine.

It led.—The wilderness was a trackless waste to the hosts of Israel, and they were absolutely dependent on the cloud to show their path, and to find out a resting-place each night. On this point the Divine commands admitted of no doubt or question. When the cloud gathered itself up from the Tabernacle on which it brooded, the hosts must strike their tents and follow. However desirable the site of the camp, they must leave it. However difficult the desert paths, they must traverse them. However uninviting the spot where it stopped, they must halt there, and remain just so long as it tarried.

It might be a Marah, without palms, or wells, or shelter; but thither they must go, and there they must remain, though many days should elapse. It might be an Elim, with palms and wells of water, and everything that could render a residence desirable to the tired travellers; but they must begone from it when the cloud started, though they had enjoyed it for but a brief spell. The cloud might be taken up by day or by night; but there was no choice, except to follow, or to wander in a trackless waste and die. For the manna fell and the water flowed, and the Divine protection was enjoyed, only where the cloud rested.

It shielded.—For, probably, when the people had pitched their tents on some exposed and scorched plain, it unfolded itself like a vast canopy, its base resting on the Tabernacle which stood in the midst of the camp, whilst its fleecy folds were spread out so as to screen the furthest extremities of the camp from the overpowering heat of the noontide sun.

It gave light.—Whilst the camp was hushed in deep slumber it watched over it like the eye of God. The people had no need of the sun by day, or of the moon by night; for the Lord had become their everlasting Light, and the days of their mourning might have been ended. There was a sense in which there was no night there, and they needed not candle or beacon-fire or torch; for the Lord God gave them light. Following the cloud, they had no need to abide in darkness; they already possessed the light of life.

All this the Lord Jesus is willing to be to us. In Him all the fulness dwells. In his many-sided nature God has made all grace to abound, that we, having all-sufficiency in all things, should be abundantly filled and satisfied out of Him. In days of doubt He will be our Guide; in days of trial our Covert and Shade; in days of darkness our Light. Nay more, as in the Pullman carriage the electric light comes on before the tunnel is entered and lingers after it is left, so special manifestations of the presence of Jesus will precede and follow times of special trial.

The peace and blessedness of our earthly pilgrimage will be in direct proportion as we appropriate Jesus in these various

aspects of his character and work. Too many of us reserve Him for special times and purposes, as we keep our capital sacredly sealed from use in the bank; too few of us use Him as the spending money which we carry in our pockets and employ for every trifling need.

The needs and trials of life are probably intended by God to compel us to search for and discover the fulness of Jesus. It is probable that men would never have discovered the treasures of the natural world had it not been for the pressure of hunger and want; and it is certain that many of us had never known what the Lord Jesus can be to the human soul but for the failure of everything beside, which drove us to Him. Our Father sometimes gives us a glimpse of perfect bliss through some earthly channel; and then as suddenly closes it up, that we may be forced to take the freshly realized thirst to the only fountain which can really appease it.

When we first enter the kingdom, God gives us a whole Christ for the supply of our infinite requirements; but at first we catch only a glimpse of the lower shelves of his Divine sufficiency, and perhaps suppose that they are all. But as we help ourselves to these and grow, the veil slowly uplifts, and we see other and higher shelves; and gradually our faith becomes stronger, and taller, and more able to help itself to the added wealth which it perceives to be its own in Christ Jesus.

There is no need for us then to spend our lives in this world, desolate and forlorn, lacking the blessedness and power which others so evidently possess, and bemoaning the barrenness of our lot; there, right before us, is Jesus in all his glorious fulness, waiting to take the shape of our need, as water of the pitcher that carries it. It is for us to claim Him, and make ours by faith any special side of his being which our circumstances specially demand as necessary. When we have learnt this lesson, we can look with equanimity on frost and thaw, on autumn and winter, on the dying Cherith and the blighted grain; our sources of supply lie far away in the nature of God, who is the perennial fountain, the unwaning day, the unending summer of love. The differences which obtain among Christian

men are very largely due to the different ratio in which they have learnt to appropriate Christ—not by a rush of emotion, but by a naked faith. Rutherford said truly, "There are curtains to be drawn aside in Christ that we never saw, of new foldings of love in Him; I despair that ever I shall win to the far end of that love, there are so many plies in it."

III. As to the Conditions.—"He that followeth Me...." We must put Christ first. He must hold the position of Leader and Guide, Primate and King. Our one question must ever be, Which way is He taking? and we may generally ascertain this as we endeavour to answer one of the following questions: (1) What is the law of Christ? (2) What is the will of Christ? (3) What would Christ do under these circumstances? If we are not sure, we must wait till we are; but knowing, we must follow at all costs. Oh to keep just behind Him—not running on in front, or lagging behind! They say that lambs are taught to follow at the heels of a shepherd, by his dropping for them savoury morsels, such as they like; and we may well follow hard after Him whom we love, and who loves us, upheld by his right hand, because of the inestimable benefits which will accrue.

We cannot follow Jesus except we leave all—our own judgment and wisdom, our schemes and preferences, our predilections and fancies; but if we dare to forsake them, and step right away from the boat, we shall win an abundant compensation. Was Paul a loser, who suffered the loss of all things that he might win Christ?

Follow Jesus, Christian! keep Him always well before thee in every path of duty; in every sphere of service; in every attack, like Jonathan's, on the stronghold of the foe. Tread no track where his footprints do not appear. But when thou descriest them, plant in them thy feet, defying aught to separate thee from Him.

Shall not walk in darkness.—Not in the darkness of ignorance and error; not in the darkness of perplexity and confusion; not in the darkness of joylessness and depression. If any man dares to follow Christ so far as he knows,

deliberately sacrificing his own will and way to his, it is simply marvellous how the mists will roll up, the night clouds disperse, and the perplexities which had beset the soul give way as brushwood before the tread of the sportsman. Endeavour to please Christ absolutely ; and you will know almost immediately what He wants to be done, and how. You may not be able to see more than a step in advance ; but dare to take that step, and you will see the next and the next. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

But shall have the light of life.—Light is essential to life. Without light flowers would be colourless, even if they grew ; animate and inanimate creation would fail ; and the world would hasten back to primeval chaos, out of which light came. And equally necessary is it for the inner life to be sustained and nourished by communion with, and obedience to, the Lord Jesus. Apart from Him it is doomed to wither. In Him, through Him, and by Him alone, can it thrive. There is no doubt about this. Begin even now to believe in and follow Him, though it may involve death and the grave ; yet, as surely as the soul follows Him, acting up to all its present convictions of duty, it will emerge into a clearness of vision and a vigour of life which shall vindicate its choice for ever. Let Jesus be your pillar of cloud and fire !

XXIV.

Christ's Absorption in His Father.

"When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as my Father hath taught Me, I speak these things."—JOHN viii. 28.

A BELOVED friend of mine told me that on one occasion he met an aged lady, a member of the Society of Friends, who in her earlier life had known Stephen Grellet; and he asked her if that notable evangelist were as good and noble as he is depicted in his biography. This was her reply: "We have many excellent Friends, but no Friend like Stephen Grellet; when he came into a room you felt that he brought God in with him."

And is not this the distinguishing characteristic of some men, who are perhaps notable for nothing else? Of others we say, How splendid! How noble! How good! Of these we say, How much there is of God in such an one! That was a great saying of the Apostle, "They magnified God in me." And we should not be content with anything less than the ideal set before us by our Lord: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

And this was one of our Lord's most striking characteristics. His whole being was absorbed in acquiring glory for his Father, and in pleasing Him. At the age of twelve He started to do his Father's business. At the Jordan He submitted to baptism that He might fulfil his Father's plan. At the well of Sychar He confessed that to do his Father's will was both meat and drink. He called all those his kinsfolk who set themselves to

do the will of his Father. The only witness He cared for was that which his Father bore to Him (v. 32 ; viii. 18). The name in which He came was the Father's (v. 43). He professed that all the attraction wrought by Him upon men was due to his Father's agency (vi. 44). He was sent by the Father ; He lived by the Father ; He could do nothing of Himself ; the life He had was given, so also was the authority with which He executed judgment (v. 26, 27 ; vi. 57). He spoke only as the Father taught Him (viii. 28). He could dispense with all human help, because the Father never left Him alone (viii. 16, 29). To honour Him, to please Him, to work his works, to live in his love, to perform his commandments, to show good works from Him, to glorify his name, to divert the attention of men to Him—such was the passion of his life (viii. 29, 49 ; ix. 4 ; x. 17, 32 ; xii. 49, 50 ; xiii. 31). He ascribed both words and works to the indwelling of the Father (xiv. 10). He avowed his intention to answer prayer that the Father might be glorified (xiv. 13). And, as his hour approached when He must pass through death to glory, from the lowest of the one to the highest of the other, He only wished for glory that He might shed it back again on Him ; "Father," said He, "glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee" (John xvii. 1). And in the ages yet to be we are told that He will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. xv. 24).

There is much for us to learn here. We choose for ourselves aims and ends too subsidiary, too low. The conversion of the unsaved, the building up of the Church, the extension of the kingdom of God, are in themselves worthy and glorious objects ; but they are not the very highest. They do not include it, though it includes them ; as the planet does not include the sun, but the sun it. Aim at the planet, you miss the sun ; aim at the sun, and you include the planet. There is a purpose, foreshadowed in the life of Jesus, the sweep of which is so wide, the march of which is so majestic, the depth of which is so infinite, as to comprehend all other motives, and to be worthy of an endeavour which, though we approach towards it through infinite ages, must yet for ever be far

beyond us. And this is the intention, that God may be pleased and glorified and magnified in our bodies, whether by life or death (Phil. i. 20). There are three stops to this.

I. WE MUST MAKE OURSELVES OF NO REPUTATION.—This is what our Master did. He carefully avoided needless publicity, and never courted notice. Indeed, He chose obscurity for Himself, that men might be compelled to ascribe the marvellous results, which were patent to all eyes, to God.

The leper was to tell no man (Matt. viii. 4); the blind men were straitly charged not to make Him known (ix. 30); whilst the paralyzed man was yet feeling the raptures of new-found health, Jesus stole away from the eyes of the crowd (John v. 13); when the people were about to make Him king, He escaped from them, and went away alone (vi. 15). His brethren were well aware of this trait in his character, and urged Him to abandon it; but, in spite of all, He went to the feast, not openly but as it were in secret (vii. 10). It was enough for Him to fall into the ground and die, and to accept any title of opprobrium with which his foes chose to brand Him (Matt. x. 25; Luke vii. 34).

It is a hard lesson; but one well worth our while to set ourselves to acquire. Let us, too, choose rather the shady than the sunny side of the street. Let us be content to be accounted nothing. Let us lay our reputation down beneath his feet, as of old they put their garments beneath the hoofs of the ass that bore Him. So only shall we cease to intercept from Christ any ray or glory which may accrue to Him to garner for his Father.

The last thing that some of us are willing to forego is our reputation. Not that it is wrong to be anxious to maintain our good name, so far as our doing so may adorn his holy Gospel; but that we are often anxious to maintain it as an end in itself, and altogether apart from the glory of Jesus, and the claims of entire surrender. It is not easy to look up into the face of the Master, and say, "If it be thy dear will, I am willing that my name should be cast out by men as evil, and my reputation

trampled in the dust, whilst I am counted as the off-scouring of all things, despised and rejected of men."

But it is men like these who, during their life, were accounted vile and worthless—men like Joseph Alleine, and John Bunyan, and Charles Simeon—who shine now with undimming beauty in the firmament; whilst their persecutors' names have been written in the dust, or are preserved only in connection with the sufferings they inflicted on God's saints.

II. We must take upon ourselves the form of the servant.—The household slave who does the most menial service, and washes the feet of the guests, was the chosen type to which our Lord conformed Himself, in the upper chamber on the eve preceding his death. Some are proud of their humility, and will stoop to lowly offices to excite admiration. But there was nothing affected here. The men that beheld the lowly deed felt that it was the natural outcome of the holy heart that throbbed in his breast.

It is probable that none of us can stoop to such a depth as He did. He that has ascended far above all heavens to reign could descend to lower depths than all beside to serve. Still it well becomes us to imitate this lowly office; a task, however, which will be impossible for us to fulfil unless we are so utterly absorbed in our devotion to God in Christ, that we come to feel no office too mean, no service too servile, no ministry too trifling, to render to Him or his. Service like this is a fruit which can only be plucked from trees which have been planted and are tended by the Spirit of God.

III. We must become obedient unto death.—Until our eyes are anointed with the eye-salve of the Holy Spirit, we have no conception of how full the New Testament is of exhortations to death. On three different occasions our Lord insisted on the necessity of a man losing his life. Frequently He spoke of his cross as inevitable for Himself and his disciples; whilst the Apostle of the Gentiles discovered that he must be ever bearing about in his body the dying of Jesus, and filling up that which was behind-hand of the sufferings of the Lord.

It is a searching question for most of us, *Have you died?* Of course we died in the death of our Lord, so far as the purpose and intention of God are concerned; but have we, by the eternal Spirit, ever really and practically drunk of his cup, and been baptized with his baptism, had fellowship in his sufferings, and been made conformable unto his death? Death is no child's-play. It is impossible not to be aware of it, when it has become the experience of the soul. There has to be a moment of choice, when one elects to take the hand of Jesus and step down with Him into the valley of the shadow; trembling as to the flesh, but glad in the inmost heart. We then yield to death our intellectual conceptions of truth, our warm and vivid emotions, our keen ambitions, our members that are upon the earth; not making ourselves die, but accepting death wrought in us by the life of the risen Jesus through the grace of the Holy Spirit; not vaunting our death, *but dying*, which is a very different matter; not inventing methods of self-crucifixion, but accepting the stern discipline of his cross in all the providential circumstances of our lot and according to his inworking. So only can we bring glory to God.

What a touching picture is that of the intercourse between John Tauler, the celebrated preacher, and the humble peasant, Nicolas, of Basle. "Know," said the simple-hearted friend of God, "that you must needs walk in the path of which our Lord spake to the young man;—you must take up your cross and follow our Lord Jesus Christ in utter sincerity, humility, and patience; you shall set before you the sufferings of our Lord, and contemplate your own life in the mirror of his. And so doing, without doubt, the eternal Prince will look down on you with the eye of his good pleasure, and will not leave his work undone in you, but will purge you still further as gold in the fire." Is it to be wondered at that after two years of lonely converse with God in this attitude, Tauler entered on a ministry which has never ceased in bringing glory to God?

It is a great mystery, of which each one of us may say, "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect, but I follow after to apprehend." May the Lord Jesus Himself

teach us what this means, that, as we have been together in his death, we may be together in his resurrection, not only hereafter, but now; that having ventured, not merely to look into his grave, but to tarry there for three days and nights, we may pass through it and upwards into a life which shall be absorbed in no other aim than the glory of God, and shall bring forth abundant fruit to Him whose way is through the sea, and his path in the great waters, and whose footsteps are not known—save by those who dare to follow Him through the dark night, led by his hand down the shelving beach, whilst the waters stand on either side, and thunderstorms roll heavily above. This is the shortest passage to abundant life, and to glory to God in the highest.

XXV.

Made Free by the Son of God.

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. . . If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

JOHN viii. 31, 32, 36.

A NEW invention has lately been announced to the world, by which it is possible to cleanse the smoke of our great cities, impregnated not only with carbon, but with other deleterious products. In the shaft of some great chimney, or in connection with the funnel of a railway engine, a cistern half full of water is arranged, into which the smoke is drawn through a narrow valve. The smoke being sucked into the cistern is compelled to pass through the water, and leaves there not only the black soot, but also the other products which are destructive of life. And after the process is complete, it escapes back into the chimney purified, colourless, odourless, and, to a large extent, innocuous. But the water is almost fetid, charged as it is with ink and poison. One may dare to imagine how glad the smoke itself must be to be freed from that which made it harmful to men, to pursue its glad way now into the upper air. And here surely is an illustration of how sinful souls, laden with crime and with the deleterious products of evil, may be made free by the Son of God, "loosed from their sins" (as the R.V. puts it, Rev. i. 5) "in his blood."

We have nothing to do with the origin of sin. That lies far beyond our ken. Nor can we tell the ultimate out-working of sin in those ages which are yet to be; except that we know that its course will be determined by the limits raised by the infinite justice, the infinite holiness, and the infinite love of God. But we find ourselves and all mankind tainted, blighted, and condemned; accosted, from our very cradle, with tears and pain and the sweat of toil, and the certainty of death,

which has passed upon all men, for that all men have sinned. Oh, blessed announcement that God our Father has taken our part against our sin, and, in the person of his Son, has come to make us free, that we may be free indeed!

Sin blinds us.—Never did men utter a more barefaced lie than when those Jews exclaimed: "We were never in bondage to any man." Never in bondage! Had they forgotten the long and bitter bondage of Egypt, commemorated annually by the Passover? Or the dreary captivity of seventy years in Babylon, the memory of which lingered in the most plaintive odes of the Psalter? From that very Temple court, could they not see the Roman standard floating over the ancient palace of their kings, and hear the bugle-call regulating the movements of the victorious Roman soldiery, whilst Roman officials met them at every turn? They could not have forgotten all this; but, in their pride, they wilfully shut their eyes to distasteful truths. Thus prejudice blinds men. "The eyes of their understanding are darkened." And just as some virulent disease attacks the eyes, by which alone its ravages upon the human frame can be discerned, so does sin rob us of the power of self-knowledge. The ungodly man needs to be convinced of sin. The young Christian permits many things which, in the growing light of coming years, he will be the first to condemn. They who pursue most eagerly the upward path, in proportion as they behold the glory and the purity of God, abhor themselves and repent. But for all that, it is certain that we should never have formed a true conception of what sin is, with our enfeebled vision, and in the murky atmosphere of this world, had it not been that God had shown us its true character in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. That agony and bloody sweat, that cross and passion, constitute the only true gauge of the enormity and exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Sin enslaves us.—Here is one of the profoundest sentences ever spoken by our Lord. Men had not been wont to count themselves slaves. They were in the habit of thinking that they could take up sin, or lay it down, at their will—that they were its masters. Christ, however, has shown us that it is not so; but that, every time we yield to sin, we increase its hold

over us, and become more deeply enthralled under its tyrannous power, so that we are compelled to obey its behests, however cruel or malignant they may be. "He that committeth sin is the servant of sin."

But sin is not a necessary part of our being.—This comes out so clearly in these remarkable words: "The servant abideth not in the house for ever." This, of course, is an obvious truth. There is a great difference between the relation of your child and your servant. Your child is an integral part of the household. He has been born in it, has become part of it; and, however far he travels, he is one with it by a tie which defies the gnawing tooth of time and the growing distance of long journeying. It is different with a servant. Especially under the provisions of the Levitical law, it was impossible for the servant to abide in the house for ever. His slavery was limited in its duration to the amount of debt he had to work off. The trumpet of jubilee, ringing out its welcome notes, bade the slave go free. In like manner, however long a man may have served sin, and however tightly he may be held in its meshes, yet it has no necessary right over him; he need not abide for ever, he is but a slave in a tyrant's household, who, at any moment, may go free.

How this truth must thrill the hearts of some who read these words! For long they have been sighing under bondage, compared with which that of Egypt was light; they have bitterly cried, "Who shall deliver us?" they have thought that there was no release from their bitter bondage; and their tyrant-master has whispered, mockingly, "Mine for ever!" But let these know that sin is an intruder, a usurper, an alien influence other than God meant in his original making of men. The prison walls need not be perpetual. The chain need not be eternal. The house may be left for ever, never to be darkened again by those who have groaned within its precincts.

Freedom from the tyranny of sin must come to us from without. The slave cannot free himself. He cannot scale those walls, pick those locks, elude that tyrant. Resolutions cannot do it, nor prayers, nor tears. Every struggle only tightens the noose. The slave must be made free. Hence

the mission of the Son of God. Himself free, He came into our prison-house, put his Divine Person under the conditions induced by our sins—as Theseus sailed in the ship with the yearly tribute of Athenian youth to the dread monster of Crete whom he was destined to destroy—"and, by death, destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and delivered them who, through fear of death, have all their life-time been subject to bondage." He shared our lot, though He did not share our sinfulness. Mighty as God, yet weak and frail as man; able, on the one hand, to wield and use infinite power, and, on the other, to suit Himself to the weakest and feeblest of his brethren. "Such a High Priest became us."

I. The Nature of this Freedom.—It is not freedom to do as we like. That were not liberty, but licence. To be emancipated from all rule and law would be impossible in a well-ordered world, and incompatible with the well-being of others. But the Son sets us free from the unnatural conditions into which sin has brought us; so that we, "being delivered from the fear of our enemies, may serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life."

We are free from the imputation of Adam's sin; because He as the second Adam has borne it away. Free from the lash of a broken law; because He has paid the penalty, and met its last demands. Free from the weary gnawing of remorse; because He has forgiven us our sins, and blotted them out of his book, and cast them behind his back for ever. Free from the hopeless endeavour to weave for ourselves a robe of stainless righteousness; because He gives us his own, as Jonathan exchanged his apparel with David. Free from the bondage of corruption; the chains of which have been struck off by his mighty hand. Free from the very love of sin; so that its least breath or approach is instantly shrivelled before those habits of woven fire with which He arrays the soul. Free from the dread of death; because He has died. Free from the whole entail of evil; except those limitations and failures which must ever weaken the strength of our purpose and lower the temperature

of our motives, compelling us to apply constantly for daily cleansing and acceptance through his flawless righteousness.

We do not want more than this. The swallow, with a broken wing, seeks not liberty to feed on carrion ; but only to be able to mount again into the sunny air, which is its native sphere. And the soul which is athirst for God and holiness asks for no other freedom than that it should be able to pursue its divine quest unhindered by the restraints of sin.

II. The Means of this Freedom.—"The truth shall make you free." The only-begotten Son speaks of truth because He was full of truth, and truth came by Him (John i. 14, 17). And from this point the Light of the world repeats often this great word—*truth* (viii. 32, 40, 44, 45, 46 ; xiv. 6 ; xvi. 13 ; xvii. 19 ; xviii. 37). When He speaks of truth, He means the inner heart of things ; their essence and kernel ; that panorama of the unseen and eternal which lay before his eye in open vision.

Truth always frees.—The villager will no longer dread to pass some haunted spot when he learns the truth that there are no such things as *fays* or *goblins*. The slave girl will no longer remain in the house of her cruel oppressor when she discovers that he has no longer any claim on her ; because some time ago the Act of Emancipation was passed, though the tidings of it have been carefully concealed. The timid soul will no longer question whether it may not have committed the unpardonable sin, when it is taught that that very fear is proof positive that it has never entered this awful state. The dying will be free from all fear, if they realize the truth that the wasp has lost its sting, the viper its fangs, the roaring lion its teeth ; and that the iron gate will open of its own accord.

So, when the Lord Jesus reveals the truth of all that He has done for us—that in Him we are accepted and triumphant ; that through Him we sit in heavenly places with Satan beneath our feet ; that from Him we are equipped with power to tread on serpents, and scorpions, and all the power of the enemy—*then* the whole aspect of our life alters ; we see our position, and we take it ; we learn our power, and we use it ; we realize that we are free, and as such we begin to act. Knowing that we have the right to walk the waves, we step out on them

in faith, and find them as rock beneath our tread. Acting by faith in the truth revealed to us, we discover that it is so. Things are not what they seem. We think we are powerless and helpless, and destined to be overcome; but, if we would venture out on Christ's revealed truth, and dare to live by faith, and not by sight, we should discover that all the world is new, and life is ours, with victory and sweetness and power, such as we have never known or dreamt of.

III. The Results of this Freedom.—It is the prerogative of the son; and if you rise up from the chains of the prison to the freedom and joy of the Father's house, if you are no longer entangled with the yoke of bondage, it is a sign that you, too, are no longer a servant, but a son; that, by a blessed act of regeneration, you have passed from the one to the other, from death to life. The moment of soul-emancipation witnesses to the moment of regeneration and adoption. And this again attests that there shall be no going out any more for ever.

"The Son abideth ever in the house"; and the sons abide there for ever, too. Hagar and Ishmael are cast out; but Isaac, the divinely-given Laughter, stays in the home for ever. The child can never cease to be a child. It may sin, and grow cold, and cause pangs of anguish to hearts which would give themselves to save it, but it is a child still, to be brought back through seas of sorrow and fires of pain; it may wander into the far country and waste its years, but it will certainly return home, never to go forth again.

There are many among us who are really in a much better position than they have any conception of. They are children; but they do not know it. They shall never perish; but they fail to realize it. They are in the place of power; but their eyes are blinded and they cannot see it. Oh that such would cry for the heavenly eyesalve, that the eyes of their heart may be enlightened to know "the hope of his calling, the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of his power toward them that believe"! And, as the Spirit of Truth shall lead them into all the truth, their freedom shall increase with their knowledge in ever-widening circles.

XXVI.

The Glory of Christ.

"I seek not mine own glory."—JOHN viii. 50.

FROM this point our Lord begins to speak of his glory, as if He already beheld its dawn, and pressed on with renewed speed to where it beckoned; although the dark ravine of death lay between Him and its sunny heights. The Shekinah that shone within the veil of his human nature was, for the most part, veiled from all besides; except that once on the mount of transfiguration it burst from all restraint, and saturated his human nature with torrents of light, so that the favoured three beheld his glory. But, speaking generally, it was veiled, and the curtains kept close drawn. The time was coming when He should be glorified; and it shall be our task reverently to consider the elements of which that glory was composed, and the conditions on which it rested.

In the olden time, Moses asked to see God's glory. It is difficult to understand what he precisely meant by his request. Did he think that some superb procession would sweep down the mountain rent, in which the loftiest archangels should take a part, as the body-guard of Deity? Did he expect some supernatural unfolding of the mysteries of light, or of fire, or of the spirit-world? We cannot tell. But we eagerly notice that, in his reply, God spake of none of these things; but said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee." The prayer to behold God's glory was answered by a catalogue of the moral qualities of the Divine nature. In other words, we may accept the affirmation of Professor Drummond, and say that glory

means character, or, rather, the revelation of character; so that those who behold it, keen in their appreciation of moral worth, may be constrained to admire and imitate. The glory of Jesus is, surely, the manifested beauty of his matchless character.

In speaking or thinking of the glory of the Lord Jesus, we must ever distinguish, as He did, between the glory which He had with the Father before the worlds were made, and that glory which accrued to Him as the result of his human life. The former was his by inherited right, as the fellow of Jehovah; the other was given to Him by his Father as the reward and guerdon for his obedience to death. The one is incommunicable, the unique property of his Diety; the other is transferable, for He graciously speaks of passing it on to his own. For the first, see xvii. 5; for the second, see xvii. 1, 22, 24.

That He might the better preserve his *incognito* (if we may reverently so term it), and become a merciful and faithful High Priest, by a thorough participation in our human life, He laid aside the evidences of his Divine glory. To use the expressive word of the Holy Ghost, "He emptied Himself." And so He set Himself to win that glory which should result from a perfected character, and from suffering even unto death. It is of this that He speaks, when He says, "I seek not mine own glory." Let it be clearly understood that it is of his glory, as the Son of Man and the obedient servant, that we are now speaking.

I. The Motive of Christ's Desire for Glory.—That He desired glory is evident. Did He not directly ask for it?—"Father, glorify thy Son." Was there not an accent of satisfaction in his twice-repeated ejaculation—first, when He heard of the inquiry by the Greeks, and again when Judas went out to do the fatal deed of treachery—"Now is the Son of Man glorified!" Are we not warranted in believing that it was the anticipation of the glory into which He must pass through suffering that quickened his pace into the valley of the shadow? (Luke xxiv. 26).

And yet we cannot believe that our Master sought glory for any selfish end. This He could not do. He said explicitly, "I seek not mine own glory." There was not the shadow of

personal ambition resting as a cloud over that pure and noble heart. But He desired glory, that He might shed it back again upon his Father.

It was the supreme passion of his being to glorify the Father. As He descended into the dark valley, this was his one cry, "Father, glorify thy name!" Deeper and deeper still He went; and this same entreaty, breaking from his agonized heart, comes back to us yet fainter, and ever fainter. "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, glorify thy name!" Perhaps even the love of the race and the desire to redeem had failed to support his fainting soul, unless his resolution had been empowered and maintained by this all-masterful desire. He was greedy, therefore, of every vestige of glory that He could win by suffering, even though it were unto death; that He might be able, though it were with but a feather-weight additional, to augment the revenue of glory which, through Him, should accrue to God. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee."

What an example He has left us that we should follow in his steps! Human applause, and admiration, and reward, would not hurt us, if we gathered them all only as the vinedressers pluck the produce of the vines for presentation to the owner of the vineyard. It is a high ideal, and yet evidently the Apostle thought it attainable; else he would not have exhorted his converts to seek that glory even in their meals (1 Cor. x. 31). But it is only so that we can come into the deepest fellowship with our Saviour, when we, too, have so drunk of his spirit that we become absorbed in the same supreme object, and seek for the prizes of our high calling that we may cast them at the feet of God. That God may be better understood, and admired, and loved through our life; that men may turn from us to Him as from the jewel to the sunlight in which it sparkles; that more hearts may be brought beneath his sway—be this our aim, at all costs to ourselves.

II. The Directions in which his Desire was realized.—The Apostle Peter says, "God gave Him glory" (1 Pet. i. 21).

In what did that glory consist? (1) *In the indwelling of God in his human nature.*—The glory of the desert acacia-bush was in the fire that burnt there; of the tabernacle in the Shekinah glow; of Zion that God had chosen to dwell there. And the glory of our Lord, as to his human nature, was that in Him the Divine and human blended in perfect union; that the Father dwelt in Him, spake and wrought in Him; and that He was the perfect vehicle for the expression of the incorruptible life, which was, and is, and is to come. This was the glory which the Apostles beheld expressed on the Holy Mount.

(2) *In his perfect endurance of the severest tests.*—The whole brunt of evil broke on Him, as the roll of the Atlantic breaker on some weather-beaten rock. It is impossible to imagine tests more searching and complete than those through which He passed; in journeyings often; in conflicts with the Pharisees and Sadducees; in conflicts with his own brethren; in conflict with the devils that possessed the afflicted; in conflict above all with the prince of this world in that last terrible duel of the cross; in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in bloody sweat and nakedness; in the anguish of God-forsakenness and of dissolution. But, so far from being overcome, He rose out of each successive test, having set forth in perfect beauty the appropriate grace which it demanded, and absorbed the whole force of the trial with which He was confronted; so that it passed into Him, and became an addition to his moral strength, as the savage warriors think that the strength of each foe they slay in battle becomes incorporated into themselves.

(3) *In the benefits which He has conferred on men.*—There is no glory so dear to the noble heart as that accruing from helpfulness to others. When it comes we cannot be inflated with pride, because we are already so thankful to know of the blessing which we have been the means of bestowing. And, ah, what glory was it to the blessed Lord, that He has delivered us from the consequences of Adam's sin; that He has borne away the sins of the world; that He has opened the kingdom to all believers; that He has made it possible for

sinful creatures to receive and be impelled by the very Spirit of God; that He has obtained for us a life which is death-proof, sin-proof, devil-proof, the essence and crown of blessedness! To be loved as Saviour, to be trusted as Priest, to be enthroned as King, to receive the unutterable devotion of myriads, and to be able to help them to the uttermost—this surely is one prime element in his glory.

(4) *In the exaltation of his nature.*—"The God of our fathers," said Peter, "hath glorified his Son Jesus." And in his mouth, fresh from the scenes of the Ascension and of Pentecost, these words referred to the glory of his exaltation (Acts ii. 32, 33; iii. 13). We are told that, as a guerdon for his tears and obedience, the Father gave Him a name above every name, and set Him at his own right hand far above all creature life. But this was only possible because his nature was already supreme in its quality. It was no arbitrary act of enthronement; it was the recognition of superlative worth. And as He that descended ascends far above all heavens, that He might fill all things with floods of light, there is given an evidence of the glory of his being, of which the princes of this world were ignorant, but which now shines forth to illuminate all worlds.

These are but the guesses and babblings of a child; yet do they seem tracks that lead our feet towards the heart of this maryellous subject. But who shall tell of the love of the heart of God towards his Son, or of its expression? Here are depths which must be hidden from our scrutiny. As it was the passion of Christ to glorify the Father, so it was the passion of "the Father of glory" to glorify the Son. Yes, and as yet that glorification is only in its beginnings; the first stages alone of the coronation and enthronement of Jesus "in all his glory" have taken place: the full outburst of his meridian splendour is yet future. Ah, we are yet to behold some wondrous scenes, which will ravish our eyes and fill our hearts with an exceeding weight of glory! "God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." And we shall behold his glory, nay, better, share it for ever and ever (John xiii. 31, 32; xvii. 22, 24).

III. The Cost at which his Desire was realized.—The glory glistens in our view, but we are not always ready to consider its cost. The only path to the glory is that which lies through the tangled thorn-brake of sorrow. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, lying alone and forsaken through the winter with its pitiless blasts and frost. He must descend ere He can ascend. Pain must inflict the wounds in which the pearls of untold glory shall glisten.

Nor can it be otherwise with ourselves. We must be witnesses of the sufferings, if we would be partakers of the glory to be revealed; only as we suffer can we reign with Him; there must be fellowship with his sufferings if there shall be attainment to his resurrection; we must drink of his cup and be baptized with his baptism, if we would sit right and left of his throne.

But let us not invent death for ourselves; let us put our hands into his, and ask Him to lead us down one step at a time whither He will. It must be right to go where He takes us. It cannot be dreadful when He is there. He will not give us more than we can bear, because his own experience of pain will be a safe guide in his dealings with us. And, as we go down with Him into darkness and death, let us sing with assured hope, as He did, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show Me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

XXVII.

The Works of God.

"I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."—JOHN ix. 4.

THE utter restfulness which filled the heart of the Lord Jesus is beautifully manifested in the introductory verses of this chapter. At the close of the preceding one He is seen amid the heated altercation of his foes, enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and compelled to use some of the severest epithets that ever fell from his gracious lips. The climax of the argument was reached on his claiming to have existed before Abraham was. He appropriated the incommunicable name of Jehovah, and said, "Before Abraham was, I AM." And in a frenzy of indignation the Jews caught up the stones lying about for the repair of the temple to inflict forthwith the doom of the blasphemer.

But there was a force at work which they little understood, rendering them powerless to harm Him. Was it the spell of his majestic presence? Was it the aureole of his spotless character? Was it the protecting power of his Father? Whatever it was, He passed unscathed through the midst of them; and so left the temple, and began to descend the great flight of steps, and to pass through the successive courts. On the way his attention was attracted by a blind beggar, who for years had been a familiar object as he sat and begged. And albeit that there was every need to put as far a distance as possible between Himself and the missiles of his foes, He stopped, made clay, and leisurely healed him. Is it not evident

that He realized his absolute safety until his hour arrived; and that if there were an opportunity and a prompting to do God's work, there was the strongest ground also to count upon perfect immunity till the work was done?

His enemies might chafe and storm around Him; but they could not hurt Him, or penetrate with word and stone the encasing envelope of the presence of God. Secure of that protection, He was able to go and come, fearless and unharmed, serene and quiet, restful and peaceful, blessing and blessed. Oh for the quiet heart which looks from itself to God, and considers neither difficulty nor peril, because it is so absorbed in doing his work! Here the blessed Spirit broods undisturbed, amid the wild fury of earth's tumult, whispering intimations of God's will, and nerving the soul with sufficient power to perform.

I. The Conditions in which God's Works are done.—The phrase, "works of God," is a familiar one throughout this Gospel. To do them was to feed the Redeemer's soul (iv. 34); they were in an ever-ascending scale (v. 20); they were of a certain definite number, given Him to finish (v. 36); they were the signs and seals of his mission (x. 38); they were not his own, but wrought through Him by the Father (xiv. 10); they were unique in the history of the world (xv. 24); they were definitely finished ere He left it (xvii. 4). But it becomes us to learn the conditions under which they were wrought, that we may be able to do those greater works of which He spoke.

(1) *His heart was at rest in God.*—When suddenly aroused amid the tumult of the storm, or pursued by infuriated crowds, or amid the anguish of the grave of Lazarus, or in the garden of his arrest, there was ever the same deep inner calm, which spread an awe on nature, and cast its spell on men. And it is impossible to expect any great thing to be done in the world through a man whose inner life is ever in a state of ferment.

Nature herself teaches the need of repose for the putting forth of her mightiest efforts. It is in the closet, the study, the cave, the woodland retreat, that problems have been solved, resolves formed, and schemes matured. And the river of life

itself will lose its most precious properties, if it flows through the muddy and perturbed waters of restless hearts.

It is not possible for us all to have a life of outward calm. In such a world as this, with the opposition of men and the intrusion of sorrow on our most sacred moments, there is perpetual interruption. But beneath all the heart may keep its Sabbath. Trusting in God, resting on Him, rolling off to his charge its anxieties and cares before they have time to soak down poison into its springs, the inner life may thus retain its tranquillity, reflecting God's heaven above, and recipient of the least impulse of God's will.

(2) *He was specially endued with the Holy Spirit.*—Our Lord had his Pentecost before Pentecost. In the same hour He was baptized as to his body with the waters of the Jordan, and as to his spirit with the Holy Ghost. In his address to Cornelius and his friends, the Apostle Peter lays distinct stress on this as the condition on which Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good: "He was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts x. 38).

It should be a serious question with each of us, Have I claimed my share in Pentecost? On his ascension, our Lord received from the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost in its fullest plenitude, that through Him the whole Church might get it. It is ours in Him; we have not to go up to Heaven or down to Hades to win it; we have not to endeavour to merit it, but only to claim it by faith. If on comparing ourselves with the symptoms of Spirit-filling given in the Acts of the Apostles, we are conscious of a grievous deficiency, let us by believing prayer dare to ask for all that is ours in the risen living Saviour.

(3) *He was willing that the Father should work through Him.*—On the day of Pentecost, the preacher clearly emphasized this: "Jesus of Nazareth was approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you" (Acts ii. 22). And this statement bears out the affirmation of the Lord Himself, "the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works" (xiv. 10).

Blessed are we when we learn that secret, no longer to work

for God, but to let God work through us; to be brooks of Siloam, pent in given beds, instead of wandering at our own sweet will; to be clay kneaded into any shape; to be earthenware pipes, if needs be, hidden under ground, and trampled beneath the hurrying feet of men, with one end open to the reservoir, and the other to the empty cistern of human need, so that the torrent may come in with even flow on the one side, and pour out on the other with a regularity which escapes notice because it is so unbroken. It was thus that the great Apostle lived who said, "Christ hath wrought through me in word and deed to make the Gentiles obedient" (Rom. xv. 18, literal rendering). So are we bidden to yield ourselves to God, and our members as instruments of righteousness, that He may work in us that which is well pleasing in his sight (Rom. vi. 13; Heb. xiii. 21). "WE must work," the R.V. says.

II. THE NEED FOR THESE WORKS.—"A man blind from his birth." We have observed before that the miracles of this Gospel were evidently selected in each case with a special purpose of becoming foils to bring into prominence some characteristic feature in the ministry or teaching of Jesus Christ. Nor is this one an exception to the rule. What emblem could better set forth the condition of mankind than a born-blind beggar? That men are blind, that they are born so, and that they are destitute and bankrupt, needing gold and white linen, and eyesalve, needs no proving. But amid all, He comes who is the Light of the world, and is able to give sight to the blind, and to the poor a share in his measureless wealth.

The Jews had but two hypotheses on which to account for human suffering. "Either this man sinned" (in some previous state of existence), "or his parents, that he was born blind"; with them, special suffering was always the sign of special sin (Luke xiii. 1 4).

There are many who argue thus in the present day. The occurrence of special disaster leads them to search for the sin which must have led to it; forgetting that it does not always follow, and that it has been the problem of the ages that so many of the worst of men have had comparative immunity

from suffering—"there have been no bands in their death"—whilst for the godly the waters of a full cup are wrung out. It is true that sin brings suffering; but there is some suffering which is not the evidence of special wrong-doing.

This is therefore a third and broader hypothesis, which our Lord suggests here. "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God may be made manifest in Him." Suffering is permitted for wise and good reasons, which we shall one day comprehend, and amongst them is this: that it may provide a platform on which the grace and power of God may manifest themselves, each new phase of evil leading to some new forth-putting of the heart of God. To how many suffering ones may the Lord Jesus send the message: "This sickness is not unto death; but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby"!

If only the sufferers who may read these words would bracket together these two texts, this spoken of the blind beggar, and that of the sickness of Lazarus, surely it would be easier to bear the long nights of weariness and the days of pain—not in punishment, not by neglect or mischance, not as the inevitable results of the mistakes or misdeeds of others, but—to give an opportunity for the works and glory of God. What works? What glory? Surely the works of humility, and patience, and gentleness, which his Spirit instils; and the glory of that lovely spirit which his Spirit begets.

But how necessary is it that, as there is the need, we who have the supply be not wanting. If there is need for the works of God to be manifested, we must be at hand, and willing at all costs to manifest them. If there is the opportunity for the glorifying of Christ, we must not be slow to seize it. Make haste!—the night is coming, in which no man can work. Life at the longest is but a day; and before we are aware the shadows have stealthily crept far across the grass, the air has become chill, and the silver crescent of the moon is rocking in the dimming light. What works await us yonder we cannot tell. But the unique work of healing blindness and enriching beggary is confined to earth; and we must hasten to do all of this allotted to us before the nightfall. He lives

intensely whose eye is fixed on the fingers of the dial; as the poor sempstress works swiftly whose last small wick of candle is rapidly burning down in its socket.

III. The Subject of these Works.—What a contrast between the opening and the close of the chapter! The blind sees, the beggar is rich. The abject is an apologist. The intruder on the temple steps is a worshipper within the true shrine. The soul ignorant of Christ owns Him as Son of God. And all this because of the individual interest our Lord took in him.

(1) *He detected what was working in his mind.*—Beneath that unpromising exterior were the elements of a noble character. The power which might have run to waste, being dammed up, wrought deeper into his soul. He heard the converse of the crowds as they passed, caught the voices of the Levites chanting their majestic psalms, detected the benedictions of the priests; and awoke in him indefinable yearnings after God. Unknown to any besides, these arrested the attention of Jesus, who, unconscious of personal danger, bent over him with eager interest, as a child over the first primrose of spring.

(2) *He developed the latent power of faith.*—It was there, but it had nothing to evoke it; and yet it must be evoked ere Christ could give him sight. He could feel, though he could not see. So the Lord put clay on the eye-socket, awaking wonder, hope, expectation; and such was the ladder put down for his faith to climb up into the light. And then in the command to go and wash there was a still further test to his faith, to conform and strengthen it. Is it not thus that the blessed Lord still deals with us; watching the smallest spark of faith, and fanning it into a flame, giving it some very small and obvious thing to do, that it may from a thread become a cable?

(3) *He found him when cast out by all besides.*—His parents disowned him, and the Pharisees cast him out of their synagogue, depriving him of a highly-prized privilege; but Jesus found him. He had been cast out Himself, and knew the

weariness and pain of excommunication; and thus acquired the desire and the clue to help another, suffering beneath the intolerance of the religious world. Does not Jesus always steal to our side when we are cast out, or deserted by our friends?

(4) *He answered his hunger for faith.*—"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The question startled him; and yet it explained one of the deepest instincts of his nature, though he may have been little conscious of it, and perhaps felt only an utter dissatisfaction with all else, and an insatiable yearning after God. If we live up to what we know, at all costs, we shall most certainly be led into further discoveries of truth. If we dare to go to the pool of Siloam and wash, we shall be gladdened by great revelations and unfoldings of God in Christ. We think we are going to plough a field; and we suddenly come on a box of treasure, struck by our plough, which makes us independent of work for the rest of our lives.

And so obedience passes into worship, and we see that He who has made our life his care, tending us when we knew Him not, is the Christ of God, in whom are hid all the riches of time, all the treasures of eternity: and we worship Him.

XXVIII.

The Blessed Life of Trust.

"When He putteth forth his own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him; for they know his voice."—JOHN x. 4.

FEW images could better express the relationship between our Lord and his people than that of Shepherd and sheep, so often applied to God in the Old Testament, and appropriated by Christ Himself in the New. He had already shown that references to Himself underlay the manna, the water, and the fire-cloud. And now He shows that beneath the sweet pastoral imagery of the prophets He was ever the glorious substance and reality.

The Eastern sheepfold is a mere enclosure surrounded by a palisade. The sheep are brought into it in the evening, several flocks being committed to the care of the common keeper or porter for the night. In the morning the shepherds return and knock at the closely barred door of the enclosure, which the porter opens from within. Each separates his own sheep by calling to them; and the sheep respond, disentangling themselves from the rest, and when thus collected they follow their own shepherd, wherever he may lead.

The shepherd alone enters by the door. The robber may break in by force, the thief by stratagem; but their object is plunder and slaughter, and the sheep will neither respond to their voice, nor follow them. "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers." Huddled into a corner of their pen, stricken with alarm, they dread the rough hand of the intruder.

That sheepfold is the Jewish people. The irruption into the

fold of the sheepstealer represents the audacity and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Scribes, who had no purposes but plunder in their heart. They fleeced the flock for their own advantage (Ezek. xxxiv. 3).

In opposition to them, the Saviour comes as the true Shepherd. He has no need to scale the wall, or to establish his authority by force or guile. In Him the porter, who is well represented by John the Baptist, recognised the true Shepherd of Israel: and He was now prepared to lead forth his own to green pastures, and beside waters of rest.

I. The Putting Forth of the Sheep.—Up to the end of the last chapter it might have appeared that the whole of Israel might be included in his flock. But recent events had proved that this could not be. The Messiah, as Zechariah had foretold, had taken to Himself his two staves, "Beauty" and "Bands," and had fed the flock for one month, but had finally been compelled to renounce the task as hopeless (Zech. xi. 10-14). The expulsion of the blind man; the decree of excommunication which had struck at Himself and his followers; the violent hostility that dogged his steps—all pointed to the impossibility of gathering the whole nation into his care.

There was but one alternative. He must bring his own from out the Jewish fold—separating them, not by force, but by his gentle voice; calling them by name and leading them out. Is not Jesus always leading us out? He calls the souls of men from the fishing-net and the toll-booth; from scenes of worldly pleasure and haunts of sin; from associations with the flock of slaughter. And the one test of their being his own is that they hear his voice and follow. Not to believe, or obey that voice, or follow it, proves that the soul is none of his.

But a stronger word is used: "He putteth forth his own sheep." The phrase is a very strong one. He casts or thrusts them out; as when He constrained his disciples to get into the ship. So was Israel thrust out of the luxurious fare of Egypt to the simplicities of the desert; so are the young eaglets thrust out by the mother bird when she stirs up her nest, and forces them to learn the joys of flight.

He puts us forth by his providences.—We may have been living in some sheltered home, where love screened us from every contact with a strange and unkindly world; but suddenly the encircling arms are withdrawn, and we are driven forth to stand alone, and to act for ourselves, so far as any human help is concerned. Or we are compelled to leave the dear country village, or the ancestral home, or the land of our birth, to fare forth we hardly know whither. All that is sure is that there is no return; that we have no alternative; that the angel with flaming sword drives us out and keeps the gate behind us.

He puts us forth by the constraints of his Spirit.—We may have been living a self-contained, self-contented life, shut up in some narrow circle of religious thought and life, when suddenly there break on us the voices which summon to another and truer life. We become aware of possibilities of Christian living that had never been suggested to our hearts. From some loftier peak than usual we catch sight of a wider range of truth. We yearn with eager desire for the new power, and joy, and blessedness, which look in at the windows of our soul, and beckon us to go with them; as children who ramble for a long summer day through wood and hill. It is not so much then the outward constraint as the irresistible impulse from within which thrusts us out.

He puts us forth by his direct call.—To how many a young life, all unexpectedly, there has come the summons of the Master, "I am about to evangelize such and such a district, and I want you to accompany Me." To students in the great seminaries of America, to bowed heads and hearts in conventions at home, to souls worshipping in the loneliness of the shrine, there have come voices, bidding them arise and depart, because they are to be sent far hence to the heathen. What heart-searching, what tremour, what mingling of fear and hope, of expectancy and anguish, sweep over the heart when first it hears its name spoken by the Master's lips, and rises up to follow where He leads the way!

If you are his own, it is certain that in some one of these ways you will hear his voice, and feel his crook, putting you forth. The fold is warm and sheltered, and you are accustomed

to it, and shrink from the unknown ; but it is bare of grass, and lacks the fresh breeze and dew of the mountain-side ; there can be no true peace and satisfaction within its walls ; beyond its precincts the true life awaits you ; and to that the Good Shepherd puts you forth.

II. The Shepherd's Lead. — "He goeth before them." This is the place ever assigned to Him in the Old Testament. "He leadeth me by the still waters." "Thou leadest thy people like a flock." He permits none of his own to go along a path which He has not trodden, and in which He has not had previous experience. There is only one exception to this—the experience of sin. With this single exception, "He was tempted in all points like as we are." Take heart, O trembling believer! However strange and hard your path seems to you, if you look closely at it you will detect in its dust the footprints of the Shepherd ; and where He has preceded you, you need not fear to follow.

And it is not only true that He passed through all possible experiences of human life during those wonderful years of his sojourn on our earth, drinking every cup, exposing Himself to every grief, tried by every woe, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest ; but in addition, He accompanies and precedes by only a step each timid child that steps forth from the warm fold to follow Him. To the eye of faith He is always a little in front—removing the stones ; selecting the least difficult paths ; bending back the briers ; driving before Him the wild beasts or robbers that threaten us ; and conducting us as safely and quickly as He can to the sweetest, truest life.

It would seem as if the Shepherd is never so real as when we are being put forth from the fold. We could better exist without Him when we are there ; but directly we emerge on the life of faith, away from the familiar and friendly, we need Him, and our heart entwines itself around Him with a tenacity which grows stronger as every new trial is met, and mastered, and left behind in the onward journey.

It may be that you cannot discern Him ; but this makes no

real difference. Dare to believe that if you are in his place —that is, if you are treading a path which is clearly marked out for you by inevitable circumstances and by unmistakeable inward promptings, although you cannot see Him, and the way seems lonely, yet—that He is just before you ; the darkness veils, but does not obliterate Him ; the Lord is going before you, and the Holy One is your rereward.

III. The Following of the Sheep.—"The sheep follow Him." The utter dependence of the sheep on the Eastern shepherd is a beautiful emblem of our attitude towards our Lord. In those vast pasture-lands, rolling over mountain slopes, and dipping into darksome glens, brooded over by a silence that can almost be felt, there arises a very close intimacy between the shepherd and his flock. He forgets the distance between them, and becomes their friend. He is as intimately acquainted with their history, faces, and dispositions, as with those of his own children. He has a name for each, which is sufficient to bring it to his side. And common peril or privation, shared together, but cements the friendship closer.

Nor is the affection only on his side. Stupid as they appear to us, they develop under such conditions an amazing power of attachment, which they manifest in touching trust. They follow the shepherd anywhere.

Let us so trust our Lord. It often grieves the Christian teacher to find souls writing hard things against themselves, because they are attempting to acquire a certain lesson ; to reach a certain experience ; to attain and keep a certain attitude —altogether apart from Him : as if they had to do all this before they could count on his love and help. They are always trying to know or do something before they get to Him. Whereas the opposite is the only true and safe way ; first to keep by his side and at his heel, and then to let Him lead the soul into all it must learn and achieve. Do not attempt the Christian life as a means to closer acquaintance with Jesus ; but let your closer acquaintance with Him lead you to pass onward through the land in the length and breadth of it.

If He call you to know some new aspect of truth, throw on

Him the responsibility of adding line to line, precept to precept, till it is clear. If He desire you to live a life of daily appropriation and dependence, trust Him to make it possible and congenial. If He bid you separate yourself from some unhallowed alliance, or to quit some unhealthy companionship, or to confess your new-found rapture, let Him understand how absolutely you look to Him to show you just how He would have you act.

Let Jesus Christ stand between you and everything—between you and circumstances; between you and dreaded trials; between you and temptation; between you and your attainments in the blessed life; between you and your projects of Christian usefulness. Follow Him, *i.e.*, let Him go first. If He does not go forward, wait for Him. Every step taken apart from Him, or in front of Him, will have to be retraced with bitter tears.

The attitude of the sheep is *submission*. From the first its attitude is one of utter obedience to the will of another. It has no will of its own; or if it have, it is instantly repressed. So there must be the entire and utter surrender of our will to the will of Christ. This is the hardest lesson we have to learn; but everything of blessedness depends on our coming to a point at which we say, "From this moment and for evermore, in the smallest details, in the routine of daily life as well as in its great crises, I choose the will of God." Never again to do what we wish because we wish it; never again to consult our own preferences or choice; never again to have a way or will of our own; but to follow absolutely and always the path marked out by another: this is the secret of blessedness.

The attitude of the sheep is *dependence*. It would be impossible to *submit*, if we could not also *commit*. But it becomes easy to do the former when we can do the latter. To have an absolute confidence in Him, to lean on Him, to look to Him for direction and help as each moment needs; to trust Him on the rocky mountain path equally as on the green sward; to believe in Him against appearances and our own hearts; to refuse to take a thread or a shoe-latchet from any other hand; to abstain, as David did, from taking advantage

even of a means of deliverance, which may seem ready to hand, but which would be inconsistent with his revealed will; to wait only on the Lord till He shall pluck the feet out of the net, and give the heart's desires—this too is the secret of blessedness.

Let us quiet ourselves as weaned babes. The world is unfriendly, and life's paths are perplexing; but He is leading us on who cannot make a mistake, who will give us just as much of rest and refreshment as we require, and who is more than sufficient to deliver us from the lion and the bear. The memory of his agony and death shall ever be with us, nerving us to believe that He loves us too much, that we have cost Him too much, for it ever to be possible that we should be forsaken or neglected. And so at last we shall be folded with all the flock beside in those sweet pasture lands, in which the Lamb leads his flock unto living fountains of water, and God wipes away all tears from our eyes.

XXIX.

The Ideal Shepherd.

"I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."—JOHN x. 11.

THIS chapter is a pastoral idyll, composed and spoken by the Chief Shepherd Himself. It resembles some masterpiece of art, which one visits for days together, only finding on each successive occasion some new beauty. It naturally falls into the three divisions of morning, noon, and evening.

It is morning. The dew lies heavy on the upland wolds; the fresh morning breeze is airing the fevered world; the sun's pavilion glows with gorgeous colours, as he prepares to emerge on his daily pilgrimage; and the shepherds stand knocking at the barred gates of the fold, calling to the porter to let them have their flocks. When the door opens, each calls to his own sheep, and leads them forth, and they follow him to pastures green and waters still. They would flee from a strange voice; but they know their shepherds.

Is not this a true picture of the response which Christ's own give to his voice? Many are the voices which fall on the ears of men in the early morning of their life, summoning them to follow; and in the majority of cases with only too much success. In the hubbub the voice of the true Shepherd is undetected or unheeded, except by a few. But these hear its soft gentle tones, and obey, and follow; and to do so is certain evidence that they are his own. The desire to hear and follow Jesus proves that you are his sheep (4, 8, 27).

Again, *It is noon.* The downs are baking in the scorching glare, and every stone burns like fire; but in that oppressive

hour the shepherd remembers a little green glen, where a tranquil lake reflects the azure sky, or a brooklet babbles musically over the pebbles. The grass is green and the boulders cast black shadows. Perhaps an old fold is there, with open doorway, so that the sheep may go in for shelter or out for pasture, till the shadows begin to climb stealthily up the hills.

Thus our Beloved makes his flock rest at noon. He is not Shepherd alone, but fold. In Him as in a safe enclosure we lie down secure. He is the secret place of the Most High, in whom our life is hidden. Nor is He the fold only, He is also the door; there is no ingress to rest, or egress to pasture, except through Him. We can get pasture, abundant life, and salvation only by the Lord Jesus.

Lastly, *It is evening*. The sun is setting, the air is becoming chill, the valleys are deep in gloom. The shepherd hastens downward with his flock to the fold. They are descending together the last dark gorge, densely shadowed by foliage. Suddenly the ominous snarl and scream tell that a wolf has sprung from the thicket, and seized on one of the hindmost ewes or tender lambs; and then the shepherd rushes to the rear, prepared to lay down his life, if needs be, to save. And who can view the struggle which ensues between the shepherd and the wolf, without being reminded of the fourfold allusion of our Lord to the fact that He was about to lay down his life for the sheep (11, 15, 17, 18).

I. The Double Contrast to the Good Shepherd.—*Good* does not mean benevolent and kind; but genuine and true. And its significance is pointed by the contrast with the thief and the hireling; by which it appears that the Good Shepherd is One who is imbued with the true spirit of his work, and is an enthusiast in it, not for pay or reward, but by the compulsion of the noble instincts of his soul.

Robbers may turn shepherds, climbing the walls of the fold, or swooping down on the flock and driving it off, as Nabal's were seized on Mount Carmel. But their purpose is for the flesh and fleece, to kill and to destroy. They have no more the

true shepherd's heart than a bandit has a soldier's or a pirate a sailor's.

Many such nominal shepherds had the Jews in their national history: kings ruling for their own aggrandisement; teachers who prophesied false and smooth things for place and pelf; Pharisees who lined their nests with what they appropriated wrongfully. Such were the thieves and robbers who came before the Good Shepherd, stealing from God his glory, from men their souls and goods. What a contrast was the Saviour, who expected no reward but hatred and a crown of thorns a cross and a borrowed tomb, and whose supreme object was to give life, and to give it more abundantly—abundant as the flowers of May; exhaustless as the perennial fountains of his own being; infinite as the nature of God!

The *hireling*, too, may turn shepherd, and, to a certain point, may do his work with credit. He will not desert the flock for frost, or hail, or a thunder shower. His pay will be more than an equivalent for hardship in these respects. But when it comes to the supreme test of sacrificing the life, he breaks down. Love alone can nerve a man voluntarily to lay down his life. Of what use is hire to a dead man? "He that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth; and the wolf cometh and scattereth them."

There are good men about the world, in the Church and out of it, who have come to sheep-tending as an occupation, because it affords a means of livelihood; men who become pastors because there is a family living to be filled, or the position is an honourable one. Such do their work fairly well, so long as there is no particular danger to be faced. But when the winds of persecution are let loose, and the fires are lit, and the dragoons scour the moors, they renounce their office, and even endeavour to efface the vestiges of their calling (Zec. xiii. 5–7).

Very different to this has been the spirit of the true shepherd, revealed in hundreds of cases of Church history, and above all in our blessed Lord. He has received a great reward, which dazzled his gaze throughout his earthly life. "For the joy set before Him He endured the cross." But there was nothing

selfish in it. And it was not for this alone that He fulfilled his self-set task. He loved us. He had taken us to be his own. He had set his heart upon us. And when the question arose of delivering us from peril, He never hesitated to lay down his life. It was his own act and deed. "I lay it down of Myself."

For the most part his life was not his own, but his Father's in Him; yet special power was given Him that He should be able to take individual and personal action in this matter. "He had power to lay it down, and power to take it again." And as the voluntariness of his sacrifice unto death is insisted on, there comes out more evidently the mighty passion of his love for us who hear his voice, and may therefore claim to be his own. Why has He loved us thus? We cannot tell. It is a mystery which will for ever baffle us; but love knows no reason, no law. Surely the Son of God might have discovered, or made, beings more worthy of his attachment. But it was not to be so. He has loved us with the greatest love of all, the love that recks not the cost of life; and there is nothing now of good which He will withhold from his own, his loved, his chosen and purchased flock.

II. The Work of the Good Shepherd.

(1) *His knowledge of his sheep.*—The Revised Version brings out the exquisite meaning of verses 14 and 15, which was somewhat obscured in the older version: "I know mine own, and mine own know Me; even as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father."

The Eastern shepherd knows all the particulars of each of his sheep: its genealogy, defects, temper, and tastes, and embodies some one of these in the name he gives it. Thus did the Father know all about that one Lamb which stood in so peculiar a relationship to Himself. There was nothing in Jesus hidden from the Father. His eyes beheld his substance, when it was yet imperfect: and in his book were all his members written, when as yet there was none of them, whether of his mystical or of his physical body. Who shal explore or adequately elaborate the perfect knowledge subsisting between the Father and the Son before the worlds were made?

And it is just in this way, with a Divine, comprehensive, and perfect knowledge, that the Lord Jesus knows each of us. He is of a quick understanding to take in our past, with its sad and bitter failures, and our present with its unrealized longings. He knows our downsitting and uprising; our motives so often misunderstood; our anxieties, which cast their shadows over our lives; our dread; our hopes and fears. He intermeddles with the bitterness of our hearts, known only to us and Him. He scrutinizes each guest as it enters, and needs no census to tell Him the inmates of our hearts. "There is not a word on our tongue, but Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether." It is very blessed to be known thus; so that we do not need to assume a disguise, or enter into laboured explanations. He cannot be surprised, or taken unawares by anything we may tell Him.

Let us, on our part, seek to know Him as He knew the Father; the eyes of our heart being enlightened; the soul illumined by the knowledge which is born of sympathy, fellowship, and purity.

(2) *His seeking love.*—Again the Revised Version, in ver. 16, gives us the true intention of our Saviour's words. "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring (lead), and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock, one Shepherd."

There may be, and there will be, many folds. By the very constitution of our minds we are sure to have different views of truth, of church government, and of the best methods of expressing our love and worship. And there are many who would have us believe that if we do not belong to their special fold, we have no right to assume that we belong to the flock. But it is not so. Our Master never said there would be one fold. There may be many folds, yet one flock; even as there is one Shepherd. The more one climbs up the mountain side, the less one thinks of the hurdles that pen the sheep below in the valley, and the more one rejoices in the essential unity of the flock. Whatever may be your special fold, the one question is: Do you hear and obey the Shepherd's voice? If so, you belong to the one flock, part of which is on that, and part on this, side of a narrow parting brook.

These other sheep must be the Gentiles—ourselves. Though He belonged by birth to the most exclusive race that has ever existed, our Lord's sympathies overflowed the narrow limits of national prejudice. He was the Son of Man; and in these words He not only showed that his heart was set on us, but He sketched the work which was to occupy Him through the ages. Ever since that moment He has been bringing in these other sheep, and folding them. Perhaps the work is almost done, and the flock complete; and soon, as He leads his blood-bought ones forth to the pasture-lands of eternity, their unity shall be manifest, and the world shall admire and believe (John xvii. 21).

(3) *His words to his own.*—"He calls them by name." We often speak to the dumb animals of our homes, telling them words which they can hardly understand, and to which they can certainly give no response. But there is a dialogue ever in process between the Good Shepherd and his own. He not only calls them by name as He leads them forth, but He talks to them, encouraging, soothing, communing with them about his purposes, explaining his reasons, indicting his commands.

Holy souls become aware of impressions which are made on them from time to time, promptings, inspirations, largely through the words of Scripture, and sometimes otherwise, which they recognise as the Shepherd's voice. That voice ever calls to self-sacrifice, fellowship, purity, and is different to all other voices. And there grows up a response, the more specially so when the path is lonely, and the sheep keeps close to its Shepherd's heel. Those who follow very nearly behind Him will bear witness to the perpetual converse by which the human friend is able to keep in touch with the Divine.

(4) *His care of his own.*—"I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Time wears out all things else. It crumbles the mountains, dims the sunshine, loosens the machinery of the universe; but it cannot touch or impair the life of the blessed God, whether it be in Himself, or imparted through Jesus Christ to the hearts of those who love Him. When once that life has come to indwell the believer's heart it

must remain. Beneath worldliness, carelessness, and frivolity, burning feebly perhaps, almost quenched in the heavy atmosphere, it is there as an incorruptible seed.

Christ's sheep shall never perish. They may wander far from Him, lose all joy and comfort, fall under the rebuke of men, and seem to be living under a cloud; but, if they are really his, his honour is pledged to seek them out in the cloudy and dark day, and bring them back to Himself. His body cannot be dismembered; He cannot forfeit that which it has cost Him so much to purchase. He would rather lose his throne than one of his sheep; for the lion of the pit would glory over Him, and it would be a fatal blemish on his escutcheon that He had attempted but had failed to perform.

You may be a very lame and timid and worthless sheep; but you were purchased by the Shepherd's blood, because He loved you so. There is not a wild beast in all hell that He has not vanquished and put beneath his feet; there is no fear, therefore, of his ability, as there is none of his love. He will deliver you from the lion and the bear, and bring you in triumph to the fold, with all the rest.

XXX.

The Work of an Ungifted Worker.

"And He went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized: and there He abode. And many resorted unto Him, and said, John did no miracle; but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on Him there."—JOHN x. 40–42.

EYOND the Jordan! To a Jew that was banishment indeed. For that district, called Perea, was comparatively desert. The hills, seamed by impetuous torrents hurling themselves headlong into the Jordan valley, were marked by a few patches of cultivated soil and scattered hamlets; but for the most part they were bleak and cold, and none came there from the country west of the Jordan, except driven by stress of persecution or to escape the arm of the law.

Why, then, did the Son of Man betake Himself thither? At the close of his inimitable parable of the shepherd and his flock, He had gathered all his force to assure his trembling followers that they had nothing to fear from man or devil. On the one hand, they could never perish, because they had within them an indestructible life, identical with his own; and on the other, they were within his hand, whence none should be able to pluck them. But, in case that was not enough to assure timid hearts, He went on to declare that his own hand, with its contents, lay within the strong, all-encompassing hand of his Father; so that there was a double assurance, and none would be able to pluck them out of the Father's hand. How safe are they who hear his voice and follow Him!

But this assertion as to the identification of the Father with Himself in the blessed work of preserving the flock, led Him to affirm the deep underlying truth of the essential oneness of the Father with Himself. He would have us think of the Father

and Himself as being one in the deepest and most holy unity. One in essence, in purpose, in operation; so that neither thinks, nor wills, nor acts without the other; and each is altogether present where the other is manifested. The assertion implicated the Deity of the speaker, and startled the Jews to take up stones, so as to inflict at once the doom of the blasphemer.

Nor was this all. He went on to insist that He was the Son of God in a unique sense, and that his life was the outworking of the indwelling of the Father. "The Father is in Me, and I in Him." From all this it is clear that, whatever may be the speculations of modern thinkers, there was no doubt in the human consciousness of Jesus as to his unique relationship with the Father. He used the strongest terms that could set it forth. It is true that He quotes an Old Testament Scripture, which speaks of men who exercise judicial functions as gods, when, by reason of their office, they wield special prerogatives and exercise functions which are Divine in their quality; but He does not for a moment compare these with Himself; and only adduces the passage to show how unreasonable was the attempt to punish Him for a phrase which in the most awful times of Mosaic authority had been allowed to pass without challenge. But their vindictive hate would brook no parley; and, as his hour was not yet come, He deemed it better to go away beyond Jordan, into hiding, until the hand should reach the exact figure on the dial.

There was a special reason why He was attracted to the region beyond Jordan. "It was the place where John at first baptized." Those solemn hills and valleys had been black with the crowds that had gathered from all the land at the cry of that trumpet voice. Those waters had been the scene of countless baptisms. And the people living around had many a story to tell of the grand and fearless prophet who had met with so tragic a death in the dungeon of the neighbouring castle of Machærus. And as the disciples, all of whom had been first moved by the Baptist's influence and preaching, passed over the ground in company with Jesus, what recollections must have been stirred within them; and how sadly must they have

contrasted those sunny days with the overcast heavens beneath which at that moment they were passing!

"Many resorted unto Him." Those who had felt the marvellous fascination of the person of Jesus were glad to follow Him anywhere; and as they too came on the familiar scenes, they could not but talk much of the great preacher. "Here he used to sleep. There he used to preach. Yonder he would stand knee deep in the waters to baptize. Do you not remember him calling the Pharisees a set of vipers; and telling the deputation from the Sanhedrim that he was only a voice; and pointing to the Master as the Lamb of God?" "And yet what a contrast was his life to our Master's," might another rejoin; "he did no miracles, there was not a single scintillation of this miraculous Divine power." "No," said a chorus of voices; "John did no miracle, but all things that John spake of this man were true."

John said that this Man should be from heaven, and above all: and it was true.

John said that He should be the Bridegroom of all faithful souls: and it was true.

John said that the Father would not give the Spirit by measure unto Him: and it was true.

John said that his fan would be in his hand, and He would throughly purge his floor: and it was true.

John said that He would bear away the sin of the world: and it was true.

And many, as they compared the predictions of the forerunner with their verification in Jesus, "believed in Him there."

I. Miracles are not necessary for a Great Life.—"Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist," said our Lord; but John did no miracle, was the verdict of the crowd. Evidently, then, there may be a great life without miracles.

In the judgment of the world, birth, wealth, genius, deeds of valour, and statesmanship, are deemed essential for the living of a great life; and many an one that can lay claim to none of

these has relapsed into apathy and discontent. But how little do such understand the nature of true greatness! The fairest flowers of our race have bloomed from hidden roots. Those who have most enriched the world have said with the Apostles, "Silver and gold have we none." Genius has been overtaken and passed by plodding patience. Great wars have generally been great mistakes and greater crimes. Whereas true greatness consists in doing the appointed work of life from the platform of a great motive; and in nurturing all that is divinest and noblest in the character.

John never thought whether or not he was living a great life. It was his one aim to obey the promptings of the Spirit of God, and to fulfil his course. When all the world was ringing with his fame, in an outburst of genuine humility he said that he was only a voice borne on the desert breeze. It was no care to him that he was unable to work a miracle. He who sent him had not put miracles in the programme of his life; and he was perfectly satisfied with the arrangement. As the herald, it was his business to raise his voice in repeated proclamation of the King; why, then, should he be sad because he had not the special qualifications of others in his Master's retinue? To fulfil the task for which he had been qualified and sent, and to do it so as to please his King—that was his one ambition and aim; and to do it undaunted by the threats, and unfascinated by the blandishments, of the world—that made him great.

The lesson is for us all. Many who will read these lines are powerless to work miracles. They cannot dazzle or bewilder by the splendour of their intellectual gifts or the brilliance of their endowments. For them, the path in the valley, the monotony of the commonplace, the grey sky of uneventful routine, seem to be the predestined lot. And the very expectation of doing aught worth living for seems to have died out of them. But let such take heart! The real greatness of life is within their reach, if they will only claim it by the grace of God.

Do not try to do a great thing: you may waste all your life waiting for the opportunity which may never come. But since little things are always claiming your attention, do them as

they come, from a great motive, for the glory of God, to win his smile of approval, and to do good to men. It is harder to plod on in obscurity, acting thus, than to stand on the high places of the field, within the view of all, and to do deeds of valour, at which rival armies stand still to gaze. And no holy act, however trivial, goes without the swift recognition and the ultimate recompense of Christ.

To fulfil faithfully the duties of your station ; to use to the uttermost the gifts of your ministry ; to bear chafing annoyances and trivial irritations, as martyr bore the pillory and stake ; to find the one noble trait in people who try and molest you ; to put the kindest construction on unkind acts and words ; to give of your best to the least ; to love with the love of God even the unthankful and evil ; to be content to be a fountain in the midst of a wild valley of stones, nourishing a few lichens and wild flowers, or now and again a thirsty sheep ; and to do this always, not for the praise of man, but for the sake of God—*this* makes a great life.

II. The Theme of our Ministry.—"John spake of this Man." The Baptist did little else than speak of the coming One. But this was the sufficient object of his ministry. That was all that he was required to do ; and to do this well was to fulfil the purpose for which he was sent. And it is not otherwise now. The splendid miracles that shone as jewels on the brow of the first age of the Church have long since passed away ; and it may be truly said of her, "She can do no miracles" : but her noblest function still remains untouched. She can speak true things of her Lord.

Do it privately.—John spake of Jesus to *two* disciples, as they stood beside Him ; and each became a convert and an apostle. It was so that Christianity spread in the first age, until the whole world was penetrated with its power. And probably fewer souls have been won by great preachers than by private individuals, speaking to children, friends, and neighbours, and saying, "Know the Lord."

Do it experimentally.—"I saw and bare record." There is nothing like personal testimony in this age of speculation

and doubt. There is no voice so captivating as that which says, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God; and I will declare what He has done for my soul." Who can resist the men, that pointing to their own history as evidence, say, "We know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ"? This is an age which asks eagerly for evidence; let us give the evidence of our spiritual senses, which is every bit as good as that of our natural senses, or our intellectual faculties. The spiritual eye is as certain a guide as the physical. "The eyes of our heart have been enlightened, and we have seen the Lord."

Do it unostentatiously.—Let it be as natural as the laughter which bubbles up from the glad heart; or the song of the little child that knows no care, whilst it roams amid the flowers of spring. Do not divert men to yourself. Count yourself to have failed when they speak of you. Be content to be a voice, a messenger, a mirror, flashing the light on to the face of Christ from which it came. And that it may be so, keep the heart full of Jesus. The mouth must speak the things which it has made touching the King, when the heart is bubbling over with good matter.

The one thing which closes the lips of so many is the feeling that critical eyes would detect a flaw between the words and the life of the speaker. But, if there be ground for this fear, why not put the finger of faith on 1 Thess. v. 23, 24, and claim that He who has called to his work, and has inbreathed a yearning for the blameless life, should make it possible, and do exceeding abundantly, far more than He has even taught us to ask or think.

The mouth is one of those members which must be yielded to Jesus for his use; and, if only it is taken away from the service of sin and self to which it has too often been devoted, and handed over to be kept and used by the Master Himself, it is marvellous how all difficulties will disappear, and how easy and blessed it will become to speak of Him. When He wants you to speak, He will show you the audience; He will give you the message; He will supply you with the power.

III. An Illustration of Posthumous Ministry. — Though John had been dead for two years, his words were fresh in the people's memories; and, as they were compared with their fulfilment, they led many into the faith.

We are doing more good than we know. We are setting streams flowing that shall go on refreshing and blessing men long after we have passed away. We are planting orchards whose shades shall protect, and fruit refresh, generations that shall be born long after our heads are laid low in death. We are giving men thoughts about Christ which now seem utterly wasted and inoperative, but to which they will refer some day as the means of their conversion. And, as they stand over our graves, or meet in the old places where they were wont to gather with us, they will say: "Well! well! he was a good man; he did no miracles, he was not brilliant, he had no genius; but all things he spake of Jesus were true."

What better epitaph could any of us wish? It seems a magnificent recompense for a life of arduous and brilliant service to be buried in the mausoleum of the fatherland, amid the boom of cannon and the peal of muffled bells, whilst the great and good mingle their tears with the lamentations of unknown millions; but for my part I should be satisfied, if I could be sure that, when I am gone, some should gather, in after years, on the simple hillock headed by the stone that records my name, and assent to the truth of this epitaph, as they witness to it from the depths of their own glad experience, "He did no miracle; but all things that he spake of Jesus were true."

XXXI.

Love's Delays.

"When He had heard therefore that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was."—JOHN xi. 6.

THE lapse of years made it possible for the beloved evangelist to draw aside the veil which curtained the happy intercourse of our Lord with the home at Bethany. We are thus furnished with a conception of the one green oasis in the rugged wilderness through which He passed to his cross; and are able to think of the pure and holy love that broke in upon his loneliness, and with true affection softened the bitterness of his last days, so far at least as human love could.

There were marked diversities in that home. Martha, practical, business-like, and thoughtful of all that could affect the comfort and well-being of those she loved; Mary, clinging, spiritual, gifted with all a woman's delicacy of insight and tender sympathy; Lazarus, a man of few words, quiet and unobtrusive. But Jesus loved them each. In the forefront of this marvellous chapter stands the affirmation, "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"; as if to teach us that at the very heart and foundation of all God's dealings with us, however dark and mysterious they may be, we must dare to believe in and assert the infinite, unmerited, and unchanging love of God. Whom the Lord loves He rebukes; the sons whom He receives He chastens; the boughs that are capable of bearing fruit are rigorously pruned. This is not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, in the golden Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.

I. Love Permits Pain.—To that hidden retreat in Perea there came one day a breathless messenger with the tidings of the illness of Christ's friend. The sisters never doubted that He would speed at all hazards to his side, and stay him from death. And if He had done as they expected, He would not only have saved his life, but have spared the sisters the anguish of long suspense, the flickering out of hope, the agony of the death scene, the grave, and the desolate, darkened home. How different were his love and their thoughts of it! "When He had heard *therefore* that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was."

What a startling *therefore*! He abstained from going, not because He did not love them, but because He did love them. His love alone kept Him back from hasting at once to the dear and stricken home. Anything less than an infinite love must have rushed instantly to the relief of those loved and troubled hearts, to stay their grief, and to have the luxury (which only love can appreciate) of wiping and stanching their tears and causing their sorrow and sighing to flee away. Divine love could alone hold back the impetuosity of the Saviour's tender-heartedness until the Angel of Pain had done her work.

Who can estimate how much we owe to suffering and pain? But for them we should have little scope for many of the chief virtues of the Christian life. Where were faith, without trial to test it; or patience, with nothing to bear; or experience, without tribulation to develop it? These qualities could not be perfected in our Lord without suffering. "He learned obedience by the things that He suffered." And we can only secure the fruit of the autumn by paying the price of wintry frosts and equinoctial hurricanes. Suffering robs us of proud self-reliance, and casts us in an agony at the feet of God. Suffering prunes away the leaves in which we rejoiced, that the sap may find its way into fruit. Suffering isolates the soul, shutting it away from all creature aid, and surrounding it by a wall of fire. The leaves of the aromatic plant must be crushed ere they will emit their fragrance; the ore must be plunged in the furnace ere the gold is set

free; the pebble must be polished on the lapidary's wheel ere its brilliant colours are apparent.

This leaf, this stone—it is thy heart:
It must be crushed by pain and smart,
It must be cleansed by sorrow's art,
Ere it will yield a fragrance sweet;
Ere it will shine a jewel meet
To lay before the Saviour's feet.

How soon does pain drive us to the Saviour! Whilst Lazarus was in health, no messenger hasted to bring the Saviour to Bethany. But when death hovered over the little group, they summoned Him with all speed. This is an illustration of how pain, like a surge of the ocean, lifts us up and flings us down at the feet of the Saviour. The dark moaning waters drive the dove to the Ark; the dreary winter sends the swallows south; the sharp pruning knife compels the sap into the leafy crown or ripening branch; tempest roar makes the timid nurslings nestle close to their mother's side. Pain makes God a necessity. It is in the valley that we exchange the word "He" for "Thou." "Thou art with me."

Pain often reveals some unrealized side of our Saviour's character. The sisters had never known Him as the Resurrection and the Life, if Lazarus had not died. David had never known God as his Rock, and Fortress, and Deliverer, if he had not been hunted on the hills of Engedi. Israel had never known God as a Man of War if the nation had not endured the horrors of Egyptian captivity. Thus our very necessities read us lessons of the variety and fulness of the resources of our God. Every stormy wind in its rush whispers some new name for Christ. Every wave that dashes at our feet flings there some message from the ocean fulness of his nature. Every crucifixion rends some impenetrable veil that had hung before his heart.

And pain is often suggestive of the noblest acts of sacrifice and self-devotion. It was after Lazarus had suffered that Mary broke her alabaster box over the head of Christ, not only viewing Him as the Resurrection, but preparing his incorruptible body for its brief sojourn in the grave. Many of the masterpieces of literature and art owe their existence to the strange

touch of pain, giving a fire, a passion, and an intensity to the brain and heart of genius. If the Master is about to use thee largely in ministering to others, do not be surprised if He puts thee to serve an apprenticeship in the school of pain. Poets learn in suffering what they teach in song. Blood and water flowed from a pierced side. Pearls must be dived for by those whose feet are heavily weighted to make them sink.

And there is this further thought. The Lord permitted those sisters to suffer because of the benefit which would accrue to others. Speaking to his disciples shortly afterwards, He said: "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there." The sisters suffered because their pain offered a platform on which Jesus could erect one of his greatest miracles, to stand as a beacon to weary hearts of all ages. This idea is not foreign to even heathen philosophers. "Accept," says the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, "everything that happens to thee, even if it seem disagreeable, because it leads to the health of the universe; for God would not lay on any man that which he suffers, if it were not useful for the continuance and perfection of the whole." It is probable that no one suffers nobly without in some degree ministering to the glory of God in the well-being of others. Let those who live to suffer, who lie all day in pain, and all night in utter weariness, take heart! In some way that passes our thought they too are fulfilling a useful and blessed office to the entire family of man.

Such are some of the results of Pain; and as we count them over we cannot wonder that God's love allows us to suffer, and is even eager to stand aside to let her do her work. For the time in which Pain can perfect her work is short. She needs to make haste, because the morning cometh in which she will not be able to work.

II. God's Love sometimes leaves our Prayers unanswered.—What has become of so many thousands of our prayers? They were not deficient in earnestness; we uttered them with strong crying and tears. They were not deficient in perseverance; we offered them three times a day for years. They were not deficient in faith; for they have originated

in hearts that have never for a moment doubted that God was, and that He was the rewarder of them that diligently sought Him. Still no answer has come. The argosies went forth to sea; but, like some ill-fated vessel, have never been heard of since. There was no voice, nor any to answer, nor, apparently, any to regard.

What is the history of these unanswered prayers? Some may say that they sought things which were not good—and this may explain some of the perplexity; but a better clue is given here: this was a prayer touchingly pathetic and earnest, for something which was prompted by natural affection; for something which it was in the scope of God's love to give, for it was given; and yet the prayer was apparently unanswered. The answer was postponed and delayed.

When prayer is unanswered it may be that it has been mistaken in its object, and the mistake will be indicated by inability to continue praying, and by the dying down of the desire in the soul. In other cases, especially when desire and faith remain buoyant and elastic, and still the answer comes not, God's intention is that in the delay the soul may be led to take up a position which it had never assumed before, but from which it will never be again dislodged. No praying breath is ever spent in vain. If you can believe for the blessings you ask, they are certainly yours. The goods are consigned, though not delivered; the blessing is labelled with your name, but not sent. The vision is yet for an appointed time; it will come and will not tarry. The black head may have become white, the bright eye dim, the loving heart impaired in its beating; but the answer must come at length. God will give it at the earliest moment consistent with the true well-being of the one He loves.

III. God's Love comes at Length.—To the sisters He must have appeared neglectful; but He was not really so. Notice, that after two days, though no fresh message had reached Him, "He said to his disciples, Lazarus is dead." How carefully He must have watched all that transpired in that much-loved home! He saw the messenger's return; the

momentary joy his tidings gave; the gradual waning of life; the anguish of the watchers as they beheld the slackening of the silver cords of life. He had followed in thought the funeral train to the rocky tomb. The whole situation was constantly present to Him, till He saw that He could interpose with the best possible result.

So is it ever. His step may linger; but his watchful interest never falters. There is not a sigh, a pang, a tear, that escapes his notice. There is not a fluttering pulse which He does not feel, noticing its tremulous anxiety. He *sits* as a refiner of silver. He knows our sorrows. He is acquainted with our grief. He slumbers not, nor sleeps.

And when He comes He does more than we asked or thought. He raises not the sick, but the dead. He makes the darkness of the tomb the background against which to set forth the lustre of Resurrection glory. He does much more than the wildest fancy could have dreamed. Prayer is seen to be answered in a sweeter, deeper, diviner form than could have been hoped for. The benefit gained by the long delay is evident; and the wisdom of the Divine patience is acknowledged. "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

In after days the three would not have wished it otherwise. They would review it all, as we shall review things from the hill-summits of glory. And as the whole marvellous story passed before them in after years, they would anticipate the cry with which the Redeemed Church shall hail the unfolding of the Divine purposes in relation to our race, "Amen! Hallelujah! Amen! so be it!"—the reverent assent of the understanding, the acquiescence of the soul. "Hallelujah!"—the glad, long outburst of adoration and praise, of worship and love.

XXXII.

Anointed for His Burial.

"Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."—JOHN xii. 3.

BETWEEN the last verse of the foregoing chapter and the first of this, an interval of many weeks took place, during which our Lord was in retirement from the hate of the priests, until his hour had come. At first He took refuge in Ephraim, sixteen miles N.E. from Jerusalem, amid the wild, uncultivated hill country which fences middle Palestine from the Jordan valley. Thence He crossed to Perea, further from Jerusalem, and more secure. The few weeks spent thus teemed with incidents omitted by our Evangelist but fully recorded by the other three.

At the beginning of the last week of his life our Lord found Himself again in Bethany, and in the beloved home where He desired to spend as much time as possible before He suffered. It was easy to go across to Jerusalem in the early morning, and to return in the cool of the afternoon. On one of the precious evenings a simple entertainment in honour of their Friend was planned by the sisters, and held in the house of Simon the leper, perhaps because it would contain larger numbers.

It is not difficult to imagine the scene. The village in the hollow of Olivet, nestling amid its olive-trees and oleanders. The long-drawn shadows flung by the sun now sinking on the further side of the hill. The rustic, roomy house, perhaps not more than one-storey in height, and covered by creepers. The spacious apartment, with its low tables, surrounded by the couches on which reclined the guests. The simple provision of bread and wine and herbs and freshly-picked fruit. The company, variously composed—Jews from Jerusalem, some reclining, others standing as spectators; while peasants crowd

around the door. The Master sits among his apostles. John, with love and fire; Peter, dove and rock; James, the just; Nathanael, the guileless; Judas, the man of Kerioth; Simon, whose flesh had come like that of a little child; Lazarus, fresh from the world of spirits; Martha, intent on hospitable cares; Mary, absorbed with her self-sacrificing love; and above all, the Lord Himself in the place of honour, with the shadow of the cross already gathering over his noble face.

As the meal drew to a close, Mary passed to the back of the Saviour's couch, carrying an alabaster vase of costly ointment; this she poured upon his feet, and then, according to Matthew and Mark, upon his head. Judas scowled as he saw the act of love, and talked of waste; but Jesus smiled, and spoke of everlasting remembrance.

I. MARY.—The love of Christ falling on her heart was reflected back to Him; as the light of the sun shines back on itself from the moon. Not that she ever allowed herself to think about her love to Him; she lived out of sight of what she felt in the all-absorbing thought of what He was. Of this, at least, she was sure, that ever since she had sat at his feet, the Scriptures, the feasts, and the world, were all new to her. And could she ever forget that He had summoned her brother from the grave? There was no doubt the strong pure love of her heart to Jesus, the man; but shining through this, as light through air, was the devout reverence of the believer to the Saviour, of the servant to the Lord.

Twice during his early life our Lord was anointed by a woman. In the first instance, by one who had trodden dark and evil paths; in the second, by this pure saint. How quick of growth is love, whenever it takes root! How ingenious in its inventiveness! How regardless of cost! Such love must show itself. It pines for expression. It must go forth in offices of love for the beloved. Love approves itself by deeds. Not by feelings—they are like bubbles which children blow. Not by words—they are like down which floats away on the wind. But, as the Lord said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me."

The best love gives its best.—In the words of Jesus, quoted by

the evangelist Mark, *it does what it can.* It ransacks the house of its choicest stores, and hastens to bestow them on the object of its attachment. It is not content with giving what it must—the fixed tribute, the specific proportion; it rejoices to give special love-tokens of all that is in possession. And it is on this principle that the Lord accepts our gifts. Whatever is given, He at once turns to what is left, and apprises the offering, rather by what remains behind, than by itself. He hardly notices the munificent gift of gold, because He knows the small proportion it bears to the abundance from which it is taken. He welcomes the farthing, because He knows that it is the widow's all.

I remember once, at the close of an unusually impressive missionary meeting, that I was led to propose to the gathered crowds of Christian people that we should present our Lord with some special article on which we set great store; not with any thought of merit, but altogether as a token of the deep personal love we bore Him. It is the custom of friends to make presents to each other: how much more should we sometimes take the opportunity of giving our Lord that which we prize, and which it will cost us something to renounce; though we forget the sacrifice in the glad love which finds at last an adequate expression. In response to this appeal many there and then gave jewels and ornaments and costly articles, which realized a handsome sum for the Master's cause. We called them alabaster boxes of very precious ointment; and it was sweet to give them. And amongst the letters received afterwards was one from a widow, who said that she had long withheld her assent to her daughter becoming a missionary, because she felt that she could not part with her; but that under the constraint of the love of Christ she would stand out no longer, but gave her to Him as her priceless offering.

Love justifies itself in the eye of love.—Some that sat at table, and one of them especially, thought that Mary would have shown her love better if she had sold the alabaster-box for three-hundred pence, and given the proceeds to the poor. But the Master said it was a good work, good because of the love which prompted it. It is, of course, right to help the poor, to build churches, to subsidise missionary societies. We must compensate for our lack of personal service by giving the

results of our labours. But we have no right to criticise a love that expresses itself in some other form—in a psalm, a picture, an act of strange devotion. To our utilitarian brains ours may seem the best method of expressing our love. There is something to show for it. But the love of the other may be deeper and more delicate, because eager to give the beloved one all the rapture of personal enjoyment; and there is an element of unselfish devotion too, purged from the alloy of the desire to see one's gift embodied in some lasting expression.

I have met somewhere with this parable. There were two men, Christians, the one of whom expressed his love for the Master in acts that left little permanent record among men, but which glowed with the fire of enthusiastic devotion. Amongst other things, he built a church in a lonely place in which he spent vast sums on architecture, music, beauty of decoration. But his friend rebuked him. "What," said he, "will you sing psalms when the poor of Christ's flock are perishing? and build churches when oppression has to be exposed, evil attacked, foul dwellings cleansed? will you devote yourself to questions of taste when there is so much to be done amid the squalid quarters of the poor? If you really love Christ do something practical." And the other meekly answered that he did all for the love of Christ; but, feeling rebuked, he went forth to labour amongst the poor; however, he had no gift for it, and failed. And the Master called both to his side, saying to the one that had rebuked his brother, "Rebuke him not; he loves Me not less than thou; and it is sweet to Me to have love expressed in such a way as that it must be meant for Me alone, altogether apart from any benefit it may confer on others."

There are so many mixed motives which enter into our beneficence. We like to feel that we have done something; that we have built a little bit into the fabric of God's kingdom; that we have contributed to the well-being of our fellows. And these are all laudable and worthy aims. But by how much they are prominent in our minds, by so much do they detract from the simplicity and purity of our expressions towards Christ. Let us not leave these undone; but let us supplement them by taking opportunities as they occur of presenting Christ with

that which only He knows about, and is the direct personal gift of our affection. It is possible to combine love to Jesus with beneficence to the poor. But if a choice must be made the personal love that does all it can for Him is better than the love that is divided between the Master and the beneficent results of its gifts.

The love of contemplation will sometimes break out in the most heroic acts.—Martha was apt to chide her sister for doing so little in the house. She could not understand a love which seemed so utterly unpractical. She did not realize that her sister was being led to apprehend truths of which she had no idea ; and that probably she was the only one in the world who had really entered into the heart of the Lord's teaching about his approaching death. The busy house-wife little dreamt that her younger sister would presently perform a deed of rare and deep significance ; which should refresh that beloved heart amid the agonies of crucifixion, even as it left a fragrance on the sacred body, of which all the coarse handling of the next few days could not deprive it.

As she heard the Master speak of his approaching end Mary grasped the whole situation. She saw that she could not be there to perform the last offices of a woman's love. She bethought herself of this ingenious method of anticipating his burying. She resolved that, whatever the indignities offered to that dear form, it should have as royal an anointing as a king's. And Jesus read the meaning of the deed, and put into words the unexpressed eloquence of her soul : " Let her alone ; against the day of my burying hath she kept this."

And love kindles love.—Not even Judas would have called this act waste, could he have seen the love it has kindled and the acts to which it has led. It has been spoken of in all the world for a memorial of her. The Lord's prevision has been exactly verified. His Gospel has been preached in all the world, and this woman's deed has been proclaimed with it, stirring the hearts of men and women beneath every sky. No noble act is ever lost. It carries in it the seeds of self-propagation. It sows itself, as wind-wafted seeds will find a lodgment in crannies of the rocks, and interstices of walls. It is found after many days in the heroic purpose and generous act of those

who have been inspired by its spirit. Yield yourself to God; let the Spirit of God suggest your method of service: it may be quite different from anything to which others are called; it may even draw down adverse criticism and censure; but if it is for Him, whether it be an act or a gift, it is enough—do it. He will shield you, and reward you with a smile, and put the precious treasure among His choice possessions. Shall an earthly sovereign have a cabinet filled with choice gifts from her subjects, and shall not Christ treasure the love-tokens of his closer friends? The poor you have always with you; do not through familiarity neglect Him, but do Him good.

II. JUDAS.—What a contrast between his face and Mary's! Hers—open, pure, tender, now and again flushed with an exquisite glow from the soul behind. His—dark, hard, forbidding. As the sun draws forth the fœtid miasma of the pool, so did this act of Mary's excite his angriest feelings of hatred, though he cleverly cloked them under solicitude for the poor. That very night, he who now haggled over three-hundred pence, would be selling his Lord for thirty pieces of silver! But his true character was not yet discovered.

We can well imagine that Mary felt an instinctive shudder pass through her whenever Judas came near. Women are shrewd judges of character. The dove knows when the hawk is hovering over her. We can imagine that after Jesus and his disciples had gone forth on any morning from that home, how Mary would say: "I cannot endure that Judas; I do not know what it is, but he never comes near me without making me shudder; and I am sure that he dislikes me in his heart as much as I do him." "Hush," Martha would answer, "you know the Master trusts him with the bag, and he is held in high honour among them for his goodness to the poor." "Well," would the younger sister reply, "it may be so; but I am certain that he is not what he seems."

Ah, how often will a man adopt sanctimonious phraseology to hide his real self, and will talk of the poor, and Christ, and religion, not that he cares for any of these things, but because he desires to add to his own estate or position! *Not that he*

cares might be written on the life of many a hypocrite. He comes to church ; not that he cares, but to secure admittance to good society. He professes to be a Christian ; not that he cares, but to blind people to his deeds. He gives away money ; not that he cares, but to win name and fame. And the man who does not care is hardening himself by every act of hypocrisy, until he can sell his Lord.

III. THE MASTER. *He shielded her.*—"Let her alone. Why trouble ye her?" I see her timid look to Him, when those rough words were spoken. Will He sympathize with them? And He cast over her the mantle of his instant protection. Whenever you are molested or assailed, look to Him, shelter in Him, hide in his cleft side ; and you will hear Him say, "Touch not mine anointed."

He approved her work.—He called it good. It is very wonderful that He should think of aught which is wrought by human hands as good ; but He looks beneath to the love that inspires and prompts. If He shall speak so of any of our poor work, what a heaven it will be ! It has been full of failure ; the promised crops have failed ; our hopes have been dashed with repeated disappointment ; and men have either not noticed or turned away with disdain. But if his verdict is *good*, we shall be more than repaid.

He interpreted her inner purpose.—No one would have guessed what she meant by that gracious act ; but He knew, and vindicated her. Yes, and so it must ever be. He reads our motives ; He sees what we put into any act ; He understands what we hardly dare to say ; and before the universe He will some day give us credit for it all.

What a Master is ours ! Oh for crowns for his brow, for alabaster boxes for his person, for tongues to tell his love ! Let us anew dedicate ourselves, our lives, our substance, our all to Him ; so that the perfume of the sacrifice may fill the homes where we dwell, and the shrines where we worship and work, and the hearts and lives of others.

XXXIII.

Falling into the Ground to Die.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."—JOHN xii. 24.

THE far East sent representatives to the cradle of the Son of Man; the far West sent them to his cross. Both hemispheres and all races of men find their centre and meeting-place in Jesus Christ. It is important to bear in mind that these seekers for Christ, whose pathetic entreaty, "Sir, we would see Jesus!" so deeply stirred the Master's heart, were not simply Greek-speaking Jews; but were genuine Greeks, children of the race which, next to the Roman and the Hebrew, has left the deepest impression on our modern life.

They were probably in the habit of frequenting the Jewish feasts; either for purposes of trade, or because they found in the literature and worship of the chosen people some truer satisfaction for the instinctive cravings of their religious natures than could be supplied in the land of their birth. And as the land was ringing with the name and deeds of Jesus, it was natural that they should want to see Him for themselves.

They made their application in the first instance to Philip; perhaps because, as his name indicates, he had Grecian connections, or was even of Grecian origin. Philip called in the counsel and advice of his friend and companion, Andrew; and the two together told the Master of the interesting inquiry, eliciting, in answer, one of the profoundest statements that ever fell from those gracious lips. It is as if the Lord saw in their application a foreshadowing of the advent of a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and

people, and tongues, who should be led to seek Him ; though He realized also the tremendous cost to Himself, by which alone He would be able to attract them, and hold them, and satisfy the infinite cravings of their hearts. It is of that cost that we are now chiefly to think.

1. Death the Way to Glorification.—"The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." How much this glorification meant to the Master ! It was not for Himself ; but that He might be the better able to bring a revenue of glory to his Father. Thus He prayed : "Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee."

What majestic stages there are in the glorification of the Holy Trinity ! In the first instance, the Father raises the Son from the dead, and gives Him glory ; and then raises Him to his own right hand, investing Him in his human nature with the glory He had with Him before the foundation of the world. Then, when Jesus is glorified, the Holy Spirit is given ; and He glorifies the Lord by taking of those things which are his, and revealing them to his own. Moreover, in addition to this, He repeats them in their hearts, so that the Lord is glorified in them. And thus, as the Son is glorified—in the first place by the Father, and in the second by the Spirit, and in the third by the unity and spirituality of his Church—He gathers up the triple ray and flashes it, in one strong and direct beam, back on his Father ; and thus the passion of his heart is realized (John xvii. 5-10 ; vii. 39 ; xvi. 14 ; xvii. 1).

But at the threshold of all stands the glorification of Jesus through death. It was his constant habit to connect the two. The Christ must suffer ere He could enter into his glory. As Judas went out to do the fatal deed of treachery, the Master said : "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." And so here the search of the Greeks reminds Him of his approaching end, and this of his glory.

The death of Jesus could not add to his intrinsic glory. What could be added to that character in which Man and God met in perfect balance, as the pure air of the mountains is penetrated and saturated by the clear and blessed light of

morning? But the death of Jesus could and did promote his glorification—that is, it opened up to the view of men and angels qualities of his character and attributes of his being which had else remained for ever concealed. The prism cannot add to the glory of the sun by a single ray; but it can glorify each beam of light, which it breaks into a sevenfold band of colour, revealing its hidden glory in a mystery of beauty. The death of the seed in the ground does not add a single property of fruitfulness or beauty which was not there before; but it liberates them, and gives them room to break into manifestation.

And perhaps there is a sense in which each of us must learn to die daily, that the true intrinsic excellence of the character of Jesus may be revealed in us. It is there in germ and essence; but it awaits death to set free its hidden powers. Let us not be surprised, therefore, if we have to pass through death, and in dying are compelled to manifest traits and qualities which else had been hidden and concealed. The death of December must precede the colours of May and the fruits of October.

II. Death the Cure of Loneliness.—"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." It would seem as if the very heart of God yearned for society. In perfect blessedness He had been all-sufficient for Himself; but there was within Him a love which could find no expression or satisfaction apart from beings on which it could rest. Love is almost inconceivable unless there be objects on which to expend and for which to sacrifice itself. Did not this underlie that Divine resolve, "Let us make man"?

But it was not enough simply to make objects for love. They must be attached to the Infinite Lover by strong and enduring bands—they must be led to love; there must be reciprocity in affection, and blessedness in mutual tenderness. If a man and woman do not love, there will be unutterable loneliness in the marriage-bond itself. It were not enough, then, for God to create; He must attract, and attach, and bind, to Himself. But to do this involves something more than an act of power;

it will demand self-sacrifice, self-giving, self-abandonment, on his part—all that is set forth in the metaphor of falling into the ground to die. God can only cease to be alone when He not only loves, but is loved. And He can only be loved with the one love that can satisfy Him, because it yields all, when He has first given all. Therefore, He gave his only-begotten Son; and in giving Himself Jesus has made it impossible that God should ever be alone again; because self-giving, such as his, will ever excite the love, and gratitude, and devotion, of human hearts through all ages.

There are many lonely people about the world who complain of desolate and solitary lives. They account for their condition by supposing it due to the failure of relatives through death or intervening distance; but, indeed, it is rather attributable to the fact that they have never fallen into the ground to die, that they have always consulted their own ease and well-being, and have never learnt that the cure of loneliness comes through the sowing of oneself in a grave of daily self-sacrifice. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, and it will abide no longer alone.

III. Death the way to Fruitfulness.—"But if it die, it beareth much fruit." What vision was that which rose before the mind of Christ when He heard of those Gentiles and spoke of fruit? As to the first man in Paradise the fruit of the tree was pleasant to the eyes, so to the second Man the fruit of the tree of the cross was, above all things, fair and seductive.

It included the bride, his wife; it included the great multitude which no man can number; it included all those deeds of heroism and graces of self-denial to which the story of his cross has given rise as it has sped from land to land; it included harvests of saved souls which shall golden the furrows of eternal ages. All this was possible only because He dared to die. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." His death was needed to put away sin; to reveal the love of God; to abolish the curse; and to open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

There are many who sigh for fruitfulness, that have never yet learnt the deep lesson of the cross of Christ. We can never die in quite the sense in which He died; not by us can there be substitution, or sacrifice, or expiation; and yet there is a sense in which we must drink deeply into the meaning of his death if we would be really fruitful. If we would save others, we cannot save ourselves. If we would help men, we must be content to be helpless. If we would receive grafts of the wild olive, we must be content to bear the gash of the pruning knife. If we would fill the world with a sweet savour of the precious ointment, we must be content to be broken boxes. The most fruitful boughs are those from which the foliage and shoots are cut away with unsparing hand, that the sap may accumulate in the swelling clusters.

IV. Death the Gate to Life.—"He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life shall keep it unto life eternal." Our Lord deliberately chose death, because He knew, first, that He could not be holden by it; and, secondly, that it was only through the grave that He could reach the resurrection life and the ascension glory. Therefore, it was that He went down into the valley of death, singing as He went, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

There is also a deep truth for us all in these marvellous words which He repeated on three occasions, as if He would work them into the very texture of our hearts. Not that we are to make death for ourselves, or constantly fling ourselves away into deep, dark furrows at the impulse of our own choice; but that we should be on the alert not to avoid, but to take any opportunity that God gives us, of going into the land of Moriah, to any of the mountains of which He may tell us. Dare to look up into the face of God, O ye who long for the richer, deeper life; and tell Him that you will not choose your path, but that you are willing to follow Him through death, if that is the only portal of life; and then wait for Him to teach you each step that must be taken through the

deepening shadows which lie between you and the more abundant life, which is your true heritage!

Death can never be pleasant to the flesh. The knife is sharp, the fire burns, the cup is bitter, heart and flesh fail; and it sometimes seems as if we must relinquish the effort to keep the girded loin and the undaunted attitude. We learn how Abraham felt as for those three weary days he knew that each step was carrying him deeper into the gloom. We cry, "Let this cup pass from me." Falling into the ground to die is no pastime to the little corns of wheat.

But He who has gone through death Himself knows every turn of the valley and every ford in the river. He cannot make a mistake; nor will He take us by a rougher path than needs be. See how his footprints, nail-pierced, have trodden and retrodden the way with the many that He has brought hither and brought through. He would not have brought you by this path unless He had known that you were strong enough to bear it; or that He was strong enough to carry you, if the worst should come to the worst. And so, since He is there, do not fail to say his name a hundred times a day, if need be, repeating it as the antidote to pain: "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!"

There are times in such experiences when his voice is very distinctly heard, reassuring the soul of a promise. At other times it seems impossible to detect his voice. But then He infuses strength into our nature in a subtler, tenderer way; and instead of strengthening us by his words, He becomes Himself the strength of our heart and our portion for ever.

Our true attitude is the uncompromising surrender of our will to his will; not trying to effect any great changes in our emotional or mental life, but willing his will, completely and always, and asking Him to work in us, to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Let us not court death, or seek to inflict death, or worry as to whether we are dying properly. Let us roll the whole responsibility on Him, and trust Him up to the hilt. His will is our weal.

All along the line of life we must be prepared to erect altars on which we may yield to God in sacrifice, habits, associations, fascinations, which He has revealed as alien to our true

well-being. The soul that dares to live this life will find streams flowing from every smitten rock ; honey in the carcase of every slain lion ; fair winds (as in the old Greek story) following on the offering of every Iphigenia. I saw a beautiful device once—a hollow cross, filled with flowers which fell out as the cross was carried. Shoulder your cross, child of God ! After the first step there will be a shower of flowers.

So it must be ever. Day out of night ; spring out of winter ; flowers out of frost ; joy out of sorrow ; fruitfulness out of pruning ; Olivet out of Gethsemane ; the Ascension out of Calvary ; life out of death ; and the Christ that is to be out of the pangs of a travailing creation.

XXXIV.

The Troubled Saviour.

"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour."—JOHN xii. 27.

IN these words the Son of Man lays bare his soul. There is no question of the resolute spirit, one with Deity itself in the purpose of redemption; but only a question of the soul, with its sympathetic influence on the flesh. Never for a moment could the blessed Lord swerve from his cherished determination to undo the havoc wrought by Satan in His own fair world. But as He contemplated the awful cost of agony which must first be met by Him, it seemed as if his human nature could never hold out.

In the garden of Gethsemane this awful agony reached its climax. The anguish there anticipated and borne so oppressed his holy, yet weak human nature, that it uttered itself in strong cryings and tears; "and the overflowed soul might have given way to an internal death before the external death of the body, had He not received a strengthening accession of Divine power, in answer to prayer." As Luther says, "A beam may be tested beyond its strength, and may threaten to give way because of the weakness of its nature, not because of anything wanting in itself."

This scene is an anticipation of Gethsemane; the penumbra of the great eclipse. The question of the Greeks had led the Saviour's thoughts to his death and burial, reminding Him that He must fall into the ground to die, before He could bear fruit. He saw, too, the baptism of suffering unto death through which each of his servants must pass, and in which He would die many times again, in sympathy, though not, of course, as

Mediator. And as the whole dread aggregate of sorrow arose before his vision, He cried, "Now is my soul troubled."

There is a human side in this scene, which is all that we can understand; but which may help some of us. We cannot launch out into the great deep; but we may wade in the shallows. The humblest Levite in the temple may learn something from the evident anguish of the Great High-Priest, and the way He bore it; though he may not be able to gauge the pressure of that anguish through every part of his wondrous nature, capable of depths equal to its ascents, of downsittings proportionate to its uprisings.

I. The Troubled Soul.—We cannot be troubled as He was. On us can never rest the weight of the world's sin, nor even of our own. For us there can never be that lonely resistance to the onset of all the powers of darkness; or the hiding of the Father's face; or the unutterable woe of being made a curse. And yet, who of us does not sometimes taste of trouble beneath which the heart threatens to break down in helpless collapse?

When the love that had filled our life with music is suddenly silenced, or passes on to fill other spheres with its song; when the sun that had flooded our room with light goes off it, and the cold night settles down; when we have to tear out of our lives some evil thing, which had entwined itself about them—as the octopus about the body of the swimmer—and to do it with the anointed head and washed face; when, at the call of duty, which is the call of God, we have to turn our faces away from some radiant rapture, which had long enticed us forward, in order to take a lonelier, rougher path; when we are misunderstood and misinterpreted, by our dearest, misrepresented and maligned; when we see lover and friend stand afar off with veiled faces; when we are perplexed and baffled at God's dealings; when we are called to suffer through the vices and sorrows of those whom we love as ourselves, while we can do nothing to relieve or save them: then we know what it is to say with Jesus, though in thinner tones, "Now is my soul troubled."

Abraham said it as he trod step by step the path which seemed all too short to Mount Moriah, and knew that the hand which had so often rested in the curls of the darling of his old age must presently strike the knife into his heart. Job said it when, pelted by the accusations of his foes, afflicted with a loathsome disease, perplexed at the dealings of God which confounded all his philosophy, he wished that he had never been born. David said it when he awoke to perceive how, by his grievous sin, he had shaken the fabric of his kingdom, and put into the lips of God's foes a reproach which they have never ceased to use. Jeremiah said it, weeping over the disastrous suicide of his nation. The lovers of Jesus said it as they saw Him deliberately court death, and as they cowered together through the day which followed his decease. And these are but samples of myriads more. Indeed, it is questionable if any life reaches its prime, or unfolds all its beauty, unless there have been some dark hours in which cries of pain have borne witness to the troubled soul.

II. The Resort of the Troubled Soul—"Father!" When the soul is smitten by a huge wave of anguish, it shivers from stem to stern, and for a moment questions with itself as to what it shall say: "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" At such times let us beware lest we speak unadvisedly. There is a deliberateness about speech which aggravates the inner temper. Repress the utterance, and you will often mitigate the passion of feeling which boils turbulently below. There was no fear of our Lord speaking the wrong word, but there is every fear of our doing so; and when once it is uttered, it stamps itself indelibly not only on ourselves, but on the minds and hearts of others, to go on breeding evil for all coming time.

But there is one word which can never be unfitting: "Father." Once before, our Lord had hidden Himself there, when face to face with the mystery of Divine Providence, which reveals to babes what it hides from the wise and prudent. "Even so, Father!" an expression which might be rendered, "Yes, Father!" Here, again, in this dark hour, He murmurs that

dear name over and over, to hush and quiet his troubled soul. And in the garden He repeated it again and again: "O my Father!" "Abba, Father!"

There are times when the soul knows by sure tokens the presence and love of God. It cannot give reasons why; it is satisfied to know it; as a child lying beneath its mother's smiles knows that she loves it, and as a shivering invalid brought into the sun knows that it is warm. But it is not always so; shadows fling themselves on the landscape. Clouds marshal themselves in the sky. We can no longer live by sight. Then we are tempted to think that we are deserted indeed; and as we yield to this impression, we begin to fall as into a bottomless pit of despondency.

At such times, there is no medicine which will so certainly restore the tone of the soul, as to look up and compel yourself to say "Father." To say it when you do not feel it; to say it in the teeth of every appearance to the contrary; to say it again and again, till presently the bruised heart begins slowly to feel that it is infinitely loved, and is being led each step by a love compared with which the strongest love it ever felt is as a glow-worm's sparkle compared with the sun at noon.

There is no pain which the thought of the Divine Fatherhood will not assuage. But what shall they do who cannot avail themselves of its consolations—or will not? To suffer at the whim of an adverse fate; to be the sport of circumstances and things; to be unable to find a hand reached out in the dark; to miss the Father; to look up and not be able to realize that a Person is shaping the life-course—this must be suffering so acute as to test the power of endurance to breaking.

None have the right to call God "Father" after this inner sense, save those who have been born into his family through the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. Only to those who believe does He give the right to become sons of God. Only those who are led by the Spirit of God may enjoy that Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father! But where this right has been conceded, there is the further privilege of counting on the Divine Fatherhood in all time of our tribulation, in

all time of our wealth, in the hour of death, and in the Day of Judgment.

But, beside this appeal to and belief in the Father's heart, there is the further solace of willing his will. We may not delight in it; but we can will it. We may not understand it; but we can choose it. It is simply marvellous what rest comes into both heart and life when once the soul dares to look into the Father's face, and cry, I want nothing outside the enclosure of thy choice for me. To walk, as it were, right away from the dear circle of our own preference into the circle of his Fatherly will; to dare to abide in the cleft of that Rock; to do it while the flesh rebels and friendly voices remonstrate — there is nothing like this to cure the heartache. Then the pain begins to assuage; the evil one finding himself discredited ceases to annoy; the judgment is cleared of silt which had spoilt its crystalline beauty; and life begins to assume something of its old buoyancy, enriched and deepened and purified by the ordeal through which it has come.

III. The Petitions of the troubled Soul.—It is the human nature of Jesus which speaks first. *Save Me from this hour.* There is something here of the same spirit as afterwards cried, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." So terrible was it to become the Substitute for human sin, that it seemed as if all that was merely human in Him could not possibly endure.

It brings our Master very near to us. Often in the process of fitting us for higher service, or in the prosecution of his plans for ourselves and others, God brings us to a point where all our own courage and strength collapse. We feel as if we cannot go on another inch. Dazzling as the prospect is beyond, we despair of ever wading through the deep waters that lie between. Granted that the welcome shouts to the conqueror are worth a hell of pain, yet how is one to get through that fiery lava-stream which seethes right before the feet? At such times the soul is tempted to say, Save me from this hour; lead me by an easier path; let me forego the prize, if only I may miss the conflict.

How good and wise it is of our God not to answer such prayers! He hears them, and ponders them, and replies to their spirit. Not for one moment, because He loves us too well, will He allow us to miss the great purpose of blessing that He has in view; but He draws near to our trembling, shrinking nature, and pours in such marvellous strength as we had never dreamed of. We find ourselves calm, self-possessed, restful, almost joyous, in circumstances which, as we had considered them from a distance, had seemed utterly intolerable. Amid a fiery current of pain we are so vividly conscious of the presence of the Son of Man, that we are actually reluctant to leave it. In the deprivation of all that men prize we actually enumerate our unsearchable satisfaction and wealth. And so we bless God for that from which we had asked to be saved. There are thousands of believers who can verify these statements from their own experience.

As we consider these facts we are driven to cancel all thought about ourselves, and to turn to God with the cry, *Father, glorify thy name!* We have before seen how this desire was ever uppermost with the Son of Man. He would do and suffer anything with that in view. From heaven He engages to answer any prayer which tallies with that supreme ambition of his being. Happy shall we be if it is the supreme ambition of ours also.

"Father, glorify thy name. I will not seek my own comfort or deliverance, I simply dare not; but I am willing, in thy strength, and because I love Thee so, to suffer anything, if only thy glory may be promoted, so that men may think better of Thee, because of what they see in me." What a battle-cry is this—Father, glorify thy name! How it must thrill the hosts of heaven, as they see some dauntless soul descending into death, with these words upon the lips. How it must strike amazement and panic into the hosts of hell! Scævola held his hand in the flame till it was burnt to ashes, to show the stuff of which Romans were made; and here is the spirit of all God's saints. To ignore the shrinking flesh, to trample it in the dust, to nail it to the cross; to follow the path, clearly pointed by the will of God; to charge into the valley of death, whilst

destruction is belched from the cannon's mouth, "here is the patience and the faith of the saints."

Then came a voice from the clear April sky. It seemed like thunder to the awestruck crowds who heard the noise but could not detect the sense, as the beasts who hear the noise of our speech, but to whom it is perfectly unintelligible. It well gathered up the results of his life and death: of the former it said, *I have glorified it;* of the second it said, *and will glorify it again.* The revenue of glory accruing to God from this small planet is vastly greater than when Jesus became incarnate; and it is yet to gather till a very storm of hallelujahs breaks in thundering waves of praise around the sapphire throne.

Let us gird up our loins, my brothers, to take the way God leads us, though the brake is thorny, and the path almost impassable; let us never cease to cry, especially when we must speak to vent our anguish, "Father, glorify thy name"; let us call thus out to one another through the darkness, till the gloom becomes vocal with many voices, encouraging the pilgrim host: and then as the morning breaks we shall find ourselves at the margin of the sea of glass, crying, with the redeemed host, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever!"

XXXV.

The World and its Prince.

"Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out."—JOHN xii. 31.

THE Lord was still in the current of thought about his approaching death, which had been suggested by the inquiry of the Greeks. He is speaking from the standpoint of his cross, and as if He were already crucified.

What a strange new rendering He gives to the appearances of that day! It would seem as if He were standing at the bar of the world for judgment; receiving its verdict from the lips of Caiaphas, representing its religion; and of Pilate, representing its government: that verdict being registered in the heading of his cross, which was written in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. And it would seem also as if He were being cast out of the world, as the king's son was cast out of the vineyard and slain by the wicked husbandmen; and that this were the decisive crisis in his existence, and not in his only, but also in that of the few who owned Him as Master.

But none of these things were really so. The world, not He, was being judged. It was standing before Him for his verdict; not He before the world for its judgment. Caiaphas and Pilate, and all the course of this world whom they represented, were passing in long procession before his judgment throne, and were being manifested and judged. And as for the casting out—that was the precise penalty being meted out to the Prince of the World, who wrought beneath those scenes of hate, and treachery, and blood. He, not Christ, was being cast out; cast out potentially, though perhaps the fulness of his sentence

has not been meted out to him in actual suffering. Little as they guessed it, the day of Calvary and its cross was the crisis and turning-point of the history of earth and hell, of men and devils ; and settled for evermore the question of supremacy between darkness and light, death and life, hate and love.

I. THE WORLD.—The Lord gave a new meaning to this word. We use it of our planet, or of the populations of men that cover its surface. He used it for the spirit of human society ; for the course and trend of its thinkings and activities. Take any section, however small, of the great world of men, and carefully study it, and you will discover the presence of an indefinable spirit which sways all hearts, and influences all lives. It is difficult to say what it is. It is something in the air. Men call it fashion, or the spirit of the age. But whatever it is, it determines their pleasures, their opinions, their method of life, and their very dress. This is what our Lord meant when He spoke of the world. And it is probable that the world of one age is as nearly as possible the world of all the ages. There is nothing new under the sun.

The majority of men born into this world are so familiar with this subtle influence that they yield to and grow up in it, from the earliest moments of consciousness ; and are unaware of the strength of the current by which they are being carried along. It is only when we are no longer of the world, because chosen out of it, and identified with Christ, that we learn how masterful the spirit of worldliness can be—imperious in compelling obedience ; haughty if disobeyed ; virulent and deadly in its hate.

This world-spirit met our Lord in full force. At first it sought to fascinate Him with its charm, and by its witchery to beguile Him from the rough path that He had chosen. The crowds thronged his footsteps. The leaders of religious thought were found in his audiences, and invited Him to their homes. The people proposed to make Him king by acclamation. And all the land seemed to lie at his feet.

Then, as its soft fascination failed, the world turned to fight against Him, and oppose his every step. Where flowers had strewn his pathway, jagged stones lay thick. Where pleasant

voices had uttered their flatteries, the air was full of murmurs and threats. Where smiles had shed their sunbeams, there frowns and averted faces lined his path downward into the valley of shadows. In his own words we have the results of his experience : "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you."

But in either case our Lord overcame the world. Its blandishments did not divert Him from his chosen path, and neither did its frowns. It did its utmost and failed ; and as He stood at the foot of his cross, whither He had come, notwithstanding all, He raised the shout of victory, "I have overcome the world !" (xvi. 33).

When He died, the world was judged. Its inner motive was unveiled. There could be no longer any doubt as to its true meaning and character. It had come into collision with the Eternal God, representing the life of heaven ; and had flung itself against Him in frantic opposition. In condemning Him it had condemned itself ; and henceforth none of those who loved Him and the Father that sent Him, could love it or ally themselves with it. The citizens of Edinburgh hooted Mary Queen of Scots, because she wedded Bothwell, the murderer of her first husband, Darnley : and shall not they be convicted of falsehood and treachery who profess to love the Son of God, but in their hearts love the world which cast Him out ? Take heart, all ye whom the world knows not ! it is fair to presume that you have been chosen out of the world and called to be the sons of God. And as for you, who are entangled in its current and enamoured of its lusts, take heed lest you be proved to have neither part nor lot with Him ! (xvii. 14, 15, 16 ; 1 John ii. 15, 16).

II. The Prince of this World.—There is no doubt as to who is indicated by this significant phrase. Frequently Satan, the arch-enemy of man, is thus referred to by our Lord ; as for instance when He said : "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." And when in the Temptation the devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said : "All this power will I give thee, and the glory

of them, for that is delivered unto me," the Lord did not challenge his statement and charge him with falsehood, but by his silence apparently acquiesced in the proud boast.

What does it mean? Are we to believe, as some tell us, that in primeval ages, before sin and death had entered the fair universe, he who is now a fallen spirit, but then a bright archangel, was the appointed ruler and vicegerent of our world, which flashed with undimmed beauty in the bright sisterhood of worlds; and that when he lost his first estate, he nevertheless retained his supremacy, bringing desolation and evil on all that is connected with the world he rules? It may be so. It is not impossible that the prime object which underlies the divine scheme of redemption is to cast him out of the position which he has usurped, and to bring our world again under the benign sway of heaven. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

But the task must have been one of tremendous difficulty. Of course the evil one could not be cast out simply by the exercise of such omnipotence as made the worlds; because the sphere of conflict was not the material, but the spiritual. And the conditions of the conflict were greatly aggravated by the fact that Satan had misled our race to love and trust him. Thus it befel that God had not only to dispossess him of a power which he was no longer competent to wield; but to do so in the face of the sworn fealty and allegiance rendered him by the children of the human race.

The world of which we have been speaking is the stratagem by which the devil holds the souls of men in thrall. He does not obtrude himself, as that would alarm them and defeat his purpose; but he conceals himself beneath the course of this world, with which he is identified by the Apostle (Eph. ii. 2). The world is to Satan what the web is to the spider, the bait to the angler, the lure to the fowler. Very specious and attractive were the appearances and the religious professions of the world; but Christ tore the veil from it and revealed its true nature, so that we might be no longer cajoled by its appearances.

But it behoved God to do more than expose the hollowness

of the world ; it was needful that He should assume our nature, so as to meet and vanquish the devil on his chosen battle-ground, and in the race that he had seduced. This is the clue to the Incarnation. This explains the conflict which raged so fiercely throughout the Lord's brief early ministry. This throws light on the extraordinary way in which the devil was permitted to possess the bodies of men, like so many garrisoned castles. This may cast a light also on much of the agony through which our Lord passed ; the evidence of conflict with a hidden foe, as the beach is strewn with wreckage after a night of storm.

Mark the point which had to be decided. I suppose the devil never doubted for a moment that God was stronger than he ; but it had to be settled in actual conflict whether God were strong enough to expel him from men who accepted and loved his rule, and whether man could ever be made strong enough to withstand and vanquish him. Was the devil to be for ever supreme over man ; or could man ever become supreme over the devil, his hosts, and the world through which he wrought?

Wonderful promises gem the pages of Holy Writ, to the effect that man would some day be more than the devil's match. The earliest promise foreshadowed this ; when speaking of the woman's Seed, God said, " It shall bruise thy head." The psalmist celebrated this blessed reversal of what threatened to be perpetual, when he assured the man who dwelt in God's secret place that He should tread on the lion and adder, and trample the young lion and the dragon beneath his feet (Psalm xci. 13). Our Lord foresaw the downfall of Satan as lightning from heaven ; and promised to give his disciples power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy (Luke x. 19). The Apostle assured his converts that the God of Peace would shortly bruise Satan under their feet (Rom. xvi. 20).

And all these strange predictions were more than realized in the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of the Son of God. In his death He destroyed him that had the power of death—that is, the devil. From the grave He came bearing at his girdle the keys of Hades. And at his Ascension his triumph was consummated. Comparing Eph. i. 21 with vi. 12,

in the latter of which the same expressions are used of evil spirits that are used in the former of the powers above which Christ was raised, it is fair to infer that his Ascension was resisted by the re-gathering of the broken squadrons of evil for one last assault, but in vain.

It was not wonderful that God should go to God—that the Son should hasten to the Father: and if this had been all, the devil would probably never have sought to stay it. But the matter in dispute then, which was to be laid at rest for ever, was, whether our race should be supreme; whether devils should be put beneath the feet of redeemed men; whether our nature should pass regnant and victorious to the heart of the Throne, into the rare air of which no created thing had ever dared to intrude.

And this is what the Lord's Ascension established for all time. In the grave, the Son of God took human nature into indissoluble union with Himself; more completely, as it appears to me, than even in his Incarnation. In this He took on Him the nature of man; in that He took the nature of man into Himself, and from the brow of Olivet bore it upward to the Throne. If angel-hosts came to greet Him, they were doomed to fall back, as He reached the furthest bounds where their created natures could follow. But as for the human nature which He had made one with Himself, He took that with Him into the very focus of the majesty of God. This, then, is the marvellous result—that our nature is supreme in Him; over all other natures, celestial and terrestrial, whether they be thrones, or dominions, principalities, or powers.

It is very wonderful. We are told that our earth is utterly insignificant amid the myriads of the stars, and our race as the animalculæ, whole kingdoms of which exist in a single drop of water. But bigness is not greatness, nor smallness insignificance. And it has pleased God to select our planet as the nursery of the seed-royal, whose nature is shared by his Son for ever.

In his Ascension our Lord showed that He had acquired as man the power to overthrow and cast out the devil. As a matter of fact, it is probable that he was cast out from the

presence-chamber of God, where he had accused Job, and the high priest Joshua, and others of the saints. He was cast out into the heavenly places, where he is still prince of the power of the air, until Christ descends thither with his Church. He shall then be cast out into the earth with great wrath, knowing that his hour has come ; and he shall afterwards be cast down into the bottomless pit, and finally into the lake of fire. The Lord's death and ascension did potentially that which He has been realizing actually ever since.

This is a fertile subject for holy meditation and for practical help ; because if the Lord has cast Satan out of his strongholds, He will be able to cast him out also from every soul of man that offers itself to Him, appealing for deliverance.

Take heart, O child of God, tempted and tried ; your Lord is more than a match for all the power of evil ! "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." Let Him effect your emancipation, and chase your foe from all his strongholds within, until he be utterly cast out, and you entirely delivered.

XXXVI.

The True Light of God's Children.

"Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."
JOHN xii. 35, 36.

THE life of the Lord Jesus was bathed through and through with the Light of God. He was Light, because God is Light; and God filled Him as the light fills the pure transparent air. It was enough for Him that God should shine through his being, as through a transparent medium; nothing being added or subtracted from the intensity and glory of his rays. To believe on Him was to believe on God. To see Him was to see God. To hear Him speak was to hear what the Father had said to Him, and was saying to men through Him (44, 45, 49).

Light is so beautiful, so pure, so gladdening, so gentle in its all-pervasiveness, so mysterious in its sevenfold web of colour! What better could set forth the nature of Him who is the express image of God's Person; and, therefore, the beam of his glory! And in this, as the element of our being, we were meant to spend our lives, having no part dark; but saturated with the radiant inshining of Him who gathers up in Himself, after a spiritual fashion, all those qualities which naturally we ascribe to light. There are, however, three injunctions here to which we must conform, if we would know the blessedness to which our Lord refers as being possible to us.

I. BELIEVE IN THE LIGHT.—There is no moment, no duty, no trial in life, in which the Lord Jesus is not present. You may not see Him; but, nevertheless, He is there. No furnace,

but the Son of Man treads upon the glowing embers. No storm, but the Master walks over the turbulent billows. No isle of banishment, but the Lord is near the lonely exile. It may be that we do not see Him, or hear his voice ; but we must believe. We must dare to believe on the strength of his own assurances, and in spite of all appearances to the contrary. Did He not say, "Lo ! I am with you alway"?

It is much when men begin to study the acts and promises of Christ as indicating his character. This is what we all do at the outset with every new friendship which comes into our life. We are not quite certain of our new-found acquaintance, and we eagerly question each trait and indication of what He is. But after awhile we have formed our mental conception, and are no longer on the alert. We have passed behind the actions to the character, and we rest there. We are not always looking to find Him out ; sight is exchanged for faith.

So we must not only believe that Christ is in all, but we must go on to believe that He is light ; that in all the bitter and painful experiences of life He is always love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, and goodness ; and that He is conducting us surely and safely into the truest, gladdest, and most perfect life. This, surely, is something at least of the meaning contained in the words, "Believe in the light."

II. Obey the Light. *Walk in obedience to its laws* (35).—What a true word Mary spoke at Cana, when she said to the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it"! She must have learnt that lesson out of those long, quiet, blessed years at Nazareth. Often she had been unable to understand some deep word of his, and had been compelled to content herself with just doing some obvious duty to which He pointed ; and as she did it, all became clear. She knew that there was no such way of understanding Him, as by rendering Him literal obedience ; and she passed on the results of her experience to us all. And how often has this taken place since ! We have eagerly thought and read about the Master, trying to penetrate into the deep mystery of his nature, but baffled and rebuffed ; but when we have set ourselves to obey some simple injunction,

and to do the duty which lay next to us, all our doubts have dispersed, and being willing to do his will we have known of the doctrine. Men would never know what the forces of Nature can do for them except by setting themselves to obey them. And it is so in relation to Christ and the laws of his spiritual realm.

All over the world men are asking how they may come to know Christ; and there is but one answer: "Believe that He loves you; that He is prompting you by his good Spirit; that He is breathing through every yearning and perception of the better life. Dare to obey all these; follow them whither they point; walk in the light which streams forth from them, and which really has its origin and fount in Him; and you will come to know the Light, and to be changed into its image."

The light of Christ is always distinguishable because it means the next duty, the deepest impression of what is right, the clearest conviction of the will of God. It may be that even now, as you read these lines, there is some duty you shirk; some cross you refuse to lift; some act from which you flinch. You have no doubt about it. And though you may not have directly associated it with Him, yet you cannot doubt that if you did it He would be pleased. It is useless to try to know Him until that nearest act of obedience is wrought; but directly it is, He will become clearer than any words could portray. "Walk while ye have the light"; so you will know the light and become light in the Lord.

How different is this teaching from that of the world around! There we are bidden to know, before we dare to entrust our lives to any leader or commander, whatever be his fair speeches and promises; but Christ bids us obey the first glimmer of light breaking on us through the words of a friend, or the summons of Inspiration, or the promptings of the Spirit; and He undertakes that if we do, we shall not walk in darkness, but shall know whither we go, and shall have the Light of Life.

Disobedience like scales veils Christ from us; whilst obedience leads us into his very presence. The judgment always becomes just, and the vision clear, when we deny ourselves, and

set ourselves to follow whatsoever things are true, just pure, and of good report.

III. Become Children of Light (36).—It is wonderful how soon we become like what we love and pursue. Love appropriates and fixes the tones and gestures and thoughts of the one that is loved. As the fish resemble the bottom on which they lie, and as the Arctic hares change with the colour of their world, so do hearts and lives take on the complexion of the people and things which predominate and preponderate in their daily experience.

So let it be in your relation to the Lord Jesus, who indeed is the true Light of souls, "lightening every man that cometh into the world." Think of Him. Imitate Him. Ask continually what He would wish. Saturate your mind with his words and teaching. Live up to his will so far as you know it. Obey Him to the uttermost. And there will come a growing resemblance between you and Him. You will be transformed, as you behold, into his likeness. Men, as they come into contact with you, will be constrained to admit that his character has become transfused with yours, and to acknowledge you as a child of the light.

Oh to descend into the world each morning as sunbeams from the fount of day!—bearing with us something of the beauty of the world from which we come; shedding joy and blessedness on dark hearts; and living lives as transparent, as beautiful, as unobtrusive, and as helpful in our measure as his was, from whom we have received all we have and are.

But let us remember that if we refuse the solicitations and promptings of his Spirit, our hearts will become hard, and our eyes blind. There are some mentioned in this paragraph who believed in Him but would not confess Him, and loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. How could such men enter into the fulness of his blessed light? Was it not inevitable that it should become dim?

Live up to all you know, and you will know more and resemble Him more perfectly; and when kings die, and nations rock to ruin, and all nature is out of joint, you will see the King

seated on his throne amid the worship of the Seraphim, and you will begin to live with his Life, to reflect his Light, and to love with his Love. And the day of those blessed experiences shall never wane, or be overcast by the gathering twilight, but shall glow with magnificent splendour; suns glimmering far beneath as the flash of fire-flies; the raptures of earth remembered as the pastimes of childish joy; whilst through eternal ages we shall follow the Lamb deeper into the heart of his own ineffable bliss—in Him, with Him, like Him, for ever!

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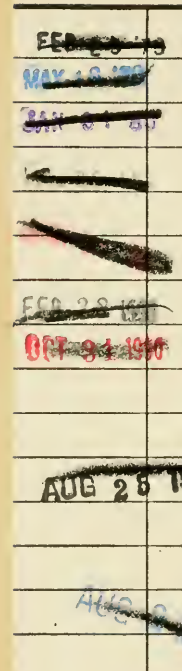

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