

A TEACHER'S COMMENTARY
ON THE
GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW.
By THE REV. RICHARD GLOVER.

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INTRODUCTION.

TITLE.—Two things here should be noted—the name of the work and the name of the author.

1. Name of work. "GOSPEL" means "GLAD TIDINGS," a fitting name for the history of the Incarnate Son of God, of the highest action, of the highest love. From earth rises darkness; only from heaven comes light. Whoso hath not Christ hath not God; and to be without God is to be without hope in the world. This history, therefore, is the best news that earth can hear.

2. The author is called—by himself, Matthew; by Mark and Luke, Levi. It was common then to have two names; such as Simon, surnamed Peter; John, surnamed Mark; Lebbeus, surnamed Thaddeus.

St. Mark gives us (2 : 14) the name of his father as Alpheus. The mention of this name has suggested several questions of relationship. For St. Mark (3 : 18), in his list of the twelve, calls James "*a son of Alpheus*;" while Luke (6 : 16), according to the Authorized Version (supplying a word left to be understood and guided by Jude 1), calls Judas "*the brother of James*," though the Revised Version, with preponderance of reason, reads "*Judas the son of James*." Now, combining the testimonies of the three Gospels, they have seemed to some to indicate that Matthew, James, and Judas (not Iscariot) were brothers, one family having the signal honour of contributing this triumvirate of apostolic men. A further link of association was found for them by combining Mark 15 : 40 with John 19 : 25, which together indicate that the name of the mother of "*James the Less and Joses, and Salome*," was "*Mary*," and that this Mary was *possibly* the sister of

Mary the mother of the Lord. I say *possibly*, for John 19: 25 may be read as meaning either three or four women, according as you understand "*Mary*," to be the name of "*His mother's sister*" just mentioned, or treat it as the name of one more friend. The seeming difficulty arising from this Mary being the wife of "*Cleophas*" (John 19: 25) instead of "*Alpheus*," being set on one side by the valid remark that Alpheus and Cleophas (or Clopas, as R.V. has it), may be merely varied Greek forms of the same Hebrew name.

If we make all these assumptions we get these results: The parents names were Alpheus and Mary; this Mary was a sister of the Virgin Mary. The children's names were Matthew, James, Joses, Salome, and Judas. These five cousins of the Saviour are all disciples—three of them apostles. These conclusions would be very interesting, but cannot be accepted, for the following among other reasons:—

1. The Hebrews seem to have been as poor in variety of names as the Welsh. Josephus mentions altogether twenty-one Simons, seventeen who bore the name Joses, and sixteen Judah's. In the New Testament we have at least five persons called James, and several Judes. Arguments, therefore, from identity of names are hazardous.

2. Two sisters were not likely to have the same name—Mary.

3. All three Gospels link Matthew's name with that of Thomas, as if some bond of affection or sympathy knit them together; but none of them name any kinship between him and any other of the twelve, or suggest any relationship.

The simplest view, therefore, is that there were two Alpheuses, both of whom gave sons to the apostolate. And all we know certainly of Matthew is, that he lived in Capernaum (Matt. 9: 1, 9); that he was a publican (perhaps the wild son of a godly home, but that the grace of Christ found and quickened him); that he received and obeyed the great call to discipleship (Matt. 9, Mark 2, and Luke 5); that he made the Saviour a great feast on his going forth; that he became apostle as well as disciple; that he wrote the marvellous life of Christ which bears his name.

His Gospel has thus the peculiar interest of being a proof of the possibility of the grandest changes being possible in even the least susceptible natures. Matthew a publican, *i.e.* one who for the sake of gain had adopted a calling held in universal disgust, a man, therefore, of coarse feelings and vulgar motives, becomes an apostle, so pure, so heavenly in temper of soul, that he can discern, appreciate, and represent in story all that angels desired to look into of the marvellous action of the Incarnate God; and by his Gospel has reached a colossal usefulness, blessing millions of souls in all ages and lands.

In addition to these facts, which we know from the Gospels, there is nothing further certainly known. Jerome saw a copy of this Gospel in Hebrew in the library at Cæsarea, and there are in the early fathers allusions to his having written it originally in Hebrew. He therefore probably wrote it in both languages, the Greek Gospel alone surviving.

Missionary labour is attributed to him in various lands—Egypt, Persia, India, Macedonia. The traditions, however, which report these labours, and his subsequent death or martyrdom, are so discordant, that they simply destroy each other's authority.

The date of the Gospel was probably somewhere between A.D. 65 and 70.

THE GOSPEL

ACCORDING TO

ST. MATTHEW.

CHAPTER I.

1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;

4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;

5 And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

7 And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;

1. **The book of the Generation.** Such books were kept with great care. The generations of the priesthood were carried back two thousand years. Josephus could give his genealogy backward to Aaron, while on his mother's side he traced his pedigree back through the Maccabees to Judah. Matthew and Luke doubtless copied these genealogies from public records. Compared with corresponding tables in the Book of Chronicles, some names are found omitted by Matthew; and probably Jehoiakim's name has in transcription dropped out from Matthew's list, as it is needed to make the three fourteens (v. 17). It must be, however, remembered that, being kept for legal purposes, every successor to property was in these documents termed "*son*" as he would be to-day in the same lands, according to Layard. In several instances in this list—Jechonias, for example (Jer. 22: 30)—we know the persons were childless, who yet have a son appearing in the line, the titular son being really a son-in-law, or a nephew, or an even remoter heir. It follows from this usage that all such as are merely sons by adoption and succession have *two lines* of ancestry—one through the adoptive father, and one through the real father.

8 And Asa begat Josaphat ; and Josaphat begat Joram ; and Joram begat Ozias ;
 9 And Ozias begat Joatham ; and Joatham begat Achaz ; and Achaz begat
 Ezekias ;

10 And Ezekias begat Manasses ; and Manasses begat Amon ; and Amon begat
 Josias ;

11 And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were
 carried away to Babylon :

12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel ; and
 Salathiel begat Zorobabel ;

13 And Zorobabel begat Abiud ; and Abiud begat Eliakim ; and Eliakim begat
 Azor ;

14 And Azor begat Sadoc ; and Sadoc begat Achim ; and Achim begat Eliud ;

15 And Eliud begat Eleazar ; and Eleazar begat Matthan ; and Matthan begat
 Jacob ;

16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus,
 who is called Christ.

These remarks will suggest a possible explanation of the cause of the differences between St. Luke and Matthew. In Matthew, Joseph appears as the son of Jacob ; in Luke as the son of Heli. If Jacob was a relative of Heli, and had no son, and adopted Heli's son Joseph, you have at once an explanation of the two lines of genealogy which meet in him : Joseph being the adopted son of Jacob, the real son of Heli, he is heir of two lines of ancestry, both originating in David, diverging immediately, one through Solomon, one through Nathan ; converging again and uniting in the persons of Salathiel and Zerubbabel, and dividing again, as they are traced respectively through two different sons of Zerubbabel, till they meet again in Joseph.

This, however, of itself needs one other statement to complete our appreciation of these lines of ancestry. *One of them must be assumed to be the lineage of Mary ; for, through her, He was "the Son of David,"* in reality as well as in heirship (Luke 1 : 32). Probably, therefore, Mary was the daughter of Jacob, one without brothers, whose husband appears in the family records as her father's "son" in the adoptive sense of that word. This assumption would meet all the difficulties and all the necessities of the case. I only add, further, that there is some probability, from Mary's cousinship to Elizabeth, and her residence in Nazareth, where a large number of priests resided, that there was priestly as well as royal blood in her veins.

On the whole subject observe : (1) *The present has its roots in the past.* Reverently regard the past, for it has made the present, and has some lessons of experience which may improve the future.

(2) *God has a purpose for the world which He is carrying out.* God's interventions are not occasional or impulsive. Men knew it not, but from Abraham to David, and from David to Mary, He was preparing for the Incarnation. And, since that event, the Ages have been

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

18 ¶ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

moulded by God's plans. We do not live in a chance world, but in a world of Providence.

(3) There is great solemnity in the thought that parents affect largely for good or ill their children—not only their fortunes, but their natures. Qualities are transmitted, and, after scores of generations, the faith of Abraham and the poetry of David re-appear in Mary. Transmit no depraved taste, no evil habit, no sin-caused feebleness of soul or body, but the finer qualities of body, brain, and nerve.

(4) All sorts of people are ancestors of Christ: patriarchs, sages, psalmists; priests, prophets, deliverers; captives and peasants. He is not of one class; He belongs to all.

(5) Some are in the line of Christ's ancestry we should hardly expect to see there—not a few godless kings, some impure women. Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba, do not destroy the line of sacred influence. One sweet heathen, at least, Ruth the Moabitess, is amongst the ancestry as well.

18. **His mother Mary.** The worship improperly given to Mary has made some overlook her greatness, but God would not entrust the motherhood of the great Christ to one of poor or common nature. The glory of Mary is more fully disclosed in St. Luke's narrative. Only note the peculiar fitness of Mary to receive such a charge: *Her Devout Spirit*, shown in the calmness which gathers no alarm from her heavenly visitants; *the Strength*, shown in accepting the immediate anguish and reproach through which her path to future glory lay; *the Grace of Mind*, which breaks forth in noble, unpremeditated song; *the Lowliness* which fits her for that special motherly action, needed in His case, which was to be all cherishing and no control, and which, when cherishing is no longer needed, accepts with gracious gratitude the position of common womanhood. Doubtless of all those who were "waiting for redemption," her spirit was the most eager and fervent in its yearnings; and just because she was the fittest of all Eve's daughters for such honour, she found it. Of her outward condition we only know, from her bringing the offering of the poor in the temple, that her lot was amongst the lowly. Let all note that *wherever there is worth, no obscurity will prevent its attaining its proper usefulness and honour.* **Espoused**; more than what is termed with us, "engaged." The betrothal was a formal, public ceremony—not reversible, except

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

by a divorce, though not followed immediately by the occupancy of the same abode. **Was found with child of the Holy Ghost.** For mother, Christ had Mary; but for father, God.

19. Just. Mary's condition seemed to involve guilt, of which Mary's character seemed, rightly, to him, incapable. Joseph's *Justness* comes out exactly in this, that he ignores neither side of the question, and will not treat what seems the most necessary suspicion as proof. Therefore, while feeling bound to divorce her, he dare not do it with a document which specified a criminal cause, but will do it **privily**; that is, with a document that states the fact, but withholds the reason of the divorcement. How strange the opprobrium through which the saints of God must often pass on their way to the "full and everlasting and passionless renown!"

20. Angel . . . appeared. "*To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.*" All perplexities are solved for those who wish to do right, even if an angel be needed for the purpose. How much of care should we save if our hearts lay open to the peace-giving light of God.

21. JESUS . . . save . . . from their sins. The name Jesus, or Joshua, was a favourite name in Israel, compounded of two words, meaning respectively "*The Lord*" and "*Salvation.*" The word was a creed stamped by the parent for the name of the Child; telling abroad the news "*the Lord is Salvation.*" But here the words added by the angel, **He shall save**, shows that the meaning of the name is, "*The Lord who is Salvation.*" Note how, at the outset, the glory of Christ is set forth in the words, **He shall save His people from their sins.** It is not from misery chiefly man wants saving, but from that which is the root of all misery—sin, which corrupts nature, destroys joy, divides from man and separates from God. But sin is exactly the thing from which it is hardest of all to save man. The accomplishment of this, the most impossible of all tasks, is that which, before He is born, is prophesied of Jesus. Your sins need salvation—find it in Him.

22, 23. The prophesies of the Old Testament are sometimes words and sometimes facts. One **Emmanuel**, imperfect, and feebly fulfilling

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife :

25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son : and he called his name JESUS.

the glory of His name, is type and promise of a perfect Emmanuel—the God with us. Note there are great lessons in names and phrases : for *Whatever expresses the great desires of man expresses, in some shape, the purposes of God.*

24. Mary secures the necessary care for which God's providence had permitted her to be betrothed.

25. This verse suggests that Mary had other children. The doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary is due to the low views of marriage entertained by a celibate clergy. The Saviour was reared *in a home*, not in a convent ; knew the love of brothers and sisters, the play and the crosses of a home. The Saviour was made in all points like to us, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest to us. Note also Joseph's faith. **He called His name JESUS.** A great and daring faith when the name carried the special force the angel gave it. We should mark the great debt the church owes to Joseph. Great calm, great love, great honour, great piety, and great strength evidently met in his character. *There is great need in the world for men and women who, like Joseph, can fill the second places grandly.*

CHAPTER II.

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

The great event of history—of man's history and of God's. Its date was given from Herod ; now Herod's and all other dates are given from that of Christ. There is great mystery in every birth, and something sublime in every babe ; but here is the mystery of all mysteries, and the highest of all sublimities.

LIGHTS SHINING IN DARKNESS.

1, 2. Israel was fitted for the reception of a Saviour. But Heathendom was not without her preparation also. Christ is the Desire of all nations ; and God is not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles (*i.e.* the Heathen) also. *Here the firstfruits of Heathendom to Christ appear.*

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Wise men. Their Greek name Magi, their observance of the stars, their coming from the East,—all suggest they belonged to the class of “*magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, soothsayers,*” spoken of in the Book of Daniel. According to the Si-Ngan Tablet—the oldest stone monument of Christianity in Asia, erected eleven hundred years ago in China—they were Persians. They belonged to the purest of heathen creeds—worshipping a God of Light, Father and Fount of all Good; whom they expected to prevail over the God of Darkness, the fountain of all evil. Sun, moon, stars, were His symbols and His messengers. They saw a star in the East; or rather, In the East they saw His star (for it led them westward). And such inward enlightenment expounded the vision and inspired obedience that it led them to Christ.

On which note many things. (1) *Possibly* this Star was a most unusual conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which happened three years before birth of Christ; or a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars, which happened two years before His birth, as many astronomers have calculated; or a *new star*, which, according to Chinese astronomical records, appeared four years before Christ's birth.

(2) God leads men in various ways. Those who sought Him by Urim and Thummim, He led by them; those who sought Him in Law and Prophets, by them; those who sought Him in Oracles, by them; and those who sought Him in Stars, by them. God speaks all languages, and meets all kinds of seekers; giving to all honest hearts guidance in the manner they expect to find it.

(3) There are always some Stars in the East pointing Christward: Simeon's secret was a Star in the East; John the Baptist was a Star in the East; so was the whole Old Testament. *Such Stars are still shining in every heathen land*, preparing men to understand and welcome Christ. And there are *Wise men*, who have seen them and are looking for truth and salvation.

(4) These truly wise men were counted fools by many, for taking such a journey of many months, through many perils, for such a purpose. But the highest wisdom is seeking Christ.

(5) *They are led by the star aright.* They only lose its light when, very naturally, they turn aside into Jerusalem to inquire; fancying they will find the King there.

(6) It is a *peculiar King* they seek; for they are not politicians. Their *worship* is not with a view to secular advantage.

(7) All receive God's guidance who are willing to take it.

2. They expect Jerusalem to know all about Him. Often those

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3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

who are far off know more of God than the children of great privileges.

THE TERRORS OF THE GODLESS.

3. Christ is always a trouble to bad men; they fear and hate Him. Jerusalem shares Herod's fear. Perhaps they remember Malachi's word, "*Who may abide the day of His coming?*" It is a bad sign to be afraid of Christ.

4. **Chief priests.** Those who either had served or were then serving the office of high priest, and their families (see Acts 4: 6). **Scribes.** Men who, having studied the Law, occupied themselves (1) in expounding it (for the Jewish preachers were all laymen), and (2) in enforcing it, as magistrates and elders of towns and villages. If Herod had been as eager in the study of Scripture for the saving of his soul as he was for the saving of his throne, it would have been better for him.

5, 6. **Bethlehem.** A little town, situate high up on the limestone range of South Palestine, where David was born, and whence Micah the prophet (5: 2) predicted that the Christ should arise. It is strange how much the scribes knew, and what little use they made of it. **A Governor.** *The full quotation is, "RULER IN ISRAEL; WHOSE GOINGS FORTH HAVE BEEN FROM OF OLD, FROM EVERLASTING."*

7, 8. Cunning is folly; hypocrisy is sin. Liars think themselves clever; and Herod fancies he will outwit God! *We should be afraid of secretiveness,* lest it grow into falsehood, and permit other evils to grow within us which will die out if we are truthful.

9, 10. They find the star again, which they seem to have lost when they began to ask man to complete the guidance God had begun. It

11 ¶ And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

came and stood. This shows it was not a distant star; and is therefore against the astronomical explanation given. God's guidance is *precise*. It leads to land, to city, to house, to Babe. Seek and trust that guidance in all things.

THE INCARNATE GOD.

11. On Christ's head are many crowns. Angels sing to Him; Shepherds welcome Him; Wise men worship Him. Here begins the everlasting worship of the Son of man. The wise men are not staggered by the lowly home. Matthew names the Child first. **Child with Mary His mother.** They worship the Child, not the mother. In accordance with the Eastern usage of bringing presents in token of submission to a king, they present Him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Many inferences have been deduced from these gifts; e.g. that there were *three givers* only; that these were the "*Kings of Sheba and Seba*," mentioned in Ps. 72; that the gold was offered to Christ as King; the myrrh, as Sacrifice; the incense, as God. It is better to remember that the frankincense and myrrh were exceedingly precious for odour and for use in anointing oils; and that, in bringing these, with gold, they simply brought their richest, sweetest, best, to Christ. *In bringing gifts to God, ever bring Him your best.*

12. Simplicity which takes God's guidance, makes no mistakes and is safe from the cunning of the cleverest. "*The wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath Thou shalt restrain.*" Fear no evil-doers.

LED IN A WAY THEY KNOW NOT.

13. Mary is guided by an angel; Joseph by dreams, in which he sees angels (comp. ch. 1: 20); the wise men by a star and by a dream. Note these further instances of God's use of many different ways to show His will. **Egypt.** The nearest and safest place of refuge. In Alexandria alone, a hundred and twenty thousand Jews resided, and a million of them were to be found in various parts of Lower Egypt. How early is Jesus persecuted! There was no room for Him in the

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt :

15 And was there until the death of Herod : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

16 ¶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

inn, and shortly none for Him in Bethlehem or Judæa ! Obscure places, like Egypt and Nazareth, are, however, the fittest for His home.

14. Note the peaceful promptness with which Joseph obeys. Matthew sees some analogy between the home and shelter which Egypt gave to Israel the nation, and those it gives to Jesus the Saviour, and again marks the prophetic fact of Israel coming forth from Egypt (Hos. 11 : 1). The flight to Egypt takes place after His presentation in the temple—say when the infant Christ was six weeks or two months old.

HEROD.

16. Note the malice which lay beneath this profession of devotion. Herod, now sixty-six years of age, was one of the most monstrous of men, while at the same time a man of commanding ability. He married ten wives, and had a numerous family. In addition to innumerable other crimes, he had caused a brother to be drowned before his eyes ; had had his favourite wife strangled ; had her grandfather, father, mother, and uncle killed ; had three of his own sons put to death, in envy of their popularity ; while a ferocious jealousy left no one safe around him. It was, therefore, exactly like him to order all the male infants of Bethlehem to be slain.

Note : (1) *Herod was a man of exquisite taste ; renowned throughout the world for his architectural works. Culture does very little for us without grace.*

(2) A throne is an opportunity of doing greater evil as well as greater good. Be content with the lowly lot.

(3) Age makes men worse if it does not make them better.

(4) About a hundred years before this the Idumeans had adopted the Jewish faith under the compulsion of Jewish masters. And Herod was nominally, therefore, a Jew. Compulsory faith has no converting power.

(5) The infatuation of sin is remarkable. A king, nearly three score and ten, might surely be indifferent about the destiny of any new-born babe ! Yet his jealousy rages. If prophets predicted, and stars of God reveal His presence, can a worm of earth destroy Him ?

(6) We are not to suppose that many children perished ; probably

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

19 ¶ But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

less than a score would be all of that age which Bethlehem could supply.

THE DEATH OF CHILDREN.

With regard to the children thus slain, observe: (1) The death of a child is the most mysterious of all deaths, yet most common. (2) There can be no real benefit accomplished, or salvation wrought, without great sufferings, involving more than the disturbers of the world. (3) The first-fruits of the redeemed world was a troop of infant spirits. (4) To these children and their mothers Christ would more than make up for all their anguish. *There was no Herod where the little ones went, and the child often draws the parents to a heaven they would not else have sought.* (5) Heaven is not a place for the worn-out only, but a home which children can enjoy, where they can grow and thrive and find a blessed employment.

17, 18. Rachel's tomb was, and is, just outside Bethlehem. And the old prophecy which told of Bethlehem's sorrow at the loss of those who went into captivity seems again fulfilled in her grief at the loss of her children. Our phrase, "History repeats itself," is one with the truth and spirit of which Matthew seems filled.

Note the grief of parents over dead children, as it shows: (1) The marvellous love of a parent's heart. (2) The worth of children. (3) The greatness of those blessings for securing which God deems it worth while to inflict such pain. (4) The ignorance of unbelief. If we knew all, we should not lament the glorified: *to even Rachel, God says, "There is hope in thine end"* (Jer. 31: 17).

19, 20. Herod . . . dead. There is an end of all human misery. Herod's death was as horrible for himself as his life had been for others. It took place, probably, about four or five years after the birth of Jesus. The stay in Egypt, therefore, must have been about that length. Probably the gold given by the wise men was needed, and sufficed to prevent their poverty being want. Note again, here, Joseph's dream and the angel. And again observe the order—Child and His mother.

21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judæa in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

21. Christ must receive homage from the East, and shelter from the West, but the Holy Land must be His home.

22. His fears were natural, for Herod's son trod in the steps of his father. Joseph, living very close to heaven, asks and learns. We all could have more guidance if we sought it. God directs to Galilee; i.e.: (1) Away from the capital, with its heartless traffic in holy things. (2) To the busiest part of the Holy Land. (3) The most fertile, where the poor could easily and cheaply live. (4) The most populous district. (5) That which had the bravest and godliest peasantry of any part of Palestine. And (6) the home of Joseph and Mary.

CHRIST'S HOME.

23. **Nazareth.** A little town situate in a pleasant valley about a quarter of a mile wide, amongst a group of hills midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean. The scenery, according to Farrar (who visited it), is "infinitely beautiful and picturesque." From the (hills round between five and six hundred feet high) charming views of mountain, ocean, and plain are to be had. A lingering blessing seems to cling to Nazareth—more comfort, brightness, and good looks being found there than anywhere else in the Holy Land. I cannot find it had any notoriety for evil. Its littleness alone seems to be the reason of Philip's question, which doubted whether any good could come out of it. **Dwelt**, for five and twenty years. Here He went to school—education being universal and compulsory in Israel. Here He played. Here He learnt and followed His trade of carpenter. Here, probably, Joseph died, leaving Mary well protected in the affection of her Son. Mark how many things you might have expected are absent. There is no college of angels to instruct Him; no little-sovereignty given Him in which to learn command. He has four great educators—a *Home*; a *Trade*; *Poverty*; and *Time to Think*. He learned to love mankind by looking on His mother, on Joseph, on His brethren. Their goodness taught Him faith in man and God alike. Work developed His powers. Poverty (not extreme, for there was little of our destitution in Palestine, and least of all in Galilee) taught Him "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." And *Time* allowed Him to ask His questions, till Bible and birds, flowers and souls,

revealed their secrets. Murmur not at obscurity and the necessity of toil ; God chose them for His Son. One may learn in a village what mankind will eagerly listen to. "If thou wouldst be divine," says some one, "thou must live hidden like God." **Spoken by the prophets.** *But not in the Bible.* Matthew is not afraid of quoting this foreign prophecy, of Christ's being called a Nazarene, any more than of narrating the wise men's star. *There is more inspiration in the world than we know of.*

CHAPTER III.

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa,

THE BAPTIST.

1. In those days. Luke (3 : 1, 23) gives the exact date—when Jesus was thirty years of age, and John six months older. Thirty was the usual age for entering on priestly duties. John the Baptist. For Mother, Jesus had the greatest among women ; for Herald, the greatest among men (ch. 11 : 11). The brevity of John's ministry, and the overshadowing glory of Christ, conceal the majesty of the man and his work. The child of parents chosen for their fitness to train him, he lived with those who walked with God. Their testimony of the marvels accompanying his birth, and the greater marvels of the birth of Jesus, would impress his youthful soul. "*Strong in spirit,*" what in an unbelieving heart would only have waked wonder, in him elicited and strengthened mighty faith. Not enough to interpret the coming Christ, or indicate the part himself would have to take,—this testimony drove him to God for light. Trained with the special education of a priest, he would seek all the light he could find in Jerusalem, only to recoil disheartened from the trivial wisdom and soulless precepts of the scribes. His home bordered on the mountainous district known as "the wilderness of Judæa"—a long stretch of country lying between the Dead Sea and a line drawn roughly parallel to it through Jerusalem, say thirty-five miles long by fifteen broad ; on its western side from two thousand five hundred to three thousand feet above the Mediterranean ; on the shore of the Dead Sea thirteen hundred feet below it. This abrupt eastern slope of the mountains of Judæa, being torn by deep valleys, crowded with bare rocks and fearful precipices, was and is desert ; not in the sense of being sandy, which it is not, but moorland, with scantiest herbage—

2 And saying, Repent ye : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

the haunt of wolf and boar, of jackal and hyena, of bear and lion ; as plentiful in game as a Scotch moor (Tristram) ; a favourite dwelling-place of hermits, singly or in communities ; a favourite haunt then and now (see Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 377) of bandit chiefs at strife with the governing powers. John feels attracted thither, as if to the temple of the living God. Perhaps feeding flocks, as David did before him, he finds invigoration of body, soul, and spirit there. And there he has that communion with God, by which he is made what he is. He was the first to see the Dawn of redemption, because he was the keenest watcher and the most fervent suppliant for it. John's questions only God could answer. Would He save Israel?—now, in his days?—incarnating Himself?—destroying sin, the fount of all evil? Was the Messiah indeed, as his parents said, already born? Was he to go before Him? How often these questions had to be asked of God, and answered by God in the secret of his soul, before he could dare to believe in a Divine intervention so august! But surrendering himself to light and guidance, it came in Scripture and in his soul, till he felt the time of the Saviour's appearance was near, and, moving to the populous edge of the desert, began (probably without having seen the Saviour—John 1 : 31) to proclaim Him. It is marvellous how his soul withstands and shames the unbelieving gaze of men—catches no chill from their coldness, but kindles in them his own convictions. It is marvellous his perception of the greatness of Christ—of His Godhead (John 1 : 27, 30, 33) ; of His self-sacrifice (John 1 : 29) ; of His work, baptizing with the Holy Ghost, judging, pardoning, ruling men. It is marvellous the service John thus renders—in preparing Israel for the Saviour ; in calling that Saviour forth ; in preparing the souls of men, in all ages since, to welcome the Saviour with contrition. It is marvellous his wonderful authority—inaugurating a new Rite, constraining all classes to observe it ; marvellous the light which saw all men's evil, and yet which had hope enough to set before them the penitential rite and expect them to accept it!

Mark the lessons of such a life. (1) Note how great a man may be, and how much one man may do. (2) Consecration, obedience, and communion with God make a prophet. (3) The desert may be the best of all colleges. (4) Those who by prayer help to bring, will be honoured to announce, mercies. (5) The greatest honour of man is to prepare some hearts for welcoming Christ. Be this thy work, teacher, parent, man.

JOHN'S CRY.

2. Repent ye : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! God's

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

messages go out two and two: a *call*, **Repent!** an *encouragement*, **The kingdom of heaven is near.** Repentance signifies a change proceeding from the soul; and means that change of view and feeling which leads us to lament, to end, to own, all known sin, and bring it to the mercy of God for pardon. **The kingdom of heaven** is the kingdom of God; the long-expected new Theocracy, in which a Divine Ruler had to receive "*Dominion and glory and a kingdom,*" in which "*all people, nations, and languages should serve Him;*" "*a dominion which is an everlasting dominion,*" "*not passing away,*" and "*not to be destroyed*" (Dan. 7: 14). All men everywhere have had some dream of such a blessed empire of God on earth. The Jews had a belief in it in intensest form. The fulfilment, therefore, of all that their largest Messianic hopes had looked for is here announced. The coming of the kingdom involves, of course, the presence of the King—the One standing among them "*whom they knew not*" (John 1: 26, 27). This double message, pointing to sin needing repentance, and to the Saviour drawing near in mercy, is the message for all times.

3. **The voice . . . in the wilderness.** So the abruptness of John's appearance and the essence of his mission are described. Everything about him was an appealing Voice. Look, dress, food, language, were all a Voice calling to repentance. **Prepare ye the way of the Lord—**OF JEHOVAH, as Isaiah has it in the original (Isa. 40: 3). When turnpike roads were poorer than to-day, the cry, **Prepare the way!** always preceded the visit of a king.

4. **Camel's hair.** Not camel's skin, but a cloth or blanket made then and now from the coarser tufts of hair of the camel; worn now by poor Bedawin Arabs, and then only by the poor of the people; *not a picturesque garb, but poor man's fustian.* **His meat was locusts and wild honey.** Locusts are to-day, and always have been in this neighbourhood, the cheapest food of the poor. Boiled with a little salt, and their legs and wings rubbed off, they are beaten into a paste, and taste like shrimps (Tristram). **Wild honey** was and is found in great abundance there. Sometimes our soul would have nobler feelings if the body were supported on simpler fare. Fearless of beasts of the wilderness, dangers afterwards would not daunt him; content with locusts, wealth afterwards could not tempt him.

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan,

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 ¶ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

A GREAT REVIVAL.

5. Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan. The heart of man lies very open to the influences of God. Wherever there is a prophet, there is a revival. Never has there been an age more hard to move; but yet all classes, in all quarters, and well-nigh all individuals, are thrilled with the solemn feeling that perchance, after all, God is nigh them. Mark, particularly, that man everywhere is a religious being, ready to look Godward.

6. Baptized . . . confessing their sins. On this many things are to be noted. (1) Lustrations, rites of cleansing, are common to most religions—Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedanism, Hinduism. Naturally, sin is felt as pollution, and the observance of a rite of cleansing is an instinctive action of repentance. (2) The name "*Baptism*," not met with in the Old Testament, was, in the time of Christ, regularly applied to the total washing of the person prescribed in various circumstances by Moses. (3) This Baptism was administered to all proselytes to Judaism, and was held an essential step in the change. "Three things in a man," they said, "make a proselyte—circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice." (4) The meaning of such a rite would, therefore, be at once understood. To accept it was to own pollution and ask for cleansing. It was "*a Baptism of*"—i.e. expressing—"Repentance;" "*for*"—i.e. asking for—"the Remission of sins." (5) John's enforcement of this rite on all Israelites would be at once understood, and by many resented, as treating them all as outsiders, who needed to come afresh to God. (6) Although he quotes no Scripture authority for the rite, great multitudes accept his baptism, confessing their sins by mouth as well as by rite, and thus prepare for the Bridegroom's coming. In Jordan. The wilderness ended where Jordan fell into the Dead Sea.

STRANGE INQUIRERS.

7. Pharisees and Sadducees. What had they to do there? The word Pharisee means "*Separatist*," but was a term not given them in contempt, but adopted by them in complacency. They formed themselves into various guilds throughout the land, of men and women (chiefly men), who combined to observe punctiliously every precept of Moses and tradition of the Elders, and to stand aloof from

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance :

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father : for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

10 And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees : therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

those not doing so. This *Standing aloof* from the careless was their pride, and suggested the name they adopted. There were about six thousand of them in Palestine (Geikie, "Life of Christ," vol. i. 69). They refused to eat with other Jews ; washed carefully the whole body after being at market, for the chance of having touched some person who might have been unclean. What do these perfect people want with a rite confessing pollution ? Sadducees were the sceptics of the time, who professed to keep the Law of Moses, but denied all later light on Immortality and Heaven. They were the politicians, who adhered to religion for power and wealth. Why are they listening to a revivalist, and submitting to a rite of repentance ? The answer is—*that In the heart of the most self-complacent there is some misgiving about the sufficiency of their goodness ; and in the heart of the most unbelieving there is an instinctive feeling that we shall live for ever.* The Sadducees, professing to disbelieve in any future existence, yet tremble when John proclaims it ; and Pharisees, who boasted they were perfect, ask, "*What must we do to be saved ?*" Comparing St. Luke (ch. 3), it is an interesting thing to mark the different sorts of souls—formalists, sceptics, soldiers, publicans, etc.—that are all similarly drawn to the great Reformer. **Generation of vipers** sounds harsh. But note : (1) What we know of many individual members of the priesthood shows that their crimes and wickedness merited such a name. (2) John does not despair of even these, but admits them to the rite, charging them to repent ! **Wrath to come.** He had been preaching a Saviour to come : how does this phrase creep into his message ? Alas ! the Christ who brings salvation to men, must bring wrath to those refusing it. *The Cause* of life to the penitent, He is *the Occasion* of death to the disobedient.

8. **Fruits meet for repentance** means fruits proving the reality of the repentance professed.

9. **Abraham to our father.** They held that to be a true Jew was to be secure of heaven ; as some imagine to-day that to be a member of the church of Christ is to be right for heaven. John teaches that the outward relationship is valueless. Abraham's faith would save ; Abraham's blood and Abraham's sacraments are nothing.

10. **Axe is laid unto—i.e. at—the root.** Ready to be used ; for whoever is Saviour must be Judge. Note : (1) There is a Divine judgment of all things. (2) Fear God, and bring forth the good fruit.

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

JOHN'S THEOLOGY.

11. Observe his great description of Jesus and His baptism. No human minister can say more than this: **I indeed baptize you with water unto**, *i.e.* for the expression and deepening of, repentance. But the great Christ is so really Divine that **He baptizes with the Holy Ghost**, giving the *Reality* of which John gives the symbol. John adds, **And with fire**; indicating, probably, that the Baptism of the Soul by the Saviour has always a twofold character. It is (1) creative of good—a *baptism of the Holy Ghost*; it is (2) destructive of evil—a *baptism of Fire*. The latter baptism is only a less mercy than the former. With this twofold baptism the Saviour baptizes men and nations. Happy they that welcome most the former, and need least of the latter! Some, refusing that of the Holy Ghost, taste only the baptism of Fire—in such cases, an awful baptism.

12. The result of such baptism is shown. The baptism with the Holy Ghost produces **the Wheat** which is gathered into the garner; the baptism of fire destroys **the Chaff**.

On the whole subject of the preceding verses: (1) Mark the great part played by individual men, and the almost illimitable force they may wield. (2) Seek equipment for all work where John sought his—at the feet of God. More of the wilderness would help us all. Whenever a speaker's words *find* you, and indicate what you feel to be God's way, obey them. Neglect not Christ's Ordinances. In observing them, seek the grace; rest not on the symbol.

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST.

13—17. A mystery that disturbed the Baptist has not yet lost all its difficulty. Why he should baptize, and ordinary men accept baptism, he could understand; but why the Saviour should come to him he knew not. Some preliminary points may help us to understand the sequence of events.

(1) Some time elapses between the commencement of John's work and the Saviour's baptism. Luke says, "*When all the people were baptized . . . Jesus also was baptized.*" First the people are gathered, expectant; and then the King comes. Just as, in a smaller matter, the people first sat down, expecting their meal; and then the loaves.

13 ¶ Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

were multiplied. A period of six months, as some have assumed, does not seem too long for this.

(2) John had never, or at least not since boyhood, met with or communicated with Jesus; so that he says, "*I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest*" (John 1: 31). There was no railway nor post in those days, and it was a long way from Nazareth to the wilderness of Judæa. *Prophets and Saviours have no policies, nor plans of action, but leave God to introduce them to their work and their fellow-workers.*

(3) The Saviour hastes not, tarries not; hears of the waking of the people; and, I suppose, *Himself wakes to the great call to be their Saviour.* "*He did nothing of Himself.*" These months would be with Him months of prayer. At last the hour arrives, and, like a child, He goes to John to be baptized of him.

(4) John baptized at various spots in the Jordan valley: at "*Ænon near to Salim [i.e. high up in a line with Shechem], because there was much water there*" (John 3: 23); and here low down, near Jericho, we have him at Bethany (John 1: 28, Revised Version). At the spot where the old Elijah was translated, the new Elijah baptizes (2 Kings 2: 4, 7, 11).

13. Then cometh Jesus. What a journey! What a moment, when He is to submit Himself to the expectant gaze of men! To be baptized. How low Jesus can stoop! He might have excused Himself, as the rite was not prescribed by Scripture, and it seemed only to invite sinners. But He comes the long journey of seventy miles to submit Himself to the opening rite of the New Testament dispensation.

14. John forbad Him. Note here: (1) He knew his Saviour when he saw Him, though there was none to introduce him. As Luther says, "*he scented the Spirit.*" He saw in His looks the glory as of the only begotten Son of God! Instinctively the quickened heart, when it meets Him, in Person, or more dimly in the gospel story, always feels "*This is the Master, and my Saviour!*" (2) The "*Forbidding*" sprang from modesty, but yet was wrong. **I have need to be baptized of Thee, etc.** John had only seen one side of his own rite—that, namely, which it showed to sinners. He feels that the glowing purity which bespeaks Christ's perfectness needs no cleansing, but can rather impart it. *So he forbids—the greatest of the prophets not knowing all things.* Note here: (1) What differences of eyesight are found in souls as well as in bodies! Many then saw nothing but

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

Christ's carpenter's apron—His common clothing, His look of sorrow and of toil. To them "*there was no beauty that they should desire Him;*" while John sees a radiant Godhead. (2) How, the higher men are, the higher is the level on which they put Christ far above them. John—the greatest of men—adores Jesus as infinitively above him. Not your greatness, but your littleness, is the secret of your want of reverence.

15. The voice of the Master rules him who rules the multitude—calm, gentle, conclusive. Nothing is to be said after **Suffer it to be so now**. John cannot foolishly argue with the Lord—as some do. He is King, and commands the prophet. The Saviour adds the reason for His course: **It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness**. In this there are many things worth noting. (1) Observe the Saviour's habitual question—*what was "becoming"?* Many seem to ask only—"What is agreeable?" or "What is binding?" or, "What is essential for salvation?" and unless a thing falls into one or other of these classes of things, they pay no attention to it. So mean and unworthy are our motives, sometimes, even in religious things. Christ asked—*what was proper?* and, whether pleasant or painful, essential or non-essential, did it. His first recorded word, "*I must,*" matches this second recorded word, "*It becometh us.*" (2) "*To fulfil all righteousness*" means simply *to discharge every duty*. (3) The Saviour keeps the turnpike road of duty—what the prophet calls "*the highway of holiness.*" He esteems everybody's duty His duty. Many only want to do the special things for which they think their nature suited, and leave out of their list everything the pleasantness or reason of which they do not see. The Saviour kept all observances; went to the feasts and to the synagogues; paid the temple tax; claimed no exemptions; was made "*under the Law*"—"in all points like unto His brethren." *Seek not to escape the common duties of life, they are the most important.* (4) There is some side of every duty enjoined by God which suits every one. Here baptism did not suit the Saviour in some respects. He had no pollution to deplore, no repentance to express, no forgiveness to crave. But the rite had sides which suited even Him. It was the formal act of entering the new kingdom of God; expressed surrender to God; sought the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which would equip Him for His work in God's kingdom. When others, therefore, were baptized, "*confessing sin,*" Christ was baptized, "*fulfilling righteousness.*" *Neglect not those Rites, in which God would have you enter His kingdom, and root yourselves more firmly*

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water : and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him :

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

in it. Then he suffered Him. True modesty will do the greatest things when Jesus bids.

16, 17. The miraculous experience of Christ is, perhaps, best interpreted by the ordinary experience of devout hearts. He who in humble devotion makes the surrender of himself to God in either sacrament, still finds heaven opening and shedding its radiance on his soul ; still feels the peaceful entrance of the Holy Spirit ; still hears the whisper, "*In thee I am well pleased.*" Only in its fulness and special force does the Saviour's experience differ from ours. Note : The open heaven to live under ; the Holy Dove to build her nest within us ; the approving voice of God to animate :—are the great things we all want. Some miss them, who would find them if they would but confess their Lord.

With this witness of St. Matthew compare carefully John 1 : 34—42, and note : That John's first description of the Saviour declares the two essential truths of the gospel. His word, "*This is the Son of God,*" sets forth His Deity ; and his phrase, "*The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,*" His atonement. On these two truths our hopes depend.

CHAPTER IV.

What a change ! Yesterday, the reverence of the Baptist, his noble testimony, the radiant smile of God, the nestling of the Holy Dove within Him, acknowledgment by God as His well-beloved Son, acceptance by disciples as Saviour of the world ; but to-day, wilderness, want, peril, darkness, temptation ! Such is life ! Concerning this dark experience, note generally : (1) *There is a tempter.* Inclination of our own hearts, and influence of our neighbours, both lead us astray ; but there is, over and above these, the sollicitation of the enemy of souls. *They who deny the existence of a devil, credit God and man with all the moving to evil.* Be afraid of temptation, watchful and prayerful against it. (2) *The tempter is under God's control.* Not a god, as the old Persians thought him, but

1 Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

limited, mastered, and used by God. *The Spirit leads men into temptation*; for temptation, when not sought by us, and when rightly met, serves our best interests. It reveals our weaknesses, rouses our watchfulness, drives us to God for help, clears our aims and principles, and strengthens the soul in conflict. *The Lord shaves "with a razor that is hired"* (Isa. 7 : 20). The devil is the string of the kite—a downward pull, by resisting which we rise. (3) *All are assailed by the tempter.* The better we are, the harder we are tempted. "Calvin and I," said Luther, "have temptations that would kill an ordinary man; and Paul had temptations that would have killed me; and Christ had temptations that would have killed Paul" ("Table Talk"). Though sinless, Christ's hunger laid Him open to feel the first temptation. Because believing, He felt the second. Because great and pitiful for mankind, He felt the third. *Temptations are most felt where most resisted*, and inflict, by their assault, most pain where they do least mischief. "*The Saviour SUFFERED being tempted.*" His horror at the thought of evil was pure anguish. *Conclude not your sinfulness from your temptation*; and remember the truth Lord Bacon teaches—that it is not the Lie that passes through the mind that does harm, but the lie that lodgeth there. Suggestions of evil are not sins; there is only sin when they are yielded to. (4) *Temptation suits itself to all our states and circumstances*, as here to the depression of hunger, to the elation of victory, to the force of spirit there was in Christ. (5) *The steps to which it invites are often*, as in the first two temptations here, *most innocent in their aspect*, though most grave in their nature and results. (6) *It assails us especially in all sacred beginnings of service.* (7) *All temptations have this character—that they seem to offer shorter cuts to the things we desire than the way of duty.* (8) *How we deal with our secret allurements in the wilderness will determine all our life.*

Leaving these general statements, which apply to the whole temptation, consider it more in detail.

1. **Led up of the Spirit.** Compare Paul's word, "*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*" It is well to yield, at each step of life, to the Divine movings, even when they lead us mysteriously. **To be tempted of the devil.** Both Testaments begin with the story of a temptation. The first Adam is tempted lightly in a garden, and falls; the second Adam, in a wilderness, exhausts all the arts of the enemy, and stands. The one is the story of Paradise lost; the other, of the beginning of Paradise regained.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

2. **Fasted forty days and forty nights.** So by prayer and fasting He undertakes His life-work. What weight and burden must have lain on His soul to make Him continue all this while forgetful of bread! every waking thought a foreboding and a prayer! *A Gethsemane begins as well as closes His work!* Not lightly did He enter on His task; but with "*strong crying and tears.*" Murmur not at the greatness of thy task, when you see how the Saviour feels burdened with His. "*Fasting*" means either *spare diet*—as the Saviour speaks of John "*neither eating nor drinking,*" though he had his locusts and wild honey; or abstaining totally from food. Probably here the latter is meant. **He was afterward an hungred.** He had not felt the need of food while absorbed with the contemplation of the work on which He had now entered (comp. Mark 3: 20, 21, and John 4: 31, 32). But when the strain of thought and prayer is over, He awakes to find Himself helpless and feeble through want of bodily sustenance.

THE TEMPTATION OF THE PHYSICAL LIFE.

3. **The tempter.** An awful name—*belonging to some men as well as devils*; but here naming the chief malignant enemy of souls, who labours for their destruction; *who is weak in that he can only harm us by making us harm ourselves, but strong in his power of persuading us to do so.* **Came . . . said.** Note the time chosen for assault. (1) Immediately after His baptism. Consecrate yourself to God, and you will certainly be tempted with all the arts of hell. (2) When the special strain of supplication is over. (3) When He is physically unfittest to resist such a temptation. **If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.** A seemingly innocent suggestion. There was no harm in bread; no more harm, apparently, in making stones into bread than in making water into wine. He needed bread. Why should He not make it? *Perhaps Satan employs the voice of some dear friend to convey the suggestion; as he did on a similar occasion afterwards* (ch. 16: 20-23). So, perpetually, the worst temptations are to, seemingly, harmless actions. *One of the greatest lessons which we need to learn in life is this—every act is wrong which is done from wrong motives, however innocent in itself it may seem to be. Here the only wrong in the act would be the feelings prompting it.* For what would Christ have done had He obeyed this suggestion? (1) He would have yielded to the doubt the devil insinuates. All the enemy says is, "Make bread."

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

What he *means* is, "God has left you nothing but stones, and if you do not take the matter into your own hands, you are a dead man." If Christ had yielded, He would have taken Himself out of God's hand. (2) He would have made Himself *unlike* His brethren. I, in want, cannot work a miracle. I need a Saviour to stand with me in my need, and teach me how to endure and how to trust. The simple doing for His own comfort what the poor and needy could not do, would have cut the link that unites Him to us. So that an act, in itself harmless, would, in the circumstances, have severed Him at once from God and from man. Be lowly, and fear "*the wiles of the devil.*" We are assailed by this temptation when we are moved to discontent with God's providence for not giving us more money, or more friends, or better health, or a happier lot, and to doing something to make ourselves better off than God will make us. All short cuts out of discomfort will be found to have something in common with this temptation. Mark how the Saviour meets it.

4. He answered, etc. Note: (1) Christ's calmness, which keeps the suggestion outside His soul: "*The peace of God,*" which "*guards the heart and mind.*" (2) He takes the rule for all men as the rule for Him. The question for Him is, not what "*the Son of man*" may do, but what man in general ought to do. (3) He finds in Scripture His comfort and His answer. The lesson of the manna (Deut. 8: 3) is not lost on Him; He learns what God meant all to learn—that He has other ways of keeping the body alive besides the gift of bread. And, anyhow, whether He is to live or die, *He will leave it to God to support His life, and will do nothing from a motive of despair. Do nothing at bad men's bidding, nor at the bidding of bad feelings or fears.* We act like Christ when we refuse to let despairing or discontented thoughts guide us. With "*every tree of the garden*" for food, Adam fell; with desert stones mocking His hunger, the second Adam conquered. The word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God means a miracle-working word of God.

THE TEMPTATION TO SPIRITUAL PRESUMPTION.

5, 6. Then. Evidently some interval must elapse for recovering strength and making a journey. The devil taketh Him up into the holy city, etc. The first temptation assailed Him *through His bodily sufferings*, and was overcome by faith. The enemy will endea-

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down : for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee : and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

vour now to make that faith overdo itself in presumption, and so he appeals now to *His Spiritual Exaltation*. "*The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple,*" said Malachi (3 : 1). And in an ancient Jewish commentary, earlier than Christ, this occurs : "Our rabbis give this tradition. In the hour when King Messias cometh, He standeth upon the roof of the sanctuary, and proclaims to Israel, saying, 'Ye sufferers, the time of your redemption draweth nigh ; and, if ye believe, rejoice in My light which is risen upon you.'" The enemy—speaking, perhaps, through some disciple—*suggests* : Such faith as He has shown had never been seen in Israel. Let but Jerusalem see it—give them but a sign or token of it, and they will at once believe Him. The crowds are in the temple courts. Let Him descend from the summit of the building—floating unhurt on a cloud of angels' wings, and all men will welcome Him. This is a short cut to acceptance by the people. It is commended to the Saviour as being quite safe, a Scripture promise guaranteeing it—very effective and easy. [Note : The enemy can suggest we should throw ourselves down, but cannot push us down.] *We* are assailed with this temptation when we are *urged to take liberties with God* ; or to show off our virtues ; or to pursue any course morally perilous, in the idea that God will step in and keep us from being destroyed. Many that do not fall through despair fall through presumption, our pride rendering the temptation more seductive.

7. Again the calm of Christ breaks the force of temptation. He takes time to ask God if this is what He would like. He remembers, perhaps, that the false friend who tempts Him has left out part of his quotation, "*Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder*" (Ps. 91 : 10-12). He thinks it is better for Himself to fulfil the unquoted verse, than for Him, needlessly, for vanity's sake, to put on God the fulfilling of the quoted one. Again, He finds His guidance and His answer in the Word of God (Deut. 6 : 16). **Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.** This word, forbidding us to experiment with God, settles the Saviour's action. *He will take no liberties with God*—will expect angels to protect Him in every way on which God sends Him ; will not ask, dare not expect them, to protect Him in running needless risks from motives of spiritual pride. Too often we take liberties ; sinning wilfully, in the hope that, after all, grace will not be with-

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

drawn ; or going into temptation and risking the safety of soul, in the hope that some angel will prevent mischief. Learn the Saviour's way : "No liberties with God ;" no self-display. The lowly path of duty is to be preferred to the ostentatious path of seeming faith. Remember the solemn words of Moses : "*The soul that doeth aught presumptuously . . . shall be cut off from among his people*" (Numb. 15 : 30).

THE TEMPTATION TO POLICY.

8, 9. High mountain. From no point of vision is it possible for two hemispheres to be seen at once. And though Palestine is a land of mountains—some high ones (Hermon reaching a height of ten thousand feet), yet the formula which determines the distance visible from any height (Euclid, bk. iii. 36) tells us at once that no eminence accessible would be more than sufficient to start the imagination of the Saviour. It was with "the mind's eye" he saw "*in a moment of time*" (Luke 4 : 5), **all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.** Thus showing them, the enemy offers to give all these to Christ, if He will fall down and worship him. What is this temptation? If the first assailed Him through physical hunger, and the second through His consciousness of trust in God ; this last assails Him through His strength and fitness to command. He promises the throne of universal empire ; and on easy terms. The worship he wants is *only homage, not adoration. Only let the Saviour accept his ways, and follow his methods, and the world shall be His.* Probably he flattered Christ, through the voice of some enthusiastic zealot, or, perhaps, of Judas Iscariot—urged Him that He was fit to rule ; that the weary world wanted some such rule as He would wield. *But he indicates that Christ's way to empire was impracticably spiritual.* If he would rule men, He must fool men ; must appeal to their selfishness, and tickle their conceit. To get the kingdoms of the world, the way, he suggests, is, *not Service, Truth, Love, Laying down life, but a little Kingcraft that he can teach Him.* We are assailed by the same temptation when wealth, honours, importance, are shown to be accessible, if we will only *compromise*, be less outspoken, humour the multitude, mix a little policy with our light and justice. And note carefully, that, *Whenever we take the worldly way of winning these things, we thereby fall down and worship Satan, for thereby we make him the providence in whom we trust, and the guide we follow* (Rom. 6 : 16).

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

12 ¶ Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee ;

10. Again the enemy "*finds nothing in Jesus.*" The Saviour does not look at the delightful end which Satan places before Him, but only at *the dubious way.* He has followed another Guide, and looked to another Giver to bestow the sovereignty which suits Him. The Bible again gives Him light and answer : **Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.** He bids him **Hence,** resolved to go uncrowned till God shall crown Him ; and to employ no art, but only Love, to win the empire of mankind. Our proper influence will come, if we deserve to have it. Seek no power save that which naturally grows out of the service you render to men. The enemy keeps no promise ; for "*all the kingdoms*" he gives, would prove, if gained by us, too small to satisfy us ; while all he gives he gives with only a brief title. Worship and serve God, expecting power from Him, and seeking it by lowly service ; and the power we really obtain is large, and the possession everlasting.

REST.

11. **The devil leaveth Him.** Luke adds, "*for a season.*" For the while he has exhausted all his arts. What a Saviour ! They who are not tempted cannot help us ; nor they who, being tempted, have fallen. But in Christ we have One "*in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace." **Angels came and ministered unto Him.** So it ever is. Heaven smiles, succours, and refreshes the faithful heart, and the strain of trial is more than repaired by its gracious ministries. The result of Satan's assault, and the Saviour's steadfastness, and the angels' ministry, is told by St. Luke, who adds (4 : 14), "**JESUS RETURNED IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT INTO GALILEE.**"

In the section which follows (vers. 12-25) we have, in brief epitome, a statement of work covering, doubtless, several months. Matthew seems to have limited his narrative to what he himself knew. Accordingly, we have to assume that, previously to what is next recorded, the visit to Cana of Galilee and Capernaum (John 2 : 1-12) had taken place ; also a visit to Jerusalem at the Passover feast (at which He works miracles and discourses with Nicodemus) (John 2 : 12-3 : 21), and the journey back to Galilee through Samaria, related in John 4 ;

13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim :

while the "*leaving Nazareth*" mentioned in ver. 13 is explained by the narrative of His visit to Nazareth given by St. Luke (4: 16-32). From John 3: 23-36 it is evident (1) that John continued baptizing for some months after he baptized Jesus; and (2) that he had changed his baptizing-place from Bethany (Revised Version, John 1: 28), somewhere near to Jericho, and had moved to Ænon, near to Salim, probably considerably higher up the river—the abundance of water permitting, and probably its greater nearness to Galilee, from which many of his noblest disciples had come, prompting him to carry his work on there in preference to the more southern station. In baptism there comes to Christ the power of work; in temptation that power is strengthened, and His plan of work grows clear. Thus in the power of the Spirit He has begun His work.

THE DAWN IN GALILEE.

13. **Dwelt in Capernaum.** The word *dwelt* suggests something like a home. Possibly Mary and "*His brethren*" removed permanently from Nazareth to this place (John 2: 12), where, with Peter and John and other disciples, and the nobleman whose son was healed (John 4: 46), and others, she might find fellowship and protection. Henceforth Capernaum is termed "*His own city*" (ch. 9: 1), and for a little while the loneliness, which prompted the expression, "*The Son of man hath not where to lay His head*" (ch. 8: 20), is deferred and falls not on Him. Nothing remains to show even where it stood. Possibly, as many authorities concur in suggesting, *Tell-Hûm* is its site, though Tristram's objections to this view seem unanswerable ("Land of Israel," 441-443). If it is, some ruins indicate its position, and among them the traces of a synagogue have recently been discovered by the Palestine Exploration Society, and found to be those of a building of good architecture. It was in the time of Christ "a city," and apparently the head-quarters for taxation and customs purposes on the lake; not very healthy, owing to the marsh land around, which, as we know from Josephus as well as the Gospels, induced a great deal of a virulent kind of fever. Galilee attracted the Saviour's first and chief work, partly, perhaps (1) because much more populous; (2) because its people were simpler and manlier and godlier than those in the south, where the worldliness of the priesthood and the privileges of the temple had corrupted them; and (3) because the intermingling with Gentiles, who were more numerous in Galilee than elsewhere, had given greater freedom of custom and

14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,
 15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea,
 beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles ;

16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light ; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

17 ¶ From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

18 ¶ And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea : for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

usage, and would give greater fitness for their work to converts who were to carry the gospel to a heathen world.

14-16. The prophecy is from Isa. 9, the most remarkable of Messianic prophecies. Matthew read his Bible with practical intent, and so fastens on a great word that promises special comfort to *his own locality*. His devout gratitude remembers his own former state as that of darkness and the shadow of death, and adores the Saviour as the **Great Light**, the Divine dawn, which has enlightened him. *There is darkness on God, on man, on duty, on salvation, on heaven, until our eyes rest on Christ. Prefer not the shadow of death to the Light of life.*—*Neglected districts and obscure souls get their turn.*

17. **Repent : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.** These are John's words, which Jesus is lowly enough to use and to instruct His disciples to use (ch. 10 : 7). Be more careful to utter truths than novelties. This brief word is the sum of all gospel preaching ; for God's words go out two and two—precept and promise never separate. It is fit for a universal message, for every soul needs to repent, and to every soul God's kingdom of grace and help is nigh.

THE FIRST APOSTLES.

18, 19, narrate the call of Peter and Andrew to the apostleship. In this there is a good deal worthy of our thoughts. Note : (1) This is not the first time He has seen Peter and Andrew. Andrew had followed Christ home immediately after His return from the temptation, and had brought Peter to see Him (John 1 : 40, 41). They had been with Him at Cana of Galilee, and seen His miracle there, and many other miracles at Capernaum and at Jerusalem (John 2 : 23). *The Saviour exhibits no haste, but gives all of us time to realize His claims and our duties.* (2) Both probably, Andrew certainly, had been disciples of John. They, who always choose and follow the best they find, are on their way to something better still. Every disciple of John to-day, *i.e.* every one hoping for the Light of life, will sooner or later reach it. (3) Fish abound in the lake, and a fisherman's calling on

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

such a squally sea was one of peril and of toil. A trade of any kind is a great education in temper, knowledge of human nature, self-denial. Christ prefers brave, good men to mere scholars. (4) Brothers can help each other greatly to be better. It is partly due to this fraternal helpfulness that amongst the twelve apostles there are three pairs of brothers. (5) The whole story of Peter's call is not given here, but is given by Luke (5 : 1-11). The Saviour had borrowed Peter's boat for a floating pulpit, after a night of fruitless toil. After His sermon, Peter had somewhat reluctantly obeyed Christ's order to cast their nets for a draught—only to find them filled with so great a multitude of fish that it threatened to sink both his own ship and that of James and John who came to aid them. *Something in this miracle went straight to Peter's conscience* (Luke 5 : 8), and told how the Lord had read and marked what inwardly he was debating. *Probably a conflict between the duty of following Christ and the fear of exposing his family to want was distracting him ; and the Saviour, by this miracle, at once reprovcs and destroys his fears.* (6) Peter and Andrew were "washing" (Luke 5 : 2), John and James "mending their nets" (ver. 21), when they were called. We read of no one being called to the apostleship while "standing idle in the markets." No indolent man will make either an apostle or a teacher. (7) The Saviour needs fellow-labourers in the kingdom of God, and converted men are fit to help in the grandest work in which God engages—viz. saving men. (8) The best of men and women have always listened to and obeyed Christ's call, and grown better by doing it. (9) *To make a great man, give him a great work to do.* (10) The great encouragement held out is that, following Him, they will be made by Him into fishers of men, i.e. gain power over men to draw them out of one state, perdition, into another state, grace—the grandest usefulness that the highest ambition can covet. (11) And lastly observe who makes ministers, and who are made by Him. *Only Jesus can make "a fisher of men ;" and only those who follow Him, in bold self-denial and loving discipleship, can be made such even by Him.*

20. They straightway left their nets, and followed Him. Observe : (1) The noble decision : had they not done it straightway, perhaps it would have been left undone altogether. (2) How great are the sacrifices many make for Christ ! (3) How little they knew the greatness of grace, usefulness, glory, reward, to which their simple act was leading them ! Too many hear the Saviour's call to follow Him, and doom themselves to uselessness and misery by disobeying it.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets ; and he called them.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

23 ¶ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

24 And his fame went throughout all Syria : and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy ; and he healed them.

21, 22. What a "*Fisher of men*" is Christ ! What a draught for one cast of His net ! Truly the power of the Holy Spirit rested on Him ! What a group of men from one town ! Good men grow in clusters. You may sometimes get twenty schools, not one of which produces a missionary ; you will find one, no larger than any other, which will send forth a band. *One would like to know more about Jonah and his wife*, the parents of Peter and Andrew ; and of Zebedee and Salome, the parents of James and John. These were partners with Peter and Andrew in business, and became partners in the greater business of winning souls. Note : That the decision of the first two made the second two obey more easily. What a blessed power sometimes pertains to friendship, when it assists the great decisions ! Love, and you can win men. Was Zebedee bewildered or delighted, when they left all and followed Christ ? Happy parents, whose only trial is the consecration of their children !

LARGER LABOURS.

23, 24. Is Jesus strengthened by their prompt obedience ? It almost seems so from the mighty energy of testimony and miracle which He manifests. Whenever a sinner repents, or a saint renews his consecration, He goes on His way rejoicing. Note here : (1) *Synagogue* means a chapel. In most villages one would be found ; in cities several ; in Jerusalem it is said there were between four and five hundred. Their officers—ten in number usually—were all *laymen* : the three chief ("*rulers of the synagogue*") being virtually justices of the peace ; the rest were readers and expounders and deacons (Lightfoot, "*Horæ Hebraicæ*," on this verse). (2) The combination of teaching and healing in the Saviour's work. The work of Christ and of the Church of Christ is *Universal Helpfulness*. All good work is God's work. We are short of the temper of Christ, if we slight any sorrow, any trouble, any burden of men. (3) No trouble is too hard for Christ to cure ; and few troubles are too hard for the Church of Christ. (4) What a strange following has Christ ! Those,

25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan.

whom man despises or despairs of, gather about Christ. (5) He gathers large numbers of disciples from the afflicted and the broken-hearted. (6) *Every man had a great creed after Christ had healed him.*

25. "*Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.*" Simple-hearted Israelites from Galilee; many heathen from the semi-heathen cities of Decapolis; strict Jews from Jerusalem and Judæa; and the half-foreign Jews from beyond Jordan. The fair beginning of His kingdom gives promise of the vast expansion awaiting it. (1) Observe the sacred curiosity of these crowds. (2) Lament that there is so little of it in most of us. (3) Mark and covet the light by which it was rewarded.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT SERMON.

This Sermon on the Mount is not the first sermon of the Saviour, for in the previous chapter (ver. 23) we read of the Saviour "*teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom.*" But gathering disciples by these earlier preachings, this is the first great sermon addressed to those thus gathered. Where it was delivered, we do not know; but many spots in the neighbourhood of the Sea of Galilee would furnish exactly the meeting-place which the multitude of people required.

The question has been somewhat embarrassed by a supposed contradiction between Matthew's account, *He went up into a mountain*, and Luke's, "*He came down with them [the twelve], and stood in the plain . . . and the whole multitude sought to touch Him: for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all*" (Luke 6: 17-19). But there is really no difficulty, for "*The Plain*" was a mountain to those proceeding from the level of the Sea of Galilee (six hundred feet below the Mediterranean); while the spot from which He spoke was naturally lower than the spot to which He had climbed for the privacy of a night of prayer with God. We are to suppose, therefore, a vast company gathered round the Saviour in some hollow of the plain, from one side of which He addressed them. And thence the great King makes His throne-speech to the multitude of souls around Him—and to all tribes, kindreds, peoples, and tongues, to whom His words are carried. There

1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

is but one judgment concerning this sermon—that it is the greatest utterance in human language. Since it was uttered, its standard has been that which all who know it have owned to be Divine. It has been the comforter and quickener of all ages; it has sweetened life, and has given to it much of the beauty of heaven.

In dealing with vers. 1-16, which contain the Beatitudes, observe: (1) Their meaning ought not to be impaired by inserting, mentally, any words of explanation. Christ says not, "*Blessed are they who feel poor in spirit,*" nor "*Blessed are they that mourn for sin.*" The Saviour has to be regarded in the words He left out as well as in those He put in, and we must not enfeeble His meaning by putting in words of our own. (2) Every word is a paradox, and contradicts the usual thoughts of men. The world's beatitudes run, "*Blessed are the rich, the prosperous, the high-spirited,*" and so on. (3) The courage of these great utterances should be noted. The Saviour takes the abounding trouble of the world, which drives onlookers to despair, and calls it *Blessing*; thus justifying Providence, and suggesting that the world, with all its trials, is well ordered, and that we, who deem trials only mischievous, misread them.

1. He sat down. The usual attitude of the teacher. His disciples came unto Him. And these are the persons directly addressed by Him; the rest overhear.

THE STRANGE BEATITUDES.

3. Blessed are the poor in spirit. The benediction uttered on these, **Their's is the kingdom of heaven**, includes all the specific benedictions which follow. We therefore take this as *the general statement, which includes all the rest*. The mourners, the meek, the hungerers, are all *poor in soul*; i.e. are all in extreme need of something they have not yet got. And the Saviour greets all poverty-stricken hearts with this great benediction. The word, therefore, evidently means exactly what it says, *Blessed is every soul that has room for mercy; for I bring to it all the wealth of the Kingdom of Heaven*. Room to hold mercy is what Christ wanted, and still wants to find. Laodiceans who are "*rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,*" are envied by the world, but are to be pitied by the wise; for their little perishing wealth deludes them, and prevents their seeking and getting *the true riches*. They clutch handfuls of dust, and so cannot take the gold of the kingdom. The "*deceitfulness of riches*" deludes them.

4 Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted.

But whoever has need of soul, be it need of Grace, or Forgiveness, or strengthening, or light, or joy, he is congratulated by Christ on the ground that the kingdom provides for him, and without money or price brings to him, all the good he needs. Those who have are not so enviable as those who lack ; for no good already held is comparable to the good of which the needy may possess themselves. Moreover, outward wealth tends to lessen and destroy inward longing, to breed an ignoble content, and to make feelings coarse. Therefore Christ says, "Happy are they who are wantful in soul." If we could realize this, how it would change all our view of life ! Mark its lessons : (1) *Desire* is the only condition of mercy. (2) There is a wealth that impoverishes by keeping out God's wealth ; there is a poverty that enriches us by admitting the wealth of God. (3) God's grace, like God's air, fills every vacuum. (4) Our pity and our envy generally settle on the wrong persons. (5) How God-like of the Saviour to bring all His wealth and offer it to the children of the needy !

4 Blessed are they that mourn. What a range there is in this benediction ! The world is not so sad as we often affirm it to be. It is more than a vale of tears. But yet sorrow is a very large share of life.

"The air is full of farewells to the dying,
 And mournings for the dead ;
 The heart of Rachel, for her children crying,
 Will not be comforted !"

And while some mourn lost friends, others mourn lost fortune, or lost health, or lost time, or, saddest lamentation of all, lost character. What can be said of this overspreading shadow ? Buddha sought to comfort the mother whose babe had died, by sending her round the city with a bowl, instructing her to beg a peppercorn from each house, but to take none from any house where parent, spouse, or child, or slave had died. And when, having fulfilled her instruction, she returned without a single grain, he pointed to the commonness of sorrow, and exhorted her to endure what all must suffer. His whole religious system was directed to *training men so that they should not feel sorrow*. Buddha's view is the world's view—that sorrow is the great evil ; that its commonness is our only comfort ; and how to endure it is our chief concern. But the Saviour's view is directly opposite. He does not say, "Pitiable are the mourners ;" but **Blessed** are they. And this, on the ground *that for every sorrow* a consolation is provided, so rich that it more than compensates for the loss of what is grieved for. **For they shall be comforted.** Not, of course, in spite of themselves.

5 Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth.

But still in the great sense that *He had brought, and could impart, and sought to impart a comfort for every woe, from a child's little grief to a David's sorrow over Absalom. All griefs can in Christ find comfort.* The truth of this is known to multitudes that none can number. For the consolations of God are great. Sorrows, in innumerable instances, get that which turns them into the greatest blessings of life. Few ever have *Serenity* except after comforted sorrow. Few realize the existence of the other world till it holds some friend dear to their aching heart. Sorrow refines our souls, awakes pity, sympathy, and love. The storms of life strand men on the Rock of ages, and bless them by linking them to Him. The sweetest poets, the greatest prophets, have been made such by hallowed grief. "*I know that my Redeemer liveth*" is the warble of a broken but comforted heart. For whenever our hearts will admit them, they receive consolations, views, strengthenings, hopes, relationships, which more than compensate their loss. Pity the sorrowless. "*The night also is God's*" (Ps. 74 : 16).

5. **The meek.** The circle named by each new benediction is smaller than that of the one preceding. There are more "*Poor in spirit*" than "*Mourners*;" there are more "*Mourners*" than **Meek**. Each Beatitude rises to a higher mark of God's image than the one before it. "*Meekness*" is a rare and noble grace, of which the world mistakes both the nature and the reward. The world thinks "*meekness*" a respectable name for "*weakness*;" the limp spirit, which has not nerve to resist, which seeks the shade because it cannot shine. And, misconceiving its nature, it pities its fate, thinking the meek are always overlooked, depressed, thrust on one side, sacrificed to every one else. Meekness, however, is something quite different from this. It is a power of enduring, which requires strength of an exalted kind. It is the spirit so *rich in inward peace*, that it can "*bless them that curse*," and "*pray for them that despitefully use it*;" so calm, that it pities and forgives those injuring it; so lowly, it is content with any lot, however humble, and any work, however obscure. *It has God*, and therefore is without discontent, pride, resentment, or ambition. It is a grace not easily reached; pride, selfishness, and anger, being all strong enemies to it. *It grows from self-renunciation*. It is purity and holiness *in their first form*. It is the grace that confesses Christ, even when shame and reproach are its only reward. The grace whose aspiration stoops not to the vulgar aims of men. "*Learn of Me*," says Christ, "*for I am meek and lowly in heart*." Being Himself meek, one can understand how He should bless the meek, as having

6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

one secret of His peace. But the world pities them. To the world the meek seem not to know how to protect themselves, and to be bound, therefore, to suffer in all conflicts with the selfish, the angry, the ambitious. But the exact opposite is true. Meekness has this as its peculiar blessing: It inherits the earth. Not heaven only, but earth. And in the fullest sense this promise is true; for: (1) Their contentment enjoys all they have. (2) Peace prospers. (3) Men's over-sharpness cuts themselves more than others. (4) Honourable action, not quarrelling, finds wealth. (5) Whoso can control his own spirit, and is not swayed by self-interest, is the man whom all want for arbiter, judge, chief. Not pride, nor selfishness, but meekness, still inherits the earth.

6. They which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Another round of this ladder of grace again leads us to a higher level. The meek sought to do no wrong, and so preferred to suffer. But that meekness grows into a great longing to do all that is right, as well as avoid what is wrong. For Righteousness throughout Old and New Testaments alike means, not mere integrity and justice, but the Goodness which is full of love. In many places the term "*Righteousness of God*" is used for the grace of God; and very frequently "*Righteousness*" means "*Generosity*," as in Ps. 112: 9. It is the glory of this world that there are some in it who hunger and thirst after goodness, not after the reputation for it, or the reward of it, but after itself; some to whom goodness seems the great fortune they should try to make, the blessed heaven they should seek to reach. Some are never satisfied with themselves. Their lowliness grows with their attainments; their standard rises with each success; they follow after goodness as after the pearl of great price. None but God knows how wise they are; for the only fortune that endures is Character. Gold we must leave behind us; but goodness we may carry with us, and will find it bloom sweetly into perfect goodness above. "To be" rather than "to have" is therefore every wise man's wish; and to be Good rather than Great or clever. In such Christ rejoices, and to such this benediction is given: **They shall be filled.** *They are so now in many instances.* They find themselves aided beyond all hope by the love of God, which smiles on them; by the forgiveness, which frees them from the load of sin; by the grace, that fosters their desire and gives power to heart and will to effect it. So that it is marvellous how in some lives we see goodness grow from faintest beginnings until it reaches the love which is capable of high sacrifice; the constancy that

7 Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.

can endure great sufferings for truth's sake ; the service in which the energies seem to reach creative power ; the purity which glows with loving brightness. Many even here are so filled, that we gaze upon them amazed as they stand like the burning bush, glorified by the living radiance of God about them. Think not the effort after righteousness something doubtful of success. **Hunger**, and thou shalt be filled, even *here* ; while hereafter the complete sanctity, the stainless perfection, the full stature, will be reached, and "*we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*" Remember : (1) Character conditions everything. (2) Likeness to God carries with it every delight that makes God's heart its home. (3) Leave to others more vulgar aspirations, and seek thou God's kingdom and God's righteousness.

7. The merciful. Still we rise, and the circle of those receiving benedictions becomes more select. "*Hunger and thirst after righteousness*" bloom into **Mercy**. Saints are never content with bare uprightness or mere propriety of life ; they seek to be benefactors as well as faultless. It might be expected there would be many merciful ; as there is so much need of mercy, and such obvious beauty and goodness in it. But the number of reasons forthcoming for not showing mercy is sufficient excuse for all but the true-hearted. "So many need help ;" "So few deserve it ;" "We can do so little ;" "So-and-so, who is richer or nearer, ought to help ;" "People are ungrateful ;" "Charity begins at home." These reasons suffice to prove to selfish people that they need not go out of their way to show mercy. So the needy are many, but their friends are few. There are some, however, who are "*Followers of God,*" and therefore "*walk in Love,*" and believe mercy to be the chief business of God and man ; who instruct the ignorant, house the orphan, help the wretched, and share the griefs of the sorrowful, and think it more blessed to give than to receive ; whose hearts have no bolts to their gates, but are open for all to enter and find a home. The world does not think such are blessed. They seem to have nothing they call their own, neither time, feelings, strength, nor money. They seem foolish to waste so much of life. They think they will get no thanks for it ; that all are foolish who do not know how to look after their own interests. But the Saviour calls them **Blessed**, and gives His reason : **For they shall obtain mercy.** Like others, they have needs—sins to be forgiven, sorrows to be comforted, trials in which they want a friend. And this is their reward : God is merciful to the merciful, and His heart overflows with love, pity, and help for those whose hearts are tender to others. To be befriended by God in all ills and needs and

8 Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God.

sorrows, and at last in judgment, oh what a reward ! I add two or three observations which may remove or lessen a difficulty felt by some at *Mercy, instead of Faith*, being here made the condition of receiving mercy. Note : (1) God educates us by subjecting us to the sort of treatment we give to others. Jacob, full of faults, is sent to Laban, full of the same faults, to see how he likes the sins when he is the sufferer from them, which he had thought lightly of when he was the doer of them. The world is a looking-glass ; we find the face we bring, and kindness meets with kindness, honour with honour, wrong with wrong. It is in the line of all His principles of government, that the merciful receive mercy. (2) The merciful can, others cannot, believe in mercy. Be selfish, and you imagine God to be so ; be loving, and you know and believe that God is love ; you trust Him, and His love flows forth. It is the greatest punishment of selfishness that it believes nothing ; it is the greatest reward of Love that it "*believeth all things.*" All salvation is the grace of Jesus. They who trust Him are saved ; and the merciful always trust Him. (3) *If you would find a cure for the scepticism of your intellect or for your doubts of your personal acceptance with God—Be merciful.*

8. Pure in heart. For these, the world thinks, we must look in heaven only. For, while it admits that great differences exist in the comparative purity of men's lives, yet it suspects that hearts are all similarly, and perhaps equally, actuated by selfishness. In some cases, the world argues, it takes a coarse form ; in others, a religious or refined form. But all, they think, are seeking their own interest, and no heart could bear exposure to the light. But Jesus deems some pure in heart. Some are refined by sorrow, sanctity, and mercy, till the low thought is a pain to them, and the selfish thought a shame, their hearts aspire to and reach all that is "*pure, lovely, and of good report.*" They seek the company of God, and desire to do nothing that grieves Him ; they follow a pillar of cloud and fire, and live amidst Divine engagements and delights. The world pities such, as being *outsiders to the whole game of life*. But the Saviour greets them with benediction : **For, He says, they shall see God.** This is a marvellous promise, including many things. It promises that earth shall be turned into heaven, or, like the Isle of Patmos, be a mount of vision, from which they "*behold the King in His beauty, and the land which is very far off ;*" that heaven at last shall be reached, and they shall have the vision of God, which will perfect their likeness to Him. This promise is ever fulfilled. While the impure cannot see God, have no direct perception of His character, perhaps not even of His

9 Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God.

existence, the pure see earth full of God, see Him in Nature, in Providence, in the guidance of their own lives, filling all things with Himself. While others look on Jesus, and see nothing in Him to trust or love, they see the glory of God in His face, and feel Him to be their God. The darkness which distorts the aspect of God and alarms others, has passed away, and the view of the infinite love comes to them in its beauty. Keep the heart pure ; for a pure heart is Sight and Light ; and without it none can know God.

9. The peacemakers. A still more select class, that deal with larger troubles than even the merciful set themselves to relieve. For other troubles are single disasters, but a quarrel is a whole family of calamities. We enter quarrels "with a light heart," but soon find they are the heaviest of all afflictions. They rob us of the rest and joy of friendship ; of the leisure of heart which can rejoice in other things ; of our self-respect ; of power to pray. We grow mean by excusing ourselves and accusing others. We get absorbed in the one unpleasant business. We grow cold to other friends for not sufficiently taking our part. Everything coarse, selfish, and vindictive in us has a chance of growing apace. Yet, notwithstanding its mischief, strife abounds, and few are wise enough to profit by others' experience, and avoid it. And the worst of it is, many friends inflame the quarrels they ought to allay. It is so easy to get credit for friendship by agreeing with another that he has been ill used, that many foment strife. But some grieve over it ; set themselves to pray for its end ; are ready to suffer from both sides to reconcile both ; are brave enough to bear the anger of opposite indignations, to tell each side its fault, to implore each side to repair the wrong or make or accept the due acknowledgment. When such men and women are trusted, are eminent for freedom from the faults they would heal, are kind, judicious, and have the regard of those they would reconcile, they will often heal the breach, and restore love to its old channels and joy to its old haunts. The world, however, only pities them for meddling needlessly ; sees what they have to suffer on either hand ; and avoids what it deems their folly. But they have a great reward in the result of their effort, in the gratitude which at last they reap, and in the benediction here uttered ; for Jesus says, **They shall be called the children of God.** That is, *they now have God's own nature, the very feelings that animate God's heart ; and one day they shall be owned as His.* For God is Love, and therefore the great Peacemaker, and peacemaking is the family likeness. To be, and to be at last proclaimed to be, God's dear children, is the lot of the **peacemakers.** Therefore seek this blessedness by (1) *Doing nothing*

10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

to break peace; (2) doing nothing to increase existing variance; (3) doing all in your power to heal strife.

10-12. Persecuted for righteousness' sake. We come to the last of the Beatitudes—the highest; that which greets *The noble army of Martyrs*. Christ includes reproach and saying all manner of evil against them falsely, under the general head of persecution. It seems strange that there should be such a thing as Persecution for righteousness' sake. But there ever has been and will be. *The world forbids us to be either worse or better than itself*. Worse, we injure it; better, we shame it. It hates "*the troubler of Israel*." Every pure life is a call to repentance, and a warning of judgment, and is therefore hated. God seems present in the godly, and His presence is oppressive. Therefore righteousness is ever persecuted, and often even unto death. Hatred will pretend to be a zeal for orthodoxy or resentment against pride, but its source is deep and evil. It thus comes to pass that, whilst "*the way of the transgressors is hard*," the way of God's saints is also hard. Many, therefore, pity God's saints above all men. Their's seems suffering so needless, and so fruitless of anything but pain. But here *the Saviour treats their pain as the highest of all dignities and honours*. The world is full of suffering for its faults' sake. They who suffer for goodness, faithfulness, love, have pains and honours akin to those of Calvary. They are the leaders of souls; the winners of freedom; the destroyers of error; they make wildernesses to blossom as the rose, and lead men back to God. There seems, perhaps, something strange in the Saviour closing with the benediction with which he opened: **Their's is the kingdom of heaven**. But it is not strange; for when the spiral circle of graces is complete, a fresh round is begun, only on a higher level. *The persecuted come to a second poverty of spirit, more keen and more varied than that with which they started. And the old benediction is therefore theirs afresh*. Theirs are all the blessings of the Kingdom—strength, fellowship, peace, hope, the smile of God, grace. He adds, Their reward is **great in heaven**. Let us not lose that reward.

THE APPLICATION OF THE BEATITUDES.

Having thus delineated the various graces, He proceeds, in vers. 12-16, to urge the disciples to cultivate and to use the powers these give them.

13 ¶ Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

They are **Salt** and **Light** (vers. 13, 14) when they have the qualities He has described. I suppose the Saviour, in these words, denotes the two chief sorts of usefulness—*Influence* and *Guidance*.

13. Salt of the earth. The good have an *Influence*, subtle, unconscious. Like **Salt**, they keep evil from spreading, and, by the spell of their influence, give goodness space to grow. In this comparison note that the Saviour represents true goodness as a stronger thing than evil—something that keeps evil down. There was and is in Palestine a common kind of salt that (being impure) sometimes loses its savour. *We must keep assiduously all good we have reached, in order to keep others from evil.*

14. Light of the world. It wants *Guidance*, and good lives give it. A good man is what the prophet describes as “a word behind thee, saying, *This is the way, walk ye in it;*” “a pillar of cloud and fire.”

16. Our duty is to let our light shine. Not to tell our goodness, for words obscure the light; but to let our goodness live itself forth. And especially (as light is distinguished from good works) to let the gospel light, which moves and leads us, be well known, for then the good works done will be understood. There are many bushels hiding lights. False Humility, Indolence, Fear, Worldliness, are all *Bushels* hiding light. But Love, Diligence, Courage, Obedience, make good *Candlesticks*. On them let thy light be set.

THE LAW MAGNIFIED.

A new section evidently commences with the seventeenth verse. The Beatitudes painted Christian character in simple form; the remainder of the chapter shows Christian duty rather in relation to old Jewish Law. Already men had got the idea that Christ's salvation was to be on easier terms than those the Pharisees had preached. Neither He nor John had called to the observance of ritualistic traditions. Baptism and confession of sin were called for instead of legal righteousness; and somehow not one of the Beatitudes seemed to bless a Pharisee. There was, therefore, a suspicion that Jesus was really about to relax the law of duty. *There is always an opposition shown by the self-righteous to any doctrine which brings a hope of salvation to sinners.* The Saviour here answers by anticipation this objection.

17 ¶ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

17. **The Law, or the prophets.** So the Old Testament is described, from its two principal parts. All true religious teaching blends these two characters—precept and promise. **I came (R. V.).** Not "*I was born.*" *He was already in existence,* and, from another sphere, came to this. **Not to destroy, but to fulfil (R. V.).** It is true Christ has "*abolished the law of commandments contained in ordinances*" (Eph. 2: 15), and so seems to destroy the Law. But He has enforced with larger meaning and authority *the Love which "is the fulfilling of the Law"* (Rom. 13: 10), and so the Law finds itself spiritualized, enlarged, made more constraining, and better obeyed. Duty is not dethroned, or made less by Christ, but enthroned. The Saviour fulfilled the Law by: (1) Obeying it; and thus (2) Adorning it; (3) by Voluntarily suffering its penalty, and thus enhancing its authority; (4) by Elevating all its precepts into principles, and demanding more while giving grace to do more. (For illustration of Christ's way of fulfilling, see His treatment of the sixth commandment in vers. 21, 22.)

18. **Duty cannot alter.** While the moral character of God remains the same, our duty, which is to *be like God,* remains unchangeable. *The gospel does not let us off our duties, but brings grace by which they can be done.* **Jot or tittle.** Something in Hebrew analogous to our dots over the *i*'s and crossings of the *t*'s. The least particles of duty stand binding for ever.

SMALL DUTIES.

19. We are apt to draw distinctions between important and unimportant duties, duties necessary and duties neglectable. And "*False Prophets*" always seek (ch. 7: 13-15) to make themselves acceptable by making omissions from the code of duty. There are less and larger duties; but the least duty is duty—something to be done; which cannot be neglected without guilt and mischief, and cannot be observed without blessing and reward. Compare "*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much*" (Luke 16: 10). Keep a tender conscience to all the claims which God or man makes upon your honour. Let every teacher note the combination, **Do and teach.**

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

21 ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill ; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment :

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment : and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council : but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

20. This utterance must have sounded most mysterious, as the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees seemed to far exceed what was possible to ordinary men. Yet the Saviour requires them to excel in righteousness those who thought they excelled all other men. They only aimed at external propriety ; He requires inward life. They wanted legal faultlessness ; He demands love. He wants a new heart ; the spirit of a child ; not a fashion of outward seeming, but "*Christ living in us.*" There is too much merely formal goodness about all of us ; we want life, and life more abundantly. The Saviour proceeds to give special instances of this "*fulfilling*" of the Law by taking and expanding special precepts. He begins with

THE LAW AGAINST MURDER.

21, 22. Revised Version reads rightly, Said to them of old time: The precept is the sixth commandment as given by Moses, but with the addition made by tradition—a threat of earthly punishment, which, *though meant to impress*, really weakened the force of the precept by overshadowing the judgment of God. There seem to be three grades of punishment and guilt named in these verses. The judgment is the assize in every town, which was competent to punish murder by death with the sword. The council, *i.e.* the Sanhedrim, took cognizance of heresy, and punished it by death by stoning. Hell fire ; or, "*The fire of the Valley of Hinnom,*" seems to have been a combination of death with ignominy, and to have been the judgment on apostates. Gehenna, *i.e.* the Valley of Hinnom, was "the common sink of the whole city, whither all filth and all kinds of nastiness met. It was probably the common burial-place of the city. And there was also a continual fire, whereby bones and other filthy things were consumed, lest they might offend or infect the city" (Lightfoot, "*Horæ Hebraicæ,*" ii. 38). It thus became the symbol of hell. The words of Christ, therefore, are very clear in their general scope. He teaches us that *Anger has some of the sin of murder in it ; that Contempt of others has the sin of heresy and schism in it ; and that Despair of any is of the nature of apostasy from God,—Raca being a contemptuous expression ; and the word Fool carrying an expression of*

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee ;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him ; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

loathing chiefly on account of moral or spiritual folly. In this way the sixth command is "*fulfilled*" by Christ. Remember, God's law is "exceeding broad," and searches hearts as well as actions.

THE LAW OF PRAYER.

23, 24. There is often a temptation to use religion as an escape from duty. *It seems easier to neglect duty and get forgiven for neglect, than to do duty.* The Saviour, in these verses, forbids such abuse of God's mercy-seat. *If we have injured a brother, we must own and, as far as it is in our power, repair the injury before God will listen to a prayer for its forgiveness.* It is an affront to ask pardon for any sin of which we do not repent ; and true repentance always includes the three things, "*Contritio cordis, confessio oris, satisfactio vitæ*"—"Sorrow of heart, confession of mouth, reparation in life."

25, 26. A further enforcement of the same subject. We must, according to the two previous verses, confess to our injured brother if we would secure the forgiveness of God. According to these two verses, we must make our peace with the injured brother if we would escape the penalty of God. *There is vast danger in leaving a wrong unacknowledged and unrepaired.* It works mischief in our souls ; it sets God's providence and judgment alike against us. Therefore there should be the swiftest and heartiest efforts we can put forth to be at peace with all men. Many would easily be "right with God," if they would but make themselves right with man.

26. A very solemn word, although probably referring almost exclusively to penalties in this life. The solemn lessons are these : (1) *Every one whom we have wronged has a mastery over us.* (2) *God backs up his claims, from love to him and love to us.* (3) *There are many prisons into which wrong-doers are thrown—Suffering ; Retaliation ; Fear ; God's frown, and the Withdrawal of His comforts.* (4) *God does not let us off the doing of any duty.* *Even when He forgives our neglect, He requires us to retrace our steps and do the neglected duty.* God loves us too well not to keep us up to the mark. Neglect no duty, therefore, under the idea that a free salvation makes it safe to do so. You will have to do it to the uttermost farthing.

27 ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery :

28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

THE LAW OF PURITY.

27-30. The seventh commandment they regarded as forbidding only the act of sin, and this only as it might be committed with a woman already another man's wife. Their loose views on divorce—alluded to by Christ in the next paragraph—tended still further to enfeeble the restraints of this precept, although they professed great zeal for the enforcement of the law. The Saviour, therefore, gives His reading of it.

28. Looketh on a woman to lust after her is, according to Christ, adultery of the heart. Observe carefully that Christ does not call the passing appetite, awaked by a casual glance, Adultery. Appetites that are natural are not sinful : *they become such only when unrestrained by principles of righteousness and honour.* What is here called adultery is, not the casual glance, but the indulging in the gazing on that which stirs the animal passions : “ *Looking in order to lust ;* ” and that whether the gaze be on one married or unmarried (a woman), the Saviour including all fornication under the head of adultery. A tender conscience may rightly remember that Lord Bacon's remark concerning the harmlessness of the lie that “ *passeth through* ” the mind without *lodging* in it, has valuable suggestions concerning other faults. Dr. Morison, in his commentary on this verse, quotes a saying given by Luther : “ While we cannot hinder a bird flying over our head, we can well enough hinder its building its nest in our hair.” With this precaution against the distress that some pure souls may needlessly suffer, let us weigh carefully the solemn protest on the guilt of impure desires and thoughts.

THE DISCIPLINE OF PURITY,

29, 30, is given in the next two verses. The great secret of the exclusion of evil from the soul is the absorption of the soul with good. But in addition it is necessary, if one would keep his heart pure, to practise the most rigorous self-denial in all matters tending to promote impurity. Through the eye a man sees ; through the hand he seizes. The Saviour, by ordering the plucking out of the lusting

31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

eye, means that *at all sacrifices* we should, when free to do so, avoid whatever sights move the animal passions; and, by ordering the cutting off the right hand, that at all sacrifices we avoid whatever could facilitate the commission of sin. The prudence that avoids what stirs lust is a higher virtue than the presumption that needlessly enters into temptation to it. This precept reaches far, and requires the avoidance of such amusements and sights as stir the animal passions, and of all impure literature. It requires of many that they forego entirely the use of alcoholic drinks, as these tend to inflame the animal passions. In its wider scope it carries many suggestions of grave importance: (1) The inexpediency of delaying marriage longer than is absolutely necessary. (2) The supreme expediency of every marriage being a marriage of love. For a prolific source of impurity is found in marriages whose motive is money, or convenience, or lust. **Thy whole body . . . cast into hell.** Note the awfulness of the penalties of uncleanness in the Saviour's judgment! Some, alas! treat impurity as a very light sin. *It is a very grievous one*, degrading seducer and seduced; animalizing the whole nature; and, much more frequently than is realized, infecting the wrongdoer, and sometimes his family after him, with the most horrible of all our modern diseases. The young should heed this teaching of the Saviour's, and avoid the indulgence of lust, and *all provocations to it*, as they would hell.

THE LAW OF DIVORCE.

31, 32. The subject of Adultery naturally leads to the subject of Divorce. Without this further precept, the precepts just given would have been constantly neglected, since most of the Jews followed the last great teacher of their nation—Hillel—in holding that Moses permitted divorce *for any reason, serious or slight*, which made a wife distasteful to her husband; and required only that *she should have her freedom restored* by a "*Bill of Divorcement.*" (See on ch. 19: 3-11.) And many, therefore, deemed it quite right that when a man saw any woman whom he desired, he should divorce his wife and marry her. *This was their way of avoiding fornication.* But the Saviour sanctions no such sinful way of avoiding sin. And without stating now the reasons He gives later (ch. 19: 3-9), He lays down the law, that only fornication on the part of a wife gives the husband the right to divorce her. As in any other, so in the marriage contract,

33 ¶ Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths :

34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all ; neither by heaven ; for it is God's throne :

35 Nor by the earth ; for it is his footstool : neither by Jerusalem ; for it is the city of the great King.

36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

one party ceases to be bound by a mutual contract when the other party breaks it. Because fornication breaks the marriage contract, it liberates the innocent spouse. For fornication the Saviour permits a man to divorce his wife. When so divorced, another man may, without sin, marry her. But to divorce a woman not self-divorced by unfaithfulness, or to marry her when unrighteously divorced, is committing, or causing to commit adultery. The strictness of the marriage bond is the security of morals and of family welfare, and all should unite in opposing the arguments and movements for permitting divorce for any reason short of the act which ruptures the bond between man and wife. If a marriage be an unhappy one, there is nothing which will so much repay the sufferers from it as patience and meekness.

THE LAW OF OATHS.

33-37. From this and other evidence it is obvious that the truth in ordinary speech was very rare in Israel. They might not take the name of God "*in vain*," *i.e.* to support a falsehood. They, therefore, set themselves to support it by something sounding very like the name of God, and which might be thought to be used as an equivalent for His name, which reverence prevented their using. The practice still exists in Syria, where Jews and Mohammedans alike swear to almost every statement which they make.

34. Swear not at all. This is the Saviour's clear and solemn utterance, binding us in all our private intercourse to abstain from those invocations of God's witness to our truthfulness, which "*come of evil*"—arise either from our desire to deceive, or others' proneness to suspect. Speaking only of ordinary speech, we probably ought not to extend these words so as to take them as forbidding oaths in Courts of Law. The folly and evil of enacting that oaths shall be taken in Courts of Law is a relic of the dark ages, and loudly cries for reform ; for it is needless to require oaths when you might secure the result by attaching to false witness the penalties now attached to perjury. It is unfair to use the leverage of an imprecation on one's immortal existence to assist the comparatively small ends which are pursued in

37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea ; Nay, nay : for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

38 ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth :

39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.

courts of justice. It leads to freer use of falsehood in ordinary speech, and to various subterfuges, such as "kissing the thumb" instead of the Testament, by which men think they may swear falsely safely. It is, therefore, to be hoped that before long no English judge or magistrate shall be entitled to ask a man to pray that, if he tells not the truth, God shall withhold from him His help in the great day of judgment. Such an oath is, as usually administered, a shocking profanity. At the same time, certain considerations indicate that while the legislature sins in demanding an oath, a witness would not sin in taking it. For (1) the Saviour is here speaking only of ordinary speech. (2) When *adjured* by Caiaphas, He Himself responded, thereby admitting the compulsion of the oath. (3) Paul frequently takes oaths (Rom. 9 : 1 ; 2 Cor. 1 : 23, and 11 : 31 ; Gal. 1 : 20, etc.). And (4) it is one of those things whose faults lie, not in their essence, but in their intention. Note that all subterfuges adopted by the false are vain. The oath by heaven, or Jerusalem, or one's head—are all taken by Christ as oaths which bring God into the matter ; the Lord filling heaven's throne, being Jerusalem's King, and Creator and Upholder of our life.

37. The precept of Jesus requires that *simple truth* shall be our speech : *the simplicity* helping the *truth*, and the truth needing nothing but simplicity. It is one of the most difficult of all duties to speak only the truth, but it is one of the most richly rewarded.

THE LAW OF MEEKNESS.

38-41. The precept of Moses, **An eye for an eye**, was meant to prevent excessive revenge, the *tendency of all retaliation being to exceed the injury which provokes it*. To avenge an insult with death has often been deemed a point of honour. In order to restrain this vengeful excess, Moses ordains, *as a law to guide the judges*, **An eye for an eye**. The kind of punishment inflicted also suited a time when there were no prisons, when fines, bodily penalties, or death were the only alternatives. And, moreover, *as the person suffering bodily injuries would generally be the poor and dependent class*, this precept had the even level of justice about it. But the precept ordained to restrain was held to sanction revenge. The Saviour, not speaking of judicial

41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

43 ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

penalties, but of private life, forbids revenge altogether. In the spirit in which He accepted Calvary, He enjoins on all, **Resist not evil.** And the spirit of His precept is, that we must substitute meekness for revenge. The absolute suppression of the retaliating spirit is what the Saviour asks. The turning the left cheek, after the right is smitten, giving more than injustice compels, doing more than oppression requires, are forms of precept whose force is simply this: Endure all in love, and let meekness suppress all resentment. The greatness of God is in this precept, Whose longsuffering endures so much at our hands. Pity, rather than resentment, is the proper feeling to be cherished for all who do wrong to us; and great rewards come to all the meek. They are unvexed with passion; a "divinity doth hedge" them. They suffer not more, but vastly less, than ordinary men. They shame and win to repentance those who injure them. It is because we are weak and small, that we are so short of meekness.

41. **Compel thee**, *i.e.* to carry him or his baggage on thy beast, as government officers did habitually in those days, and do to-day in Turkey.

42. An extension of the spirit of meekness is commended here: the attitude of soul which aims to be a helper of others. Of course there are obvious limitations which are not expressed because they lie in the nature of things. **Give to him that asketh thee**, does not mean, Leave your children to starve to give to the casual stranger; nor does it prescribe our giving what would be an injury to him who asks it. It is a precept of love, not folly; for all of us have something to give, which, given to those who need, will bless both them and us. The lending prescribed is, not to the thriftless, who would be hurt by it, but to those whose misfortune or whose enterprise commend them as worthy of such help. We get too hard in our maxims of commercial economy. From this the Saviour proceeds to lay down

THE LAW OF LOVE,

43-48, in its most perfect expression. In the Law of Moses (Lev. 19: 18) occurs the great word. **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** The casuists omitted **as thyself**, the strongest term in the precept. And then, having enfeebled it, they corrupted it by adding, **And hate thine enemy**; although in ver. 34 of the same chapter God orders, "*The stranger that dwelleth with you . . . thou*

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ;

45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye ? do not even the publicans the same ?

47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others ? do not even the publicans so ?

48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

shalt love as thyself." If the word **neighbour** means simply one dwelling *nigh* us, and if any soul "loves" a "*neighbour*" as "*himself*," he will not find it in him to hate any one. Not knowing what love meant, they thought hatred could dwell in the same heart with it.

44. Christ's enlargement of the same command. **Love your enemies.** It is possible to do so, with Christ's example, grace, love for them, and reward for loving them, all helping us. The action of Christ-like affection rises as it is assailed ; and the more men injure us, the more Christ expects us to bless them. To **love**, to **bless**, to **do good to**, to **pray for**, are steps in an upward progress. What heavenly peace would fill our hearts and bless the world, if only we could act in this spirit ! Note that deep down and out of sight there is something even in our worst enemy which deserves our love, or that love would not be prescribed.

45. **Your Father . . . in heaven.** What strange thoughts of God and heaven came into the world with Jesus Christ ! The church has not yet learnt all the sweetness of God which is suggested by the word **Father**. **Be . . . children**, *i.e.* show and increase your family likeness to your Father. He who loves is already "*partaker of the Divine nature.*"

46, 47. There are still some who restrict affection (**love**) and fellowship (**salutation**) to those of their own set, whose affection and fellowship they can have in return.

48. The pattern by which we must mould our life is to be higher than these conventional fellowships. God loves the sinful, the erring ; comes to Bethlehem and Calvary to save us ; and, **therefore**, we must go and do likewise. If we were more like God in this all-enduring and all-conquering love, we would be more like Him in **peace**.

CHAPTER VI.

1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them : otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

LESSONS ON RIGHTEOUSNESS.

1. The best manuscripts have the Greek word for righteousness here instead of alms. If, with the Revisers, we adopt it, this first verse states the general principle of which what follows gives the particular applications. **Before men, to be seen of them.** It is the latter part of the clause that has the emphasis ; for many things we are required to do before men, e.g. confessing Christ. Only we have to do nothing for the sake of show ; *much in spite of being seen, nothing in order to be seen.* The Jews seem to have divided the practice of religion into almsgiving, prayer, and fasting ; and the section (vers. 1-18) is occupied with lessons on what they deemed the essential parts of practical religion.

ALMS.

2. Alms was a great part of the Jewish religion. There were daily gatherings for the poor, in alms-baskets by such as undertook this work ; collections for the poor at the sabbath services—distributed every sabbath evening ; special givings at the great feasts ; and special provisions both in the Law and the traditions allowing the poor to reap in the harvest-field, at three specific hours a day. The smallness of the towns, the union of society in one religion, the little migration from town to town, the absence of drunkenness with its embarrassing incapacity for profiting by help, all made a family friendliness more easy than in the complicated civilization of our own days. Still, it is not satisfactory that Christians in general are in the habit of giving away less in religion and charity than the Jews were required by their Law to give. **When thou doest thine alms.** *The Saviour assumes we will give alms ; disappoint not that assumption.* **Trumpet** is a metaphorical instrument. The Saviour forbids simply *our calling attention to what we give*—as we are apt to do ; as some can do with great show of modesty. **Hypocrites.** The word is a strange one, meaning a play-actor, and describing those whose religion is a

3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth :

4 That thine alms may be in secret : and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

5 ¶ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are : for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

personation—an acting, not a force of inward feeling finding expression in the life. They who begin with the outward man, with manners, proprieties, observances, instead of with the heart, however honest they may be, tend to become hypocrites. *Remember that many hypocrites do not know they are hypocrites; they think all religion is formalism, and deceive themselves as much as others.* If in our alms we would be right, we must entirely exclude from our motive regard for what others will think of us. **Have their reward.** The word implies that they get at once *all they ever will get*—the praise of men.

3. Observe : (1) *Use your right hand in giving*—your best, most active hand. (2) *Tell not your left hand.* Not only tell not others ; tell not yourself—forget it. Let your alms be part of the quiet matter-of-course business of life. (3) *God sees in secret.* It is delightful to have gracious secrets with Him. (4) *He will reward all true mercy.* Seek His, not men's, reward.

4. **Openly**—omitted in Revised Version—does not appear in the oldest and best manuscripts. God does reward openly, but His best rewards are inward. The best and usual reward of almsgiving is increased tenderness of heart, peace of conscience, purity, power of help, and willingness to give more.

PRAYER.

5. **When ye pray** (R. V.). The Saviour assumes we will do so. Prayer is one of the most mysterious of all things, yet men everywhere pray. So strong is the instinct and the impulse leading to pray, that even Buddhists pray, although they do not believe in a god with either the will or the power to hear them. *They speak forth their wishes for the chance and in the hope that somehow they will find fulfilment.* The hypocrite finds it harder work to pray than to observe any other religious duty ; for the presence of God is more oppressive than that of men. He, therefore, prefers public prayer. It was the custom to go to the synagogue for private prayer then, as it is the custom now in Catholic countries to go to the churches for that purpose (Lightfoot). There were certain hours of prayer also, and the strict rule was that, wherever the hour of prayer found you, there you should pray. Accordingly, the formal prayers of the people, con-

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

sisting chiefly of recitations of the Divine praises, were very public things with those whose religion looked little higher than passing muster with their fellow-men. You could see them at prayers any day, as to-day in the East you may see Mohammedans, when the hour of prayer comes, kneel and pray in the streets. Even Christians often like to pray publicly from motives not free from vanity. They also get such reward as they want—not *God's answer*, but *man's respect*.

6. *You often think you cannot pray so well in secret, for in public there is a certain excitement and sympathy which helps devotional feeling and expression, yet, Enter into thy closet.* For prayer is business you have to transact with God, and you want your undisturbed soul for such a work. Closet was "any room in the interior of a house" (Meyer), or any office-room or store-room where one would be least likely to be disturbed. Shut thy door. To secure freedom from thought of the world. Pray to thy Father which is in secret. The sublime act of human nature is *Prayer*. In it the spirit rises to the great Father, climbs His neck, and kisses Him; acts the child, and finds a Father. Happy is he who has once prayed. He retains a memory which will lead him back again to the mercy-seat. He can say as Jacob did, "*I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*" Shall reward thee. Though the secret prayer be a broken, troubled utterance.

7. *Vain repetitions. All repetitions are not vain.* Some are the natural expression of intense feeling. But in Judaism, Mohammedanism, heathenism, and even Romanism, the mere repetition of petitions is supposed to carry greater certainty of help. Prayers of three hours' duration seem to have been common on the part of Pharisees who wished for a reputation of devotion.

8. Note: It sometimes takes a long time to utter a brief prayer. The prayer of the publican, "*God be merciful to me a sinner!*" took, perhaps, months to make, moments to express, eternity to enjoy the answer which it found. Your Father knoweth is great comfort for those who feel how imperfect is their knowledge of their need and danger.

9. After this manner. Not necessarily in these words. Luther

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

complains of the way in which the Lord's Prayer is murdered by the thoughtless repetition of its words. What we want is to pray in the spirit of this prayer. Say, **Our Father**. *Raise your heart high enough in faith and hope to give God the tenderest of all names; and do not begin your petitions till this name has filled your soul with holy boldness and confidence.* **Hallowed be Thy Name** is the prayer that rises naturally first. It means, "*Help us to revere Thy Father-Name; to trust it; to keep away every unworthy thought of God from our hearts; to behave as reverent children to Thee.*"

10. Thy kingdom come. All earth's sorrows spring from rebellion; all earth's blessings will come with submission to the Lord. The prayer means, "Come and rule over our hearts; subdue the pride that makes submission partial; take our hearts, for we cannot give them to Thee, and keep them when we cannot keep them for Thee; subdue all hearts to Thy sway; and make the whole world the Saviour's kingdom." **Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.** We grow swiftly wise upon our knees, and soon come to wish that the desires of God's heart may be fulfilled rather than our own. We can only say, **Thy will be done** when we see God is our *Father*, and His will is a desire for our salvation, usefulness, and bliss. When we see this, then we submit our plans, not with resignation merely, but gladly. For the prayer then means, "Not our plans of life, which are foolish; not the desires of our enemy, which are malicious; but Thy plans, which aim at the enrichment of our lives, be fulfilled," so that "*as in heaven so in earth*" there may be the perfect bliss of purity, gladness, and service. Do not offer this petition as if it were a bowing to affliction only. The words, **Thy will done, . . . as in heaven,** show the mistake of treating it as chiefly a word of resignation.

11. Daily bread. In this petition observe: (1) Our wishes are to be moderate—for bread; *i.e.* the necessaries of life. (2) Limited to our present needs; for we ask daily for that day's portion. (3) Our prayer is to be kindly, bringing others' needs to God, and asking as much for them as we do for ourselves. Luther's exposition of **daily bread** is interesting: "I mean by it everything belonging to the want and supply of our life; that is, meat, drink, clothes, dwelling, gardens, lands, flocks, money, wealth, happy marriage, virtuous children, faithful servants, upright and just magistrates, peaceful government, wholesome air, quietness, health, modesty, honour, true friends, faithful neighbours, and other things of like kind" (Luther's "Minor Catechism").

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

12. Forgive . . . as we forgive. We get into deeper necessities. Needs of body come first in naming; but needs of soul are deeper things. And the first need of the soul is pardon. In this petition note: (1) Own your debts to God. (2) Put yourself on the same level with all other sinners. (3) Ask for the forgiveness of those you most condemn as well as for your own. (4) It is not easy to say, **As we forgive**, because we are proud rather than penitent; *but keep at this petition until from your heart you can add these words.* For you have not repented of your own sins till you can forgive others, and God cannot forgive those who do not repent.

13. This verse contains two petitions—the first asking *Protection from everything outward* tending to lead us astray; the second, *from everything inward* moving us to go astray. The translation of the Revised Version, **From the evil one**, is unfortunate; **From evil** being excellent equivalents for Greek words: and “*from the evil one*” being proved wrong by the impossibility of rendering ch. 5: 39, “*Resist not the evil one*,” as the identity of terms would require; by the fact that the two clauses of the verse would mean the same thing—the second a mere repetition of the first; and lastly, by the fact that, so rendered, there would be no express prayer for deliverance from moral evil. As the old version has it, the three last petitions make a complete circle of requests for deliverance from guilt of sin, from solicitation to sin, and from the fountain of sin within us. **Lead us not into temptation.** The word **temptation** means any trial; and the prayer asks, not to be exposed to *perilous circumstances or perilous solicitations*; recognizes that God orders the lot, and that without His consent even Satan may not tempt. The former petition, “*Thy will be done*,” consents to such temptation as may strengthen us by being resisted and overcome. But it is our part to fear temptation, and pray against it. Note: They who pray not to be led into temptation must not run into it. **But deliver us from evil.** The bravest of all prayers, asking to be freed from all taint of evil at whatever cost. Each petition has involved some surrender, but this the completest of any. Observe: All petitions are in the plural, to prevent the selfishness which is the vice of prayer. The Revised Version rightly leaves out **For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen**, which is not in the oldest copies. *Christ meant us to offer our prayer, and wait for God to say, Amen.*

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you :

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

16 ¶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance : for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face ;

18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret : and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

14, 15. We shall understand this addition best by remembering : (1) That the keenest test of repentance of one's own sin is ability to forgive the sins of others. If my heart is broken for my own debt of ten thousand talents, I cannot be unforgiving to another who owes me, at most, a hundred pence (ch. 18 : 24, 28). (2) God cannot forgive the unrepenting. For pardon would only harden them in evil ; therefore He can only forgive the forgiving.

FASTING.

16. Fasting is now but little practised amongst Protestants. To all in the Saviour's time it seemed a great means of grace. Undoubtedly, self-denial in matters of the body helps self-denial of the soul, and aids the higher energies of life to secure victory. No soul can thrive without self-denial. [Note : The argument here for Total Abstinence.] The lesson of the Saviour again is that our self-denial be a secret discipline ; not shown to others, but seen of God. Blessed are they whose alms, prayers, discipline, are all happy secrets between themselves and God.

18. That thou appear not. Sometimes in our public prayers we employ expressions of sorrow and of lowliness, which have no inward distress answering to them. The *show* of contrition is as dangerous as the *reality* is helpful.

19-34. The Saviour proceeds with His great lessons on the inner life. Alms were to be secret ; prayer was to be secret ; fasting was to be secret ; and something else as well—*The aim of their ambition, the object of all their activity, was to be a secret good.* The fortune they were to try to make in life was to be one invisible to vulgar eyes—wealth secret with God, in heaven. While others—children of the external—were aiming at visible and tangible results, He urges the disciples to aim at **treasures in heaven**—secret things, but things that carry immortal enrichment. This commendation of *The Pursuit of the Secret Wealth* completes Christ's exhortations on the spirituality of true life. When our best life and our highest aims are secret with God, then are we true disciples. Probably the charge to seek

19 ¶ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal :

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal :

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

22 The light of the body is the eye : if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !

an invisible fortune startled the Pharisees even more than that to practise unseen graces. All the more was it and is it necessary. Especially as avarice is the vice of respectability—something which can be cherished without forfeiting respect.

WORLDLINESS CONDEMNED.

19, 20. The visible treasure has great and obvious attractions. Jewish wealth lay chiefly in Garments, in Gold, and in Jewels ; ours, in Land, Houses, Shares. The Saviour appeals to them to fix not their hearts on the visible wealth of earth, whose perishableness He vividly suggests ; for those who do so are at the mercy of things as insignificant as the moth, as subtle as the rust, as numerous as the thieves ready to break through and steal. "He builds too low who builds beneath the skies." The perishable can never be a portion worthy of the soul's regard. If no other destroyers come against us, *old age is a sort of moth* which impairs, and *disease is a sort of rust* which lessens our enjoyment of earthly treasures, and *death is a thief* which breaks through and steals all we have that belongs to earth. Aspire to higher things, even treasures in heaven—to immortal possessions of the immortal soul. God's love is such a treasure ; The New Life, the Full Reward, the Fitness for the work and bliss of heaven, the Crown that fades not away, "*the Master's joy* ;"—these are treasures which neither moth, nor rust, nor thief can find. *Such treasures are within our reach.* Get them, and give them to God to keep for you.

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with a succession of arguments, all constraining us to seek, not the visible, but the heavenly, wealth.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION.

21. The first reason is, that *What we live for settles the kind of life we live.* If the treasure is here, the heart rises not above the earth. If our wealth is above, the heart rises to its elevation. This leads the Saviour in the next two verses to dwell on the importance of accurate powers of perception, by which we may discern the true value of things.

22, 23. Single—evil. These seem to be simply the contraries of

24 ¶ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

each other, and to mean respectively a good, clear-seeing eye, and a faulty or blind eye. The light of the body is the eye. For without an eye, the world is as dark to us as if it were without the sun. The clear eye is the medium through which every organ finds light to do its work. A dim or blind eye leaves every organ embarrassed and unguided. So, the Saviour suggests, *The eye of the soul* is the great faculty whose clearness determines the well-being of every other. There are great differences of spiritual eyesight. Some eyes are short-sighted, and see nothing at heavenly distances. Some see only the surface of things: some mistake glitter for gold; some have no power of reading the signs which indicate the perishable or disappointing character. But some have the keen sight which sees the invisible, recognizes the enduring, appreciates the worthy. *Your estimates settle your life.* Some whose eye is faulty, whose darkness is intense, think riches worth pursuit; some whose eye is single and clear, discern the charms of heaven. Keep the eye of the soul keen and clear; for, if it be dark, all is dark: and how great is that darkness!

ONE WORLD MUST BE GIVEN UP.

24. Another argument for pursuing the heavenly wealth. We cannot make the best of both worlds, and therefore must choose between them. There seems nothing easier than to serve two masters, and many aim at it, but serve neither to any profit. Mammon was a word in common use for money. Here the Saviour speaks as if some treated it as a god. Many do so, expecting more help, protection, and comfort from money than from either the providence or grace of God. It is a very solemn fact that we cannot have two hopes of life, or two objects in life, or two supports. Wholly trust God or wholly neglect Him; lukewarmness is a mistake and a sin.

25. Therefore . . . take no thought. The English word thought, two hundred years ago, seems to have meant "anxiety;" and so suitably stood for the Greek word here, which means "distracting care." This word, therefore, does not forbid proper interest in our common work, but only anxious solicitude about its issues. Observe the word "therefore" connecting this with the previous verse, and impressing two great lessons: (1) that the service of Mammon always involves men in

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

anxiety; and (2) that all anxiety is in itself a service of Mammon. To fear misfortunes rising from earth is to forget the help and sovereignty of God. *Hope is the duty of the Christian heart, and all anxiety, therefore, is a backsliding from faith in God into faith in Mammon.* Let us not be heretics of the life. Christ's question goes very deep. He who gives a jewel does not grudge the box in which it is sent. The gift of life itself is a promise of the lesser gifts by which it may be sustained. Up to this point, the Saviour's arguments for seeking the secret wealth are such as a noble earthly philosopher might have used. But, having urged that earthly treasures are perishable, are preferred only by those without sound eyesight, cannot be pursued without loss of other treasures of richer value, He now comes to dwell on the peculiar argument of the gospel, viz. *God's care is so tender that our anxiety is superfluous.*

WE NEED NOT FEAR TO GIVE UP THE WORLD.

26. The fowls of the air take a great deal of feeding. Luther somewhere reckons that a sparrow will eat a bushel of corn in twelve months. And if it had the sense or the foolishness to reckon up beforehand its need, and to speculate on the labour it would take to gather it, the change of bad seasons, and the misfortune of having no place to store it when more plentiful, what headaches the little bird might have over the prospect! But though it takes no thought of the morrow, *God feeds it*—not without work, but without worry. *We are better than they*, more worthy of God's care. Let us expect it.

27. The word translated **Stature** is equally well translated **Life**; and the latter translation should be preferred. A cubit is the distance from the elbow to the end of the middle finger—an addition which would be a huge one to make to their *stature*, and which none would wish to make. But many would like to lengthen life, and Christ asks—Can anxiety lengthen it, even by half a yard? *Anxiety usually shortens life; it does not lengthen it.*

28. Why take ye thought for raiment? Perhaps ver. 26 is addressed more particularly to men, as those who deal with crops; and this verse more particularly to women, as those who look after the clothing of the family. The lily is a gorgeous scarlet lily, growing wild, in great beauty and profusion in Galilee, exquisitely clothed,

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For, after all these things do the Gentiles seek :) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

more beautiful than any monarch—without anxiety. We should, while working, trust the universal processes of Providence, which distribute to all things exactly what they need.

29, 30. The oven was and is generally something different from what we know by that name, being really a large earthenware jar—heated by burning twigs or grass within it, and then cooking what was placed within it, and sometimes on the outside also, by the heat retained by its sides. [Note: What is translated “coals” in John 18: 18 and 21: 9 was charcoal; there is no trace of coal, in our sense of the word, in Scripture.] The argument is enhanced by this reference to the brief existence of the grass. *He who clothes the transient life of grass with such beauty will not leave uncared for immortal man.* As “Delta,” of *Blackwood's Magazine*, wrote long ago of his dead child—

“It cannot be that o'er the grave
The grass renewed will yearly wave,
And God forget the child to save:
Casa Wappy.”

O ye of little faith. The world's want of faith seemed ever to strike the Saviour as an unfathomable mystery (see Mark 6: 6). The unreasonableness of unbelief is the side of it which impressed Him most. Let us be on our guard against it.

31, 32. The double reason for refusing to admit anxiety into our hearts is very striking. (1) The longing for these earthly things is the animating principle of heathen hearts. (2) **Your . . . Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.** How near we are sometimes to the heathen and the worldly on whom we look down! How dear we are to God! How humbling the first word! How cheering the second!

33. He returns to the great exhortation with which (ver. 19) He commenced—Seek not visible wealth, but God's kingdom and God's righteousness. **God's Kingdom:** i.e. His blessing, acceptance, protection, salvation. **God's Righteousness:** i.e. God's character, *God's life in the soul.* Note the Saviour's word, **first.** It carries great

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow : for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

emphasis. What a man seeks *first* and chiefly, tells you his essential character. Many perish through putting God's kingdom and righteousness *second* in the order of time. "Let them first do this or gain that, and then they will seek God's kingdom." Still more perish from placing these second in the order of importance. **And all these things shall be added unto you.** Look after duty, and God will look after you.

34. A rich word. *The precept is rich.* It is a great thing that anxiety is forbidden. *The promise is rich ;* **For the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.** With its needs its supplies will come. Its tender wisdom is rich. Sufficient for to-day's strength is to-day's trouble. We can carry with one day's strength one day's burden ; but if we pile the evil of to-morrow on top of the evil of to-day, the heart is crushed which could have carried one day's burden bravely.

CHAPTER VII.

1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged : and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

From the more special theme of the inwardness of true life, the Saviour passes, in the section (1-12), to corrections, encouragements, and warnings of which we stand in need. We may classify its lessons and say that He points out a *Fault*, a *Neglected Privilege*, and a *Forgotten Duty*.

A GRIEVOUS FAULT.

He begins with *The Great Fault of Censoriousness* ; and warns us of it with a gravity we cannot understand. For to us it seems a failing rather than a sin, and something which, however faulty, is so common, is practised so lightly and enjoyed so much, that it hardly demands the severity and solemnity of treatment it here receives. The commonness of it and our share in it blind us. Let us mark His lesson.

1, 2. **Judge not.** Observe : (1) The connection with what has gone before. *The hypocrite is great at judging.* Not aiming at love or goodness, he does not reach them. His great things are *observances* ; and

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

if another's agree not with his, the difference is a great offence. The religion of the hypocrite is, besides, so joyless that it makes him harsh; and his self-complacency is so often disturbed that he is glad to lower the reputation of others to improve his own. (2) That there is a judging not forbidden here; e.g. the judging which is the duty of those who have the control of others—who as parents, or teachers, or leaders, or judges, are bound by duty to express their judgments on actions and character. So also there is a correction prompted by love which carries blessing. "*Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness*" (Ps. 141: 5); "*Exhort one another daily*" (Heb. 3: 13). But the judging spoken of is the common censoriousness of men, from which none gets quite free till he reaches the world of light and charity. (3) Such judging is absolutely forbidden as being evil. (4) The first great argument is that those who practise severity of judgment will find it. "*Blessed are the merciful;*" they find mercy. Woe to the judging! they find judgment. They find the judgment of man. The fault-finder contributes only a weakening and withering influence where men want help and encouragement. *They, therefore, shut him out.* The censorious always hope their judgments will make men look up to them as superiors; but the world returns uncharitableness for uncharitableness, and they find themselves deemed, not better, but worse than they are. The fault-finder finds the judgment of God as well. We are judged largely according to our light. To apply any standard of duty to others is to admit it as binding on ourselves; *and who reaches the standard by which he judges others?* Besides, heaven is the world of love. Love is fitness for it and the essence of it. *Unlovely harshness is meetness for the inheritance of perdition. Cherish the character that would be at home in heaven.*

3-5. What Christ has already said is enough to give all of us alarm. What He now adds enforces it. For now He teaches three truths, which should awaken still deeper alarm. (1) *That the fault-finding always have the faults they rebuke;* (2) *That they have them in greater measure than those they blame;* (3) *and That they add hypocrisy to them.* They, therefore, ought rather to aim at doing the necessary work of curing their own faults than the (to them) impossible work of curing others' faults. On these three points observe: (1) *We always have the faults we condemn. You can always tell a man's weaknesses by*

6 ¶ Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

noting his antipathies. The proud feel others' pride presuming and competitive. The hard man in a bargain thinks his neighbour does not yield enough to him. The untrue cannot trust, and believe all men liars. The wasps complain of other people's stings. And the quarrelsome lament that people will not let them be at peace. Your form of the fault may differ from the form which offends you, but in substance *you have the faults you dislike.* (2) *The fault-finding have greater faults than others.* A mote is properly a small splinter; a beam is a joist, something that would hardly go into the head, much less into the eye. And the Saviour indicates that those keen to cure the faults of others are full of vastly greater faults themselves. David flashes into anger at the comparatively small fault of the rich man taking the poor man's ewe lamb, unconscious of the larger scale of crime on which he had acted the selfsame part. The fault-finder blames forgetfulness, and practises anger; blames dulness, and is guilty of the great sin of contempt (ch. 5: 22); is severe on error of thought, and practises hatred. If fault-finding is agreeable to you, be sure you have worse faults than those you see. Our perception is not due to our eye being free from specks but to its being blinded by a big beam in it. (3) *The fault-finding are always marked by hypocrisy.* This seems strange; for they often plume themselves on their honesty, on their bluntness, on their habit of "calling a spade a spade." To correct another is to assume superiority. *It is virtually an assertion of freedom from faults generally and especially from the fault we name.* But to assert such freedom when we are full of the same and of worse faults is the part of a hypocrite. Hardness of judgment has generally some hollowness of heart with it. Our hypocrisy is none the less real for being in great part unconscious. There are few hypocrites who do not deceive themselves as well as others. *Correct the faults of others, not by thy reproofs, but by thy example, lowliness, prayer, and charity.*

THE OPPOSITE EXTREME.

6. This verse may guard us against another fault the antithesis of this—that of ignoring palpable evil, and treating it in the same way as we do the good. It is a lesson the propriety of which all Christians feel, but the occasions for observing which only a spiritual instinct can detect. There are great testimonies to be uttered in order to produce specific feelings. There are testimonies we instinctively withhold when *the Raging (dogs)* or *the Unclean (swine)* are before us. When swine would tread on pearls, and dogs rend those that feed them with sacri-

7 ¶ Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you :

ficial food, it is better to withhold both. This word, amongst other things, forbids us to offer sacred ordinances to the unconverted.

From this the Saviour passes to

THE GREAT PRIVILEGE WE NEGLECT—PRAYER—

7-10, the secret of all goodness, the cure of all evil, the mystery and glory of man. It is an action so high, it is marvellous any should practise it. It is one so blessed, it is marvellous any should neglect it. Great teachers—like Gaudama, the founder of Buddhism, and Confucius—have sometimes had nothing to say about prayer. Some forbid it, and tell us its answer is impossible. The Saviour has neither the precept nor the silence of despair. He, who knows God from resting eternally in His bosom, bids us pray. It is strange how simple is the sublime teaching here. Prayer according to this is not adoration, doxology, self-surrender ; it is *Asking for what we want*, and the promise of an answer to such asking is unconditional. There is no “*if*” in the whole statement. But the explicit, universal pledge is **Ask, and it shall be given you**. He sends all of us with every need and sorrow of the soul to seek what we want from God. How wonderful this is ! He gives three great words on the matter, **Ask—seek—knock** ; perhaps simply repeating the precept in different forms, to prevent possibility of mistake, and embolden us to obey it. Perhaps the precept prescribes prayer of increasing urgency. I think, however, there is another and deeper reason for the different forms of precept. If a child wants anything of a parent, what is his process ? If the mother is near and visible, he simply **asks**. If she is not near and visible, he **seeks** her, and having found her, he then **asks**. If, finding her, he finds her inaccessible, within her chamber, unwilling to be disturbed, he **knocks** till he gains her attention and consent. *All supplicants at the throne of grace know something of all these three experiences*. Sometimes when you need His help *He is there*, above you, and you need only to lift your eyes and **ask**—with the simplicity of a child. But sometimes all above you is dark, and you say, “*Oh that I knew where I might find Him ! that I might come even to His seat ! . . . Behold, I go forward, but He is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him*” (Job 23 : 3-8). In such circumstances **Seek Him, and ye shall find Him**. Sometimes when we find Him He keeps us at a distance. So that, like Jeremiah, we say, “*He shutteth out my prayer*” (Lam. 3 : 8). He seems to say, “*I cannot rise and give thee*” (Luke 11 : 7) ; He answers not

8 For every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone ?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent ?

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him ?

a word (Matt. 15 : 23). Even then the Saviour forbids us to despair and says, **Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.** There is need for *importunity*, for *wrestling*, for being "*instant in prayer*" (Rom. 12 : 12). And the Saviour tells us that, as we shall find God though He withdraws Himself, so shall we get all we want from God even though at first He seems to deny us and our prayers.

8. Note the word, **Every one.** The Saviour knows nothing of any suppliant being unanswered. Perhaps he is not answered at the time, or in the way, or in the form, he expects. God answers Paul's prayer for the removal of the thorn, in the better way of giving grace to bear it (2 Cor. 12 : 8, 9). But every suppliant is answered, and amongst the millions who lift their eyes on high there is none who is not answered. The exceptions are the apparent ones only, where some prayer has been *said*, but has not been *prayed* ; or those instances in which God takes strange but Divine ways of working out the end we sought. How gravely should we pray, afraid of offering the unworthy prayer !

9-11. The proof of this. Christ quotes a fact of human nature as we might quote a text from the Bible. Men do not refuse their children's prayers, still less embitter the denial by giving something injurious instead of the good they seek. This human habit Jesus deems a demonstration of the love of God. It is such. For pity and love in man *prove* the existence of pity and love in man's Maker. *He who thinks God has no love thinks man is better than God.* Always argue upwards, from all that is pure and kindly in man to what is purer and kindlier still in God. In these words note several important matters. (1) *The Saviour's assertion of sinlessness.* He says, **If ye,** not "**If we,**" being evil. On one side of a dividing line stands Christ ; on the other side, mankind. (2) *The depravity of man.* **Ye . . . being evil** puts a solemn mark on the whole race of man. (3) *The good existing in even unregenerate man.* **Ye . . . know how to give good gifts unto your children.** The Saviour saw wondrous beauty in family love and in all neighbourly kindness. (4) *God is man's Father,* the natural Helper of his need. (5) Above all other things, let us obey the call to prayer, and enrich our lives with the bounty and grace and care of God.

12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them : for this is the law and the prophets.

13 ¶ Enter ye in at the strait gate : for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat :

14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

A FORGOTTEN DUTY.

12. **Therefore.** Carefully note the argument in this word. Because God gives you what you desire, give others what they desire ; and this you will find out by asking what you would like them to do to you. *Be kindly ; for God is kind. The golden rule here laid down is very marvellous. It sums up the whole duty of man to his neighbour in one sentence. It is, of course, not absolutely new ; for love is old as human hearts. And this is accordingly the old commandment we had from the beginning ; and Moses, when he said, "Love thy neighbour as thyself," came nearly to this ; while Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese teachers have carefully laid down—part of Christ's rule, viz. "Do not to others, what you would not have others do to you." But it is a new commandment ; for to refrain from doing what we should dislike if done to us is only a small part of Christ's precept. Far beyond this mere prohibition is the requirement *To do to them all we would like them to do to us.* This is our duty—the sum of the Christian life. If this be neglected, no religiousness will suffice. *It is neglected. It is surprising how many Christians seem not to feel the claims of others.* What a rich world would this be if all Christians acted thus ! Let us act on the previous promise, and ask God's forgiveness for neglecting, and grace in the future to obey, this blessed precept.*

In the section 13-29, we have the great application of the great sermon. In it solemnly reaches its gravest tone, and the claims of the Saviour their most exalted expression. Some features pervade this whole section. Note : (1) *The Division into twos*, which the Saviour discerns in all things. There are only two sorts of gates, of ways, of prophets, of houses, of immortal destinies. (2) *The Responsibility which the Saviour sees in every life.* How different the tone of this whole section from ours, who usually think it does not very much matter what we do or what we are ! (3) *The Importance Christ attaches to action.* *He does not recognize as of any value the faith which does not act.*

TWO WAYS.

13, 14. There are two ways by which men travel from the darkness out of which we came, into that to which we go. The world alternates

between views, both opposed to this. In its despair it thinks there is only *one road for man*, and one sort of man; the road a way to wretchedness, and man a being always selfish, though the universal selfishness differs in degrees of coarseness. On the other hand, in its lighter moods the world thinks there are very many ways. At all events three; and three sorts of people: good, bad, and neutral. But there are *only two ways*, and by one or other of these all, heathen and Christian, wise and ignorant, young and old, are moving. All are daily rising on a path leading upwards or descending by a path leading downwards. One way is **Broad**, easy, thronged with multitudes; one is **Narrow**, as it were between precipitous rocks nearly meeting, yet wide enough for the small number that find it. We had hoped the multitudes would be found going right. But the broad way of the **many**, the Saviour says, leads to destruction, and only the **narrow way** of the **few** to life. *This is probably the most solemn statement the world had heard since its creation.* Yet who can deny it? It is not Christianity alone that teaches this; it is the universal observation of man. Many aim at neutrality; this word declares it impossible. The only way to avoid being bad is by being good. And ultimately, if we are not found with those who have lived *obedient to the heavenly vision*, we shall be found belonging to *the disobedient*. **Strait gate.** The solemnity of the lesson is augmented by the mention of *Gates*. A gate is an entrance and a beginning. Once in the way, it might not be easy or even possible to get out of it into another way; but *entering through a gate is a matter of consciousness, freedom, and choice.* And by the emphasis He lays on "*entering the gate,*" the Saviour teaches us that destiny is not the result of drift, but of choice. We do not awake to find ourselves in the narrow way; we enter the narrow gate that admits to it. Nor are any, unconsciously, pilgrims in the evil way. *A Preference for some course known to be evil* was the *Entering through the wide gate*, and constitutes the guilt and peril of our course. How solemn that the great destinies depend, not on fate, but on choice! Almost each day of life the opportunity of choice comes to us. We are continually facing *a dividing of the ways, a pair of gates*—one temptingly wide; one *Divine, but strait*. And as often as we reach the dividing ways, *so often we decide.* We are saved or lost, not through necessity, but through choice. How thoughtful and prayerful should be our choice of ways! What are the **wide gate** and the **broad way**? Evidently they are the entrance and the path which make least demand for self-denial, which permit the indulgence of our preferences, which leave self-will free, which require neither surrender, nor service, nor sacrifice. It is not strange that to the thoughtless this path of liberty should be alluring. The **strait**

15 ¶ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

gate is a nobler gateway, demanding of those who would enter some sacrifice, some consecration, and admits to that Divine pathway of love and service which the Saviour trod and which He commends to us. Many gaze on its portals, wish to enter, decide they will some day enter; yet, though heaven is entered from it, turn from it. So Few . . . find it. Some do, and find a richer joy in pursuing it than ever comes to those on the broad way, and find, though difficult, it is possible to keep to it, right up to the *Great Life* into which it leads. *The pillars of the strait gate are Repentance and Confession. The walls of the narrow way are Self-denial and Service.* Complain not of the straitness; for if the gate at the outset were wider than the gate at the end, it would only permit delusion and prevent salvation. Besides, the breadth of gate and way are fixed by the necessity of things. Without repentance bliss is absolutely impossible; and, indulging self-will, destruction is inevitable. Learn the lessons: (1) *Wait not for the strait gate to get broader; it never can do so.* (2) *Murmur not at its straitness; the more you feel the straitness, the more you need it.* (3) *Be afraid of going with the crowd.* (4) *Let a holy fear possess us lest our religious life be too easy to be real.*

TWO SORTS OF PROPHETS.

15-20. The discourse proceeds naturally from the subject of the way to the subject of the Guides we accept for it. We are interdependent on each other, and capable of rendering each other large help. One of God's greatest gifts is a true prophet (that is, not a predictor, but one who "speaks forth" God's truth). One of the most dangerous influences we can meet is that of the *False Prophet*. There are such—often men of gifts, perception, personal influence, that mark them out as leaders of their fellows, and with an interest in the great mysteries of life which leads them to aspire to be the religious teachers and leaders of men, whose knowledge, however, is that of speculation, rather than that which comes of communion with God and obedience to Him. Of such the Saviour says, *Beware of false prophets.* The

21 ¶ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

false prophet is generally found proclaiming a wider gate and a broader road than the Saviour sets before us. It is not always easy to know him; for, like Balaam, he may have marvellous insight; and, like Simon Magus, do wonders; or, like Satan, seem "*an angel of light.*" But there is a test: **Ye shall know them by their fruits.** Truth will always help you; error is always hurtful. A teaching comes to you, which seems profound, spiritual, charming. What is its *influence* on you? Does it endear the Saviour to you? deepen your penitence and gratitude? make you more ready and able to serve your fellow-men? heighten your standard of life? Month by month, and year by year, does it continue a constraint and a help to all things high? The truth of God is in that doctrine; for such **Figs men do not gather from Thorns.** In such teaching you have substantially the very truth of God. Follow it; the prophet uttering it will lead you Godward. Does the teaching relax your soul? make it indifferent? slacken communion with God? permit neglect of man? allow you to be comfortable in your neglect of others? *That teaching is not of God.* Fundamentally it is unsound. Cast it from you. You may not be able to show where the error lies. But such **evil fruit cannot grow from a good tree.** *This test of the practical influence of any doctrines on the life is one which all can apply, and is the surest test of truth which any can use.* There are many other lessons here of special seriousness to all teachers and preachers. (1) The good Life produces fruits of good Light. (2) Our teaching should be fruit—something growing out of our very being. (3) And in its turn be the seed from which fruit of holy living in others will proceed. (4) The penalty of the misleader is very grave (ver. 19). (5) Can we stand a judgment which attends not to professions, but solely to fruit?

TWO SORTS OF DISCIPLES.

21-23 contain a further warning to all, and especially to all teachers and preachers, showing that nothing but the narrow way can lead to heaven.

21. **Saith, Lord! Lord!** There is a religion which consists almost entirely of decorum, deference, and of external reverence. *This does not enter heaven; but only the religion that does the will of our Father in heaven.*

22, 23. It is strange how much the unregenerate may do, yet come

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

24 ¶ Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

short. Balaam prophesied, though his heart shrank from the great surrender. Saul fell through wilfulness, yet on occasions he "prophesied." Judas cast out devils. Sometimes the unconverted have uttered truth converting others; and in certain ages of the church miracles have been wrought in the name of Christ, even by those unsaved. It is not gifts and light, but the graces and love which make men choose the narrow way, that prove the state of salvation. "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" **I never knew you: depart from Me.** Note particularly already here, in the sermon on the mount, all the claims to Divine majesty made by Christ, which some suggest were an after-thought into which He was betrayed. He begins the sermon bearing Himself as the Divine Lawgiver; He ends it by claiming to be the Divine Judge. To **know** means here to "recognize" or "own." Those rejected expected the Saviour to be thankful to them for their patronage of Him; and lo! He says, **Depart from Me.**

24-27. From the special warnings of and to false prophets, the Saviour passes to the general warning to all men. *What we do with HIS WORDS is the main question of life. Some obey them. Some neglect to obey them;* perhaps admiring, perhaps despising them. In a vivid picture the Saviour describes the experience waiting these two classes. In both cases life is represented under the natural image of the building of a house. For life is a building up of character, habits, memories, expectations, of powers or weaknesses; like stone on stone, we add one thing to another in building the house of life. Our desire is that what we build should be secure. And some think that when they succeed in gathering money, friends, health, successful methods, the house is well and wisely built. But others build their house by daily adding to their powers of service, their knowledge of God, their victories over faults, their joys and hopes, till their life becomes a palace fit for God. Here, however, it is not the comparative fairness of the houses, but the comparative stability of them, that is set forth. One house rests on the Rock. *The life, that is, rests on and roots itself in a redeeming*

28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine :

29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

God, and everything about it has the strength of that Rock supporting it. The other house, even when it is comeliest, is something without foundation. Its resolves are not resting on God's help sought in prayer ; its joys rest not on God's heart trusted ; its peace rests not on God's love adored ; its confidence rests not on God's presence revealed. Its virtues have no root ; goodness no motive ; hope no ground. The house hangs together, but may go altogether, as well as stand. How searching is this distinction ! **Rain descended.** A time or times of testing come to every life—terrific in their strain, which Jesus compares to the concurrent forces of the Rainstorm threatening the roof, the Hurricane threatening the sides, the Torrent [the flood] undermining the wall. Such image does not exaggerate the strain which comes to all : in afflictions, or disappointments, in losses, or temptations, or fears, in the troubles of dying, or in the judgment beyond. Then we want more than the strength which is sufficient for common conventional life, or we are undone. In this stream the life which has no foundation in God goes down. Virtues fail, habits break down, hope sinks in despair. But even under this strain the Life that rests on God survives, and stands with its strength revealed and rewarded. Only they who *do Christ's words* and take Christ for *Master* have Him for Rock beneath them. *Is He Master, absolute and in all things with us ?* In many lives He is Teacher, Comforter, Example, but not *Lord of the will*. Nothing less than this makes us Christians. Ponder Christ's pitiful word, **Great was the fall of it ;** and avoid that fate.

28, 29. The evangelist marks the impression produced on the auditors. These are moved—**astonished** (the word implies amazement)—by His words, but still more by Himself as revealed in them. Two things strike them : His difference from all other men—He is not **as the Scribes** ; and the **Authority** investing Him. He spoke as if accustomed to receive the obedience of all things. Note here : (1) The beginnings of the great creed which, developed, owns His Divine authority and His sinless separateness from man. (2) That, at an infinite distance, some of the character of Christ's teaching should mark ours. We should be, *not as the scribes*, retailers merely of what others have said ; but *speaking what we know* from heart-experience, we should, like Him, speak with some authority.

CHAPTER VIII.

1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

2 And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

The great sermon is over. The application of it begins—an application growing and to grow while the world lasts. Yet the first applications which appear seem strange; those of this leper and this centurion. The last in likelihood is first in fact to seize the comfort of Christ's word. The two chief classes of prayers are—those we offer for ourselves, and those for others. Here are examples of both.

A SUFFERER'S PRAYER.

2. **A leper.** To-day we hardly know what leprosy is, though in the Middle Ages there was a good deal of it in Western Europe and in England—perhaps brought by Crusaders from the East; perhaps developed as scurvy was amongst seamen a generation ago, and as leprosy is to-day in Norway, by the use of too much salted provision and too little vegetable diet. It has died out here. But it still has a vast range, being found in Syria, the whole Levant, North Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, India, China, and the South Sea Islands. Everywhere it is a terrible disease. In Damascus there is a mild form of it, in which a cure sometimes takes place. But it is *the Disease of despair* everywhere. In Northern India, the Government of England had, by special precept, to forbid the burying alive of lepers (see Cust, "Pictures of Indian Life," p. 246; and Lord Lawrence, "Life," i. 174). In China, if concealed by bride or bridegroom, it annuls marriage. In the Hawaiian Islands it prevails at present to an extraordinary extent (*Lancet*, December 4, 1886). For it medicine had no prescription (Edersheim), religion no solace. The cases of Miriam, Gehazi, and Uzziah made the Jews regard it as one of the four great special judgments of God on great transgressions. As now in Palestine (see "The Land and the Book," p. 470), so in the days of Moses and of Christ, the leper was separated from his fellows (Lev. 13 : 46) chiefly, probably, from fear of infection. For although there is abundant proof that many have lived in closest intercourse with lepers without taking it, the last and most scientific investigations seem to prove that it possesses some infective power. Exclusion from village and

8 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

town meant denial of work to them, and the necessity of living on alms. They seemed God's outcasts, and beneath their loathsome and painful disease they were left to sink in wretchedness. This individual man, Luke tells us, was "*full of leprosy.*" What a calamity, including disease, disgust of man, beggary, despair! How little we think of the multitudes of sufferers found amongst us to-day! Perhaps on the edge of the crowd he heard the sermon, or what Christ said was reported to him. *It suits him.* He is poor: can he be blessed? If he asks, will he receive? Are the hairs of his head numbered? Can this Divine Master cure him? What a tumult of fear and hope must rend his soul as he asks these questions. But he "can but perish if he goes, so he resolves to try." **Worshipped . . . if Thou wilt, Thou canst.** Note his reverence and his faith. *Generally, large sorrows make large creeds;* but this is remarkable. **Thou canst.** No leper, so far as we know, had as yet been cleansed. A sufferer knows the grip disease has on him as others do not, *yet he believes* Christ able to heal. How marvellous men's expectation from Christ!

3. **Touched . . . I will; be thou clean.** Of all that crowd, none other would touch him; but Jesus "*had compassion,*" as Mark tells us; and *Love, never dainty, is ever daring.* The touch of ordinary man only contracted his uncleanness; the touch of Christ carries His healing. The Saviour's words seem a creative echo of the lowly prayer. And accompanying the word is the omnipotence that heals completely. Note: (1) Apply all invitations to your own case. (2) In all extremities pray, and *pray boldly for what may seem impossible.* (3) When sojourning with us Christ healed all diseases, to show that He always pities, even when He does not heal. (4) Great answers come still to great prayers. (5) Pity and help the afflicted with your ordinary, as Jesus did with His Divine, power. (6) Remember that while miraculous gifts vary in different ages in the church (the twelve had power to heal diseases; while John the Baptist, though "*greatest of those born of woman,*" "*did no miracle*"), those who have compassion always find some way of helping others. (7) As to "*faith healing,*" remember *faith sometimes feels free to ask healing, but more often it moves us to submit.* (8) Be thankful for health, for hospitals, and for the gospel that teaches us, "*Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth*" (Heb. 12: 6). (9) Mark how all things change to us when Jesus comes near. (10) The completeness of Christ's cure. And lastly, that even when our souls, which are harder to heal than our bodies, are in a like desperate condition, Christ can heal them.

4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

5 ¶ And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

4. **Tell no man.** For a while it is better that he should meditate on His mercy and learn its lessons. To talk of it prevents the thinking on it. Besides, Jesus wanted to be welcomed as a Saviour from sin rather than as a Wonder-worker. **Shew thyself to the priest.** Special mercies do not exempt from common duties. The Saviour requires the public acknowledgment of mercy. Besides, this testimony will be a "*still small voice*" to the rulers, giving them an opportunity of repentance. All of us have to get from the Saviour a greater blessing and a more marvellous joy than this man received. Has He saved us from our leprosy? We have next—

THE PRAYER OF THE MERCIFUL.

5. **There came . . . a centurion.** Luke's account is fuller, and represents the centurion as sending the "*elders of the Jews,*" and saying by them what Matthew reports him as saying directly. Perhaps he sent the elders first, and when he learned Christ was coming, went out himself to meet Him. Here is one of the most beautiful pictures in the Bible of Goodness in unexpected peoples and places. As an educated Roman, we expect him to be an infidel; as a Soldier, coarse; as a Slave-owner, unfeeling, for slavery in all ages has brutalized master and slave. But lo, he is believing, lowly, tender-hearted. Bad as Capernaum was, he saw the good in its creed; and his candour welcomed Truth. From Luke we find he was so rich in faith and generosity, that he built a synagogue for those whose religion was usually the jest of his countrymen. Romans commonly turned aged and useless slaves out of doors, leaving them to die or live as they might; sometimes killed them as men here kill worn-out horses (see Schmidt's "*Social Results of Christianity,*" p. 85); but this man loves his slave. Even Jews were slow to believe; this man feels Christ's glory and omnipotence. Here note many things. (1) The candid gain much light that the scornful miss. (2) Good masters never lack good servants. (3) Amongst heathens to-day are many "*Merchant-men seeking goodly pearls,*" like this man, who will value "*the pearl of great price*" when they find it. (4) A kindly fellowship with man helps one to communion with God.

6. **Palsy, grievously tormented.** Sometimes paralysis is acutely

7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

painful. He asks the Saviour, modestly, for healing, by simply telling the trouble. The elders enlarge his petition and add, "*He is worthy,*" etc. Happy are they who say of themselves, "*I am not worthy,*" but whose neighbours contradict them! The lowly find the praise which the proud have to go without.

7. **I will come and heal him.** The strength of God is in this simple word. *Judas probably would have advised Christ to go, but say nothing of healing till He had seen the case.* But Christ is unconscious of limit of power. Christ serves the rich centurion and the poor leper with equal readiness.

8, 9. Here, probably, the centurion speaks *in person*. How marvelously! Note here: (1) Lowliness, such as he had not seen in Israel, which declares itself unworthy of Christ's presence. (2) Faith, that thinks Christ's bare word can carry healing to extremest need. (3) The soldier's view of Christ, as One who can order life and healing to come and go as easily as he orders his men to do a common thing. (4) The mysterious energy of hope men show in prayer. (5) "*He prayeth best that loveth best.*" (6) Lowliness increases faith; were we less proud we should be more trustful. (7) Those who, like the centurion, learn one part of truth, that of the Old Testament, are on their way to learning that of the New Testament as well.

10-13. The reply of Christ is crowded with meaning. (1) He marvels at *Great Faith*, knowing how easily doubt comes in the weakness, darkness, and trouble of our lives. (2) He marvels at its being found in one who had been a heathen. "*The last*" in opportunity are often "*the first*" in attainment. (3) He rejoices in the prospect of the conversion of heathendom to God, of which this centurion is a first-fruit. (4) He grieves that the children of privilege should make so little use of it, and so many of them be rejected.

12. Remember, Englishmen occupy very much the same relation to Bible truth to-day that the Jews did of old. We, now, especially, are

13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way ; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

14 ¶ And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.

15 And he touched her hand, and the fever left her : and she arose, and ministered unto them.

the children of the kingdom. Outer darkness ; this word implies the gravity of the future judgment.

13. As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. Little faith gets little answers ; large faith gets all it wants. Faith is trust ; cherish it strongly.

DOMESTIC MERCIES.

14, 15. From Mark (1 : 29) and Luke (4 : 38) we learn that this cure was effected on that greatest day of Capernaum's history, when in the synagogue the demoniac was healed, and in the evening the streets were turned into an hospital, and He healed "the sick" that "round Him lay." It is a little episode full of gentle instruction. Apparently, after the manner of the Capernaum fevers, the disease had swiftly assumed grave proportions. What was in the morning probably a mere threatening of illness, was in the evening a threatening of death. In the incident note many things : (1) *Extraordinary consecration is not exempt from ordinary trials.* Some might have expected that Peter, the first apostle, would have had fuller nets than other fishermen, and a home free of all trials. But sometimes he toils all night and catches nothing, and sometimes sorrow darkens his home. Lord Bacon goes beyond the mark when he teaches us that Prosperity was the blessing of the Old Testament, but Affliction of the New ; but we must mark that the special rewards of faithfulness are not wealth, comfort, or ease. (2) From Mark, who says, "*They tell Him of her,*" and from Luke, which says, "*They besought Him for her,*" it is evident that *Jesus waited for the Prayer of faith, before proffering the gift of healing.* All our discipline in life is a "*Teaching to Pray*" and mercies have a double blessing when they are won by Prayer ; *for they bring us again and again to Christ.* (3) To have Jesus for a friend, is to find blessing in every relationship of life : wife, children, parents, are all enriched by the great relationship. (4) *The Saviour did not believe in the advantages of the celibacy of the clergy.* As a rule Grace will operate most richly on us when we are living on lines of Nature. It is an inestimable privation for a child to be without parents, to care for its interests and call into existence its finer affections. It is a similar privation when man or woman is without a partner in life, in fellowship with whom all the finer sympathies and affections are developed. Grace

16 ¶ When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick:

despises not Nature, but recognizes that whatever fosters love, favours goodness. Monastic graces are strained, unfeeling, artificial. The biggest hearts are those of fathers and mothers. The best goodness is the sort which is most simple and most natural. The celibacy of the clergy is a requirement which the Church of Rome enforced at the time of its lowest deadness and immorality. (5) The Saviour touched her hand. Fearless contact with them is the secret of curing many ills, which nervous keeping at a distance would leave uncured. (6) The cure was complete, for the woman (*evidently a splendid housewife*) arose, and ministered unto them. The matronly housewife, competent and kind, who bemothers all and serves them, is still one of Christ's most welcome "ministers," though she has no church office and no books are written for her guidance or in her praise. Happy the home whose formative souls live close with Christ!

A new paragraph (ver. 16-27) brings the marvellous experiences of Capernaum before us. It is generally held that the order of the other evangelists, which gives an earlier date to the great healing, and a later date to the stilling of the storm, is to be preferred. The three great phases of the Saviour are presented here—He is the merciful Benefactor of men, their sovereign Lord, and the Lord of Nature.

"HOSPITAL SUNDAY" IN CAPERNAUM.

16, 17. What a day of wonders! The sermon in the synagogue; the healing of the demoniac in the synagogue; the healing of the mother-in-law of Peter; and now the healing of a multitude at once! This day's work alone "exalts" Capernaum "to heaven" in privilege.

16. Even was come. They delay till even, because their ideas of sabbath-keeping forbade them carrying the sick before it was ended. [Note: that while our days are counted from midnight to midnight, theirs were counted from sunset to sunset.] A strange impulse seems to move almost all the afflicted. One and another is carried, those who are blind are led; some are helped, and others guided, and others go to see what will happen; until "all the city is gathered at the door." What a gathering! No one in Capernaum had known before how many were afflicted. I suppose in our own towns in England one house in every

17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

18 ¶ Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.

three or four has some one in it who needs healing. Remember how common suffering is. Be thankful for health; be patient in trial. *Mark the gathering about Christ's door.* If it had been Herod or Pilate, all the lords and ladies, all the fashionable, all the curious, would have been gathered "about the door;" but Christ's levee is attended by all the afflicted! Still it is the same: the sorrowful and needy throng His mercy-seat. **He healed all.** Luke says (ch. 4: 40), "*He laid His hands on every one of them.*" *He deals individually with each; He cures all.* Learn hence to take pains with all you have to do, and especially with all your work of mercy.

17 This verse gives a great fact and a great suggestion. The fact is **He bare our sicknesses.** Not that he became ill with them; but they were a burden to His heart, a load on His tender spirit. And the suggestion is, that *This sympathy is part of the secret of His power.* When you can bear others' troubles, you also will have some power to bear them away.

QUIET SOUGHT.

18. **Great multitudes.** Most would have thought that, in the excitement and enthusiasm of the crowd, the Saviour had a reason for staying rather than for going. But a crowd eager with curiosity is one not favourable to spiritual impression. So the Saviour seeks some that are in their calm ordinary ways. Besides, He wants rest, and the disciples need a cooler atmosphere. *See that you have quiet hours.* The Saviour can do more with you in them than He can even in great meetings, where there is keen spiritual excitement. **He gave commandment.** Though "*He had not where to lay His head*" (ver. 20), *He commands as a king; Penniless, but Imperial and obeyed.* **The other side** was the north-east shore of the lake—which was and is a wild mountainous district, with few cities, and "*desert places*" many and large. He wants God's presence, and finds it in these "closets" of sacred fellowship. His embarking is delayed, however, by a strange incident. Two "disciples"—the words "*another of His disciples*" (ver. 21) show this—profess the desire to forsake all and follow Him, to join the apostles in their work; both betraying, however, that they were not quite as ready as they thought.

19 And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

20 And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

21 And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

A PROMISING DISCIPLE.

19. **A scribe.** A rabbi. Some few, therefore, who were learned believed in Christ. Here is a rabbi, in earnest, ready to confess Christ, and cast in his lot with Him. Till now He has only fishermen for apostles. Surely He will welcome such a helper!

20. Christ does not welcome him at once. The expression of an intention, instead of the utterance of a request, indicates too much consciousness of the greatness of the sacrifice he is making and service he is offering. From his tone one gathers that he is impulsive; that he had had some difficulty in making up his mind, and had been helped to it at last by observing the popularity of Jesus. Full of yearning as the Saviour is for the love and service of men, He cannot accept a patronizing service, which, because it is so, is sure to break down, when a word of instruction and warning may quiet the excitement, and secure afterwards a whole-hearted consecration. *The Saviour, therefore, destroys the illusions, and leaves the offer of service neither refused nor accepted.* **Not where to lay His head.** This word of Christ has many matters in it for thought. Note: (1) This seems to mark the end of the sunshine of popularity, the beginning of the shadow of the cross. Henceforth He has *no Home even in Capernaum*. (2) The daily self-denial required and found in Jesus. (3) The contrast of Christ's content with the discontent we have with our abundance of mercies. (4) The solemn question, Whether those who are not led into any path of self-denial are really following this Leader? (5) How much our salvation cost. One hopes and believes that this man at some later period came in a more worthy frame to Christ.

AN UNPROMISING DISCIPLE.

21. Still another would accompany Christ—*but not yet*. His case is more difficult to understand. For at first sight the delay he asks seems most reasonable, and we marvel at Christ's reply. Most commentators take a different view, but the only view which appears to me consistent with the conditions of the case is that which supposes the man's father aged, but not dead nor dying; and the man professing a filial piety which constrains him to wait with his father, to comfort his age, and after death perform for him the last duties of filial service.

22 But Jesus said unto him, Follow me ; and let the dead bury their dead.

23 ¶ And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves : but he was asleep.

If the father were already dead, he had died that day, and the burial would have followed within a few hours of death. Is it conceivable that the man left the dead body of his father to listen to Christ's preaching, and neglected all preparations for interment? *He could not, in the nature of things, be free for such engagements as listening to Christ's preaching in such circumstances.* He is, therefore, like many who would be missionaries "but for an aged mother;" or those who will do a great work, *only not yet.* The heart being more in the delaying and the excuse than in the intent.

22. The same Christ, who defers the hasty, spurs the delaying. **Follow Me.** The unquickened can bury dead bodies. *He, by preaching the kingdom of God, can give life to dead souls. Probably both of these men were delivered from dangerous weakness by Christ's faithful word.* Note: *The sharp words of Christ have more of love in them than the pleasant words of the world.*

THE PERILOUS VOYAGE.

23-27. To leave a friendly multitude and to give hard charges to amiable and hopeful followers were both strange things. But the strangeness of Christ's action toward them is outdone by the strangeness of this journey. For it was evening when they started (Mark 4 : 35); not a good time for setting out, and, considering the brief twilight and the intense darkness following it in these latitudes, a worse time for entering a strange city. Besides, the intense change of temperature between day and night made night the chief time of storms; and, considering that four at least of those with Him were weather-wise fishermen, probably already some warnings were given of the coming gale. *Yet He goes on board.* Note: *Christ will often lead us in strange pathways.*

23. Ship. The Revised Version has "Boat." Josephus on one occasion collected a hundred and thirty such boats on the lake for a sea attack on Tiberias. From his description they seem to have been about the dimensions of our fishing-smacks. They had masts, sails, anchor, a crew of four men, and carried cargo. Disciples followed, wondering, but wisely content to follow where He led.

STRANGE STORM.

24. Great picture. The wearied, peaceful Christ! Mark has a word, "*They took Him even as He was*" (4 : 36), suggesting that, without preparation of wraps or food, they went aboard. Was this

25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

sort of rest the usual refreshment of His life? What fatigue and exhaustion is registered in this sleep! How striking the contrast! Without, the storm; within, the peace: all around, alarm; within Him *refreshing dreams of heaven*. Truly, when Jesus spoke of "*My peace*," He had something great to speak of. **Great tempest.** Not too strong a word for the storms that suddenly agitate these waters, whose violence have had a place in all descriptions of the lake, from that of Josephus downward (see "*The Land and the Book*," p. 374). The fishermen exert themselves to the utmost, but, the waves washing over them, the boat fills faster than they can bale. Till at last they—not timid landsmen, but skilled boatmen—feel the boat is sinking, and all will drown unless He saves them. *They that follow Christ will usually get into some trouble, some Slough of Despond, or Valley of Humiliation. After any great act of obedience, expect some Difficulty.* Truth, faithfulness, godliness, lead straight into trouble. *Sometimes Providence seems to care nothing for either Christ or us.*

25. The fishermen seek One who knows nothing of boats or storms! They, honourably, do not wake Him till the danger is extreme. When they do, it is with a brief, sharp cry, **Lord, save us: we perish.** How all the despairing come to Christ! There are two sorts of prayers. The first is, "**Lord, assist us to save ourselves!**" That sort goes without answer. The second is, "**Lord, save us!**" This has complete and abundant answer.

26. The Saviour, *though the storm could not wake Him*, wakes swiftly at the voice of the disciples, like a mother quick to catch the cry of a babe. But, even awake, He is not alarmed, but turns calmly first to the disciples, soothing and chiding them at once with the question, **Why are ye fearful?** Then afterwards He turns to the storm, rebukes and stills it. In this note many things: (1) Bravely waiting to what seemed the very last, the disciples might have been braver still and yet safe. (2) Christ still needs to ask this question, **Why are ye fearful?** for we are afraid even when the sea is calm. (3) *There is never any reason for a good man's fear.* God rules. Christ is near Him. A sleeping is as good as a waking Christ. It is a mistake to *fear* what our Father will do. If they go to the bottom, it is a short cut to heaven. (4) There is sin in fear, and danger in it. It is the storm inside, not outside, that drowns us. We should not dishonour God. (5) *We should school ourselves to be afraid of fear, and*

27 But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

28 ¶ And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.

cherish faith. (6) *There is no trouble so great but the Saviour can avert it.* (7) Great is the calm given by Jesus after the storm He stills.

27. Marvelling and questioning! So the world goes on. No common name fits Christ, nor common place suits Him. He is ever bursting reverence and making it larger. *God's Night School* is a great institution. So, may all our Storms of temptation—trouble—conscience—Death—end in peace.

28-34. One of the most mysterious of all the incidents in the Saviour's life is here given. It narrates an enterprise which seems to disappoint the expectations of Jesus; one from which He returns *having failed*, as men would name it. In this and other features it is mysterious, but greatly worth our pondering.

28. **Country of the Gergesenes.** Mark and Luke have "*Gadarenes.*" A recent investigator (Dr. Thomson) has discovered a "*Gersa*" on the eastern shore of the sea of Galilee. This might be described as in the country of the **Gadarenes**; the city of **Gadara**, sixteen miles distant, being the chief city of that district. From other sources we know that a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of **Gadara** and **Decapolis** were heathens; though, from Christ going into this district, we conclude that the mass of the people were chiefly Jews, for He kept his own precept, "*Go not into the way of the Gentiles,*" until the time had come for saying, "*Go ye into all the world.*" The western shore of the lake was thick with villages and towns; the eastern shore was wild and comparatively uninhabited.

The night of storm ends in a morning of difficulty. We see

CHRIST FACE TO FACE WITH MADNESS.

28, 29. In all madness there is something at once humiliating and strange. "Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh," is the description of a form which it assumed in a gentle spirit. Here a wild animal ferocity is its characteristic. From the three evangelists we get a complete and awful picture. **Exceeding fierce**; "*dwelling among the tombs*;" "*No man could bind him*;" "*He had been often bound with fetters and chains*;" "*chains had been plucked asunder*;" he "*ware no clothes*" (Luke 8: 27); **No man might pass that way.** What a picture! How thankful should we be for Reason! How careful to avoid all that would impair it! Probably more than three-fourths

29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

of all the madness which exists to-day is due to drink, or lust, or vanity. There is no doubt that the finest organ we possess, the brain, is easily injured, and the physical injury which evil actions inflict becomes in its turn a condition in which evil actions are perpetually prompted. There is no incompatibility between the view which represents *such a man as this* as "Mad," and the view which describes him as *possessed with devils*. For the enemy takes advantage of all our physical conditions, and plays upon the shattered nerve. He is able to do this *the more he has been yielded to*. We part with some protection from his assaults whenever we yield to his temptations: and many that might easily have been victors both in reason and character become his victims by yielding to him. I need not add that, while in the vast majority of cases some moral waywardness has caused brain mischief, there are many of the finest souls who suffer from mental aberration from some simple strain or innocent cause of injury. In this instance the men had probably been of the lower type. Others dare not confront such rage. But the Saviour has the confidence of a *master*, and advances to meet them. "To minister to the mind diseased," effectually, is what man cannot do. But Christ is strong where we are weak. And even though the day of special miracles is past, yet still, *even now, His grace prevents, relieves, or cures much insanity*. Others might well shrink from the presence of one so fierce and wild; but the moral authority of Jesus is a spell before which mania itself must bow. [St. Mark and St. Luke speak of only one demoniac; Matthew, of two. Probably one was more prominent and the spokesman.]

STRANGE GREETINGS.

29. Apparently, from St. Luke (8: 29), the Saviour had spoken first, bidding the unclean spirit come out of him. The initiative of all salvation is taken by the Saviour. It is a strange reply made to Him. Evidently the man had heard of Jesus. The spiritual perception has that keenness which often belongs to despair; which beholds in a clear light all that might have been and the Saviour who could have saved it. The devils in the man know their master, and see the difference between Him and ordinary men. But while there is the perception of His greatness, there is no discernment of His Love. They see Him to be **Son of God**: they imagine Him come only to torment them. *If we judge of states by utterances, there must be many who are possessed by devils without knowing it; for there are many*

30 And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding.

31 So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.

who shrink from the presence of the Saviour as from one who would only torment them, and who say, **What have I to do with Thee?** All who shrink from intercourse with Jesus Christ, and wish Him to go His way, and leave them to go their's, are more or less, "*possessed with devils.*" According to St. Luke (8 : 30), the Saviour does not immediately bid the devils depart, but asks, "*What is thy name?*" Perhaps He thought the effort of self-explanation required for a reply to the question would assist the regaining of at least the momentary sobriety which would allow the entrance of His Word of power. It is a revelation of the depth of his distress—that the human consciousness seems altogether suppressed by another, and that, feeling himself a host of evil spirits rather than one man, he answers, "*My name is Legion.*" In all this there is much that is most mysterious and yet not uncommon. Our inmost personality seems sometimes capable of being invaded and dominated by the personality of others. In its simplest and most superficial form, we see this perhaps in Thought-reading and the blending of the personal consciousnesses of two individuals involved in it. In a more complete and dangerous form it is seen in Mesmerism, in which one will and consciousness may completely dominate another ; constituting an experience to which no one ought to subject either himself or others. In a graver form still it is seen in a certain evil spell which some have over others *who have yielded to their influence.* In its worst form it is found when there has been a yielding to Satanic influence with its consequent enthronement of the tempter in the soul. *We should keep the temple of the soul sacred and free.*

THE STRANGE REQUEST.

30, 31. It is not easy to understand all that now takes place. The devils beseech Him—"not to send them away out of the country" (Mark), "not to command them into the deep" (Luke)—to **enter into the swine.** All that is meant by these words none may perhaps fully know. But perhaps we are not in error in supposing : (1) That it is their torment to be barred from their mischievous fellowship with men ; (2) they delight in mischief ; and (3) they wish to prejudice the people against the Saviour by the destruction of their property. They wish to sow discord between the Lord and others. And the presence of the swine gives them the opportunity they desire. Swine were forbidden food ; but in demand for those of heathen origin who were mixed with the Jews in that district, and perhaps for the Roman

32 And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.

33 And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.

34 And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.

soldiery, part of whose rations was salt pork. Any injury to these, therefore, would awake the resentment of many who cared more for profits than propriety. Dr. Thomson ("The Land and the Book") found, on visiting the district a few years ago, herds of wild swine still feeding on the mountain-side.

THE JUDGMENT ON GADARENE SINNERS.

32. They doubtless defended their trade, arguing perhaps that Moses forbade eating, but not keeping swine; that pork was asked for, and somebody must sell it; that suitable pasture-land made it profitable and proper for them to do so. *Men are never without excuses for doing wrong.* It is mercy to arrest these men in their evil trade, and help their deliverance even by punishing them. So, while the enemy wishes the swine destroyed in order that Christ may be disliked, the Saviour permits them to be destroyed that the people may be pricked in conscience and awaked to repentance.

STRANGE PRAYERS.

33, 34. One—not mentioned by Matthew, but by Mark and Luke—that of the sufferer, a prayer of sanest wisdom, "*that he might be with Jesus*" (Mark 5: 18); the other, that of the whole city, of men commonly reputed sane, a *prayer of wildest madness, that he would depart out of their coasts.* *The devils now are in the common-sense, business men of Gergesa, and move them with feelings identical in character, though more courteously expressed, with the dread that made the demoniac say, "What have we to do with thee? art Thou come to torment us?"* (ver. 29). The common impenitence of men is a sort of madness. How many have never offered any prayer to Christ but the devils' prayer, "*Let us alone, depart out of our coasts.*" How strange that, when they have before their eyes such an embodied offer of mercy, healing and love, they should be so infatuate. Observe: How men are damaged by any course that hurts their conscience. They apparently compared the healing of two men with the loss of two thousand swine (Mark 5: 13), and preferred to have the swine. "*Love not the world.*"

STRANGE RESPONSES.

The Saviour denies the wise prayer, and grants the wicked one! When they ask him to go, "*He entered into a ship, and passed over*" (ch. 9: 1). For all things strange the Saviour has sufficient reasons. (1) It was good for the man to be taught that Christ absent is still Christ saving and protecting, and to be made to resume the ordinary relationship of life. (2) It was good for the Gadarenes to have the sufferer left with them. They could venture to look at him; and calm consideration of Christ's work will let them regret their repulse of Him, and make them wish to see Him again. *It had this effect: The second feeding of the multitude took place in this district* (Mark 7: 31, 8: 1). (3) Any one who has an experience of mercy to relate can be of great service. Here a man is one day a maniac, the next God's messenger. (4) Christ will not thrust Himself on any soul; we have the power to exclude Him from our hearts. (5) This experience of Christ would be described as a *failure*; an "unsuccessful effort" to evangelize the Gadarenes. All failures of good men in good efforts, like this *failure*, have in them a seed of success, and lead straight up to it.

CHAPTER IX.

1 And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.

2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

A marvellous section (1-13) opens this chapter, embracing a series of ascending wonders. For we see (1) a sinner healed and pardoned; (2) a sinner engaged for heavenly employment; and (3) sinners enjoying the friendly fellowship of Jesus.

1. He . . . passed over. We read of no wrath at being repulsed. One would have thought that when spies and foes had plotted against Him in Capernaum (Mark 3: 6, 7), and lovers of evil gains had besought Him to leave Gadara, He would, in disgust at earth, have gone back to heaven. *Copy the patience which gives Capernaum another chance.*

2. Note many things in this verse. (1) The Saviour is in "*the house*" (Mark 2: 1), which must have been a large house, for "*many*" (Mark) heard Him, including "*Pharisees and doctors of law . . . out*

of every city and town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem." Probably, therefore, a house with large court-yard and rooms opening on to it. (2) Every one had not been healed in Capernaum. *There are always some in corners.* Here is a poor bedridden man, who only hears of the great chance of healing after Christ is gone. *But Christ remembers those whom man forgets, and comes back to finish up His work of mercy on the paralytic and one or two more. Weep not. There is always some mercy left.* (3) *We insufficiently mark what the Saviour's word suggests, viz. that many bodily ailments come from sins of one kind or another.* Drunkenness produces many diseases; so does vice. Vehement passions strain various organs. Worry, produced by unbelief, wastes strength rapidly. Unrest and solicitude grow out of selfishness and suspicion, and destroy the possibility of health, often even bringing on grave disease. Some sin was, and was felt to be, the cause of this man's paralysis. (4) The "sweet uses of adversity" are here displayed. Thought, regret, repentance, are produced. Prayer rises; faith in the love of God begins to appear, helping him to believe in the gift of a Saviour. (5) The usefulness of affliction to others comes out in this story. The four strong men who carry him grow gentler by their action. *Sufferers refine others by the service they need and receive.* (6) Observe the determination of those in earnest. Doubtless many said, "There was no chance of getting near Him;" "The Saviour was occupied with the scholars;" "He would get so much harm from excitement it was better not to try to reach Christ." *But he would reach Him, and he did reach Him.* There is a crowd at the door, but fishermen's ropes hanging on the wall. One of the happy thoughts that come to gracious hearts struck them. They will go up by the outside stairs to the roof and let him down through the roof (of verandah, probably), and put him before the Lord. They do so, swiftly, deftly, as only seafaring people could, and get him nearer Christ than they would have done if no crowd had been there at all. *Where there's a will there's a way to Christ. Find it.* (7) *The man was a second sermon that morning, as he hung like some great spider from the roof, in the speechless supplication of a great necessity.* (8) *The Saviour rejoices in such an interruption.* (9) And, beginning with the gravest need of this man, proclaims his forgiveness. He came to get a great mercy; he will get it, and one greater still. Oh, how greatly are we blessed when Christ says, **Thy sins be forgiven thee!** (10) Christ still says this to multitudes in various ways, either through texts of Scripture assuring mercy to those who seek Him, or through conscience, or through the witness of His Spirit. Get Him to say this to you; for forgiveness of sins is a great thing, greater than the healing of paralysis.

3 And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

5 For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?

6 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

7 And he arose, and departed to his house.

8 But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

9 ¶ And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

3-6. Those who were acting as spies on the Saviour, rejoice to hear what they think blasphemy; but are silent, in the hope that He will still further commit Himself. The Saviour will (1) Prove His power of forgiveness, (2) Assure the paralytic of forgiveness, and, perchance, (3) Convert some of the less hardened of the scribes, by doing something requiring Deity as much as forgiveness itself. Accordingly He proclaims their thought, and rebukes it by a miracle. *Be slow to judge; for mistake is easy, is grave, and is certain to take place if candour and goodness are not behind the judgment.*

6. Arise, take up thy bed. The mat in which he had been carried he now must carry. What a day for this sufferer, when life, health, the peace of God, the hope of heaven, are all given! Note: (1) How wise it is to pray. (2) How salvation always brings other blessings in its train. (3) *The reward of the bearers. Help thou some one to get to Christ.* (4) That there is still "on earth," close to us, a Saviour that forgives. (5) *That great sins, which God has heavily punished, are forgiven to the penitent as well as lesser sins.*

8. Saw . . . marvelled . . . glorified. If people would only look, how often would they see in Christ what would make them glorify God! Luke adds, "*They were filled with fear.*" *The nearness of an omnipotent, sin-pardoning Christ, is a great solemnity. What are we doing with Him?* Great as is this marvel, the next is greater. *Told in one verse by the modesty of the writer.*

A GREAT DISCIPLE.

9. A man, named Matthew. "Matthew" is the equivalent of the names Theodore or Dorothy, and means "a gift of God." He had also the name *Levi* (Mark 2: 14). The latter tells us that he was of the priestly tribe; the former suggests he was of pious parentage.

But his trade—a publican—shows he had been of perverse life. Only the selfish would, for the sake of gain, adopt a profession in which they would be the instruments of a foreign oppression and the objects of universal ill-will. Matthew was probably the heart-break of his family. But there is more in men than we see. And often, after wildness comes relenting and a better mind. Matthew, living in Capernaum, saw the face and works of Christ, and heard His words. Strange longings rose in him. Possibly converse with disciples helped it; till, as the Saviour looked into his face, all the Publican seemed gone—melted away into the Penitent and the Saint. Men can often read our looks, and Jesus reads them perfectly. *Has Jesus ever seen the heavenly look in our face?* Sitting at the receipt of custom, *i.e.* at the custom-house. A considerable staff was necessary to collect the dues which were paid on everything crossing the lake: the ground tax (one-tenth of total crops), the income tax (which was $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ in the £), and a capitation tax, besides town dues, dues on goods entering the town, bridge dues, and highway dues (Edersheim 1: 515). The opportunities for extortion presented by these made them an oppressive burden to the people, and their collection a corrupting and odious employment. This morning, though Matthew's body is there, his thoughts are elsewhere. And Jesus, reading his thoughts, said, **Follow Me.** In this word are many marvels: (1) Its solemnity. It calls to sacrifice of wealth, occupation, habits, for an unknown and perilous future. (2) Its mercy. For none would have fellowship with such; yet Jesus will employ even him. (3) Its promise. Apart from Christ, *Matthew is on his own hands.* Christ's call to follow Him promises protection, guidance, fellowship, salvation. (4) The light it sheds on man. One, yesterday, a companion of sinners may to-morrow be a prophet of the kingdom. (5) The great honour God puts on man. We can be fellow-workers in His greatest work. (6) The call given to all publicans and sinners in the appointment of one of them as an apostle. (7) The essence of all Christ's calls is, **Follow Me.** It is not a doctrine He gives, but action He asks; *obedience to, fellowship with, Christ*,—the copying of His life. The Saviour calls each of us singly to follow Him. What an honour! What a mercy! He arose, and followed Him. Luke says, "*Left all;*" but Matthew, telling his own story, ignores the sacrifice. Note: (1) The courage and vigour of this decision. (2) That the bravest are the easiest courses. (3) The wisdom of it. For it led him to salvation, to peace, to sanctity, to greatest honour and usefulness; to the task of writing a Gospel which has blessed all ages, and many millions; to heaven, with all its usefulness and joy. How much would he have lost had he disobeyed! *Have we obeyed?*

10 ¶ And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.

11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners ?

12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice : for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

THE STRANGE FEAST.

10-13. A still greater marvel. The more Pharisaic rules multiplied, the larger grew the number of those neglecting them, and the wider their separation from their stricter brethren. The strict rule was not only not to eat with, but not to buy from those neglecting the traditions. But here Jesus feasts with publicans and sinners.

10. Matthew does not say whose house. But Luke says *it was a great feast in Matthew's house* (5 : 29). Matthew turns not his back on his brethren, but wants them to share his joy, and follow his Master. Though he makes a great sacrifice, he does not do it mournfully, but makes a feast of joy and thankfulness. And the Saviour accepts the invitation whose aim is gracious. He who forgot His food to speak to the woman of Samaria had other feasting than bodily viands that day, in answering questions, waking consciences, revealing God's great love. There is a companionship with sinners which confirms them in their sin ; avoid that. There is a companionship with sinners that lifts them out of their sin ; cherish that. A fellowship of yearning affection, respectful solicitude, has great power. *Get near men.* All forces lessen, like gravitation, in the ratio of the square of the distance. *Seek a closer walk with man,* in interest, love, appeal, and prayer, as well as a closer walk with God.

11. The Pharisees are great at grumbling. Here they express the wonder of multitudes. *Their question is the sort of question which keeps always rising.* When *He is born into* a world of publicans and sinners, *all worlds marvel.* When He admits them to His Communion Table, they marvel still more. When He takes publicans and sinners to feast with Him in heaven, they marvel at it most of all.

12. The envious murmur elicits a great explanation, in two parts. In the first He expresses the motherly, pitiful mercy which fills His heart. *He is nearest to the neediest.* Take this comfort. The Physician seeks the sick. And second—

13. God prefers that we should show mercy rather than observe rites. *Christ will eat and drink with us, be the close Companion of our life, if we will but let Him.*

14 ¶ Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not ?

15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them ? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

14-17. Another illustrative conflict. It is not Pharisees only that censure Jesus ; but the Free Spirit of the Saviour disturbs devout disciples of John also. There are always some who, from lack of variety of experience or lack of imagination, cannot understand or tolerate any way but their own. It was only natural that the disciples of the austere Apostle of the Wilderness should wonder at the different life Christ led ; and especially at His eating and drinking at feasts with publicans and sinners. A comparison of the three Gospels (Mark 2 : 18, Luke 5 : 33) makes it evident that the Pharisees, knowing the misgivings of John's disciples, stirred them up to ask the question, which otherwise would have remained unasked in their hearts. So, after the Pharisees have asked why Christ eats "*with sinners*" (ver. 11), they come asking, **Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not ?** Observe here : (1) No one faithful to Heavenly guidance will escape criticism and reproof. Christ did not. (2) Criticism is cowardly. It asks the disciples (ver. 11) why "*their Master*" does so and so ; it asks here "*The Master*" why **His disciples** do so and so. Oblique ways are favoured by those who, being without manhood sufficient to achieve excellence, take refuge from obscurity by marking others' faultiness. (3) "*The conventional*" supplies the standard of common minds. Here, it is assumed that Christ and His disciples ought to do what they and the Pharisees did. It is right that the conventional should rule us, until experience and consecration give the right of self-reliance. But we need higher authority than the Pharisees and the disciples of John for the way that we should take. (4) The strongest controversies have been over the smallest matters, such as : church order, church ritual, keeping fasts, the proper days for keeping Christmas or Easter, the use of unfermented bread in the Sacrament. Here the disciples' neglect of the ordinary weekly fasts (Thursday, in commemoration of Moses going up the mount for the Law, and Monday, of his coming down) rouses the severe reflections of these men. "**Are they holier than their neighbours and the good who went before them, that they take such liberties ?**" is the question in their hearts.

THE FREEDOM OF DISCIPLES VINDICATED.

15-17. There is no rebuke for John's disciples—such as there was for the Pharisees—but a *great explanation*. The Saviour urges, first,

16 No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

17 Neither do men put new wine into old bottles : else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish : but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

that *the natural* is a legitimate guide in all things harmless and innocent ; and second, that in religion, the mixture of incongruous elements is to be avoided. **As long as the Bridegroom is with them** intimates the period of His bodily presence ; when His nearness, glory, love, omnipotence kept fear and doubt far away. Our wisdom is not to cross and thwart Nature, but to hallow it. As James teaches, the afflicted are to pray ; the merry to sing psalms—not *vice versa*, as disciplinarians with a spite against themselves would have done. **When the Bridegroom shall be taken away.** After Calvary, when they will be alone in a hostile world ; then fasting will be natural, and therefore proper. Disservice to ourselves is not necessarily service to God. And irritant and worrying self-cultivation, is not the taking up a cross out of allegiance to Christ or love to man. Wherever in religion we do what is unnatural, we tend to become artificial, and the absence of inward reason and spiritual motive becomes an absence of the heart from our religion altogether. The lesson, therefore, is : External usages must have a better authority and reason than custom. They must be natural to him who observes them, or are valueless. This law of spiritual life is fertile of much edification ; opposed as it is to all ritualism in its essential principle, which is that we should do external acts to produce feelings, and not merely to express them. The second lesson which the Saviour gives, is connected with but additional to this. Our religious life must not be a mixture, resulting from following two principles. It must be simple and single in all its motives. We are prone to compromise : to “*serve two masters ;*” to have two strings to our bow. We would trust for salvation to Christ and to our works. We would find our guidance for life in Christ and in Moses, not looking to Christ alone for living guidance and the light of His example. We wish to be in the world and in the church ; children of fashion and of faith together. So these disciples would have formed the main part of their life on John's precepts and on custom, and added a little spirituality by the help of Christ. Here the Saviour preaches *Singleness of principle and of motive.* Not new—*i.e.* *unshrunk*—cloth unto an old garment. Not new wine into old bottles—*i.e.* old skins already stretched to their utmost,—but new wine into new skins. New doctrines of Redeeming Love are to be held in a new and more gladsome spirit. New motives are to lead to

18 ¶ While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead : but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

new habits. The Jewish life will not express the Christian heart. *Christ only.* Not Christ and Moses, or Christ and Church, or Christ and Custom, or Christ and Priest, or Christ and Self,—but Christ only, is to be the Saviour, the Master, the pattern, the power, the joy of our life. This lesson, that true piety must ever be natural and single, is far reaching. Here (1) Christ virtually abrogates the whole Levitical Law, “*new bottles for new wine*” involving nothing less. (2) Here is the charter of a great freedom. According to this teaching, *we must do certain things, if at all, not because Moses has required, or others observe them ; but because they are natural to our quickened souls.* (3) The secret of true growth is here. No dividing of regards between Christ and lesser authorities, such as convention, propriety, priests, or even Moses, must divide and externalize our lives ; but our being must find everything in Christ—its motive of action, power of action, pattern of action, and ground of hope. The apostle had learned this doctrine when he said, “*To me to live is Christ.*”

[For interesting scientific treatment of “*Bottles*” and “*Wine*,” see Dr. Farrar’s “*Commentary on St. Luke*,” excursus iii.]

The great Physician is still in demand ; there is no hour in which Jesus is not wanted. In the next section (18–31) we have the record of three mercies, each of which needed the power of God, and conveyed enduring gladness to man. The accounts of the first two miracles given here should be compared with the much fuller accounts given by Mark (ch. 5 : 22–43) and Luke (ch. 8 : 41–56).

HOME SORROW.

18. Sorrow has its privileges, and Jairus calls the Saviour from the controversies that grieved Him to the work of love which He enjoyed. A ruler of the synagogue, he had seen Christ’s works and heard His words, but, with the caution of one in a responsible position, had not as yet sided with Jesus. **Worshipped.** Mark says, “*Fell at His feet.*” Affliction quickens reverence and decision. What brings the ruler to his knees—the halting to the open confession? **My daughter is even now dead : but come and lay Thy hand upon her.** Not dead when he left (Mark and Luke make this clear), he was afraid by that time she was dead ; but, for the chance of her being still alive, *would He come ?* Here note many things. (1) A great joy such as the gift of a child carries with it the possibility of a great sorrow. (2) The

19 And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

20 ¶ And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment :

21 For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

changeable state of man—one day with present peaceful future bright ; the next, the shadow of death may fall on home and change everything.

(3) *The preciousness of a child.* This alarm and woe was not excessive. The child had been one of God's great gifts ; for children do as much for parents as parents do for children. Their trust dignifies the parents ; their gladness cheers them ; they bind parents' hearts to each other. They elicit love, produce unselfishness in the heart of father and mother, endear other children and their parents to them, set them praying. "What would the world be to us if the children were no more?" Let the young seek to give all the gladness they can.

(4) The power of sorrow to quicken faith. When affliction comes, the soul soon learns to feel there must be somewhere some power that will relieve it. (5) The division of labour. Jairus, who could not nurse so well as his wife, runs for the Saviour. The mother, who could not run so well, stays and nurses. (6) The guidance that love gets. A sufferer always finds his way to Christ, and finds Christ ready to grant his request. (7) The brevity of great prayers. *Only one sentence.* Take time to know what you want and to find your God, and then tell Him exactly what you need.

18. *Arose, and followed* : like a servant, at once. How marvellous the compassion, the faith shown, in this promptitude of Christ ! *The theologians are left for the afflicted.* If you want to find Jesus still, you will more often come on His presence at the bedside of sufferers than in the books of scholars.

20-22. A casual service done on the road to another. Here note many things : (1) Another instance of faith perfected through suffering. (2) Exquisite features of this faith. Some have thought her faith adulterated with superstition, as if she believed in the garment instead of in the Saviour. Probably some that copied her act (ch. 14 : 36) were thus superstitious ; but it is her faith that makes her deem His garment healing. And this faith is full of beauty. It is modest. It is thoughtful of Jairus, and will not keep Christ from this house of grief. It has marvellous confidence in His love, or she would have taken pains to arouse His pity by recounting her distress. It hazards all on a touch. Copy all these elements in her action. Come to Jesus as one of the crowd, unselfishly, venturing boldly. (3) The perseverance which reaches Him. "*The multitudes throng Thee and press*

22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

23 And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,

24 He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.

25 But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.

Thee," says Peter. Yet a woman, weaker than women generally are, edges her way through. *There is always a crowd of obstacles between us and Christ, but we can reach Him if we try.* (4) *The touch of the hem* (or tassel, perhaps) *of His garment.* Something slight and unobserved, but through which all her story is told, her anguish expressed, her confidence declared, her desire made known. The whole soul goes forth in this touch. We read in Mark that "*straightway*" she felt in her body she was healed. You may throng and press Christ with services and formal prayers, and nothing will come of it; but any touch that expresses a longing to the Saviour will find a response of omnipotent pity.

22. She would have stolen away, but for three reasons Jesus prevents her: (1) That her act may be approved and her cure carry His benediction; (2) That others may learn to trust; (3) That Jairus may be emboldened. For just as the woman is getting near to Christ, the servants are approaching (Mark 5: 35) to tell Him it is all over. Note: **Thy faith hath made thee whole.** So the Saviour keeps instructing us in faith and its saving power. Have we entrusted our soul to Him? Has He saved us? *It does not take long to pass from death unto life.* When the message to Jairus announces the child's death, and the needlessness of Jesus coming, the Saviour turns not at the face of death, but says, "*Be not afraid, only believe*" (Mark 5: 36)—a word full of strange comfort, and preparing the soul of Jairus for its great mercy.

23-25. They reach the house. The funeral is being arranged for immediately. The usual "lament" over the dead, somewhat after the fashion of the Irish "wake," is being carried on. These mourners cannot aid Jairus' faith or comfort his loss. *He asks them to retire.* In doing so He calls Death by the beautiful name—Sleep. His word does not deny her death, but denies that death is death in the sense of that hopeless separation which they deplored. Their mockery jars with the occasion. He enters the room where the precious spoils of death await Him. What courage to beard death in its den, glorying in its success!

25. He . . . took her by the hand. Mark adds, "*And said to*

26 And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

27 ¶ And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us.

28 And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.

29 Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.

her, *Talitha cumi*”—“Little one, get up;” perhaps the words in which her mother waked her daily. And the maid arose. Here there is very much. (1) Christ is Lord of death, and it obeys Him. (2) The dead are living, and can hear His voice. (3) The gracious soul is at home in either world. The little maid is not spoiled for earth by visiting heaven, but wakes as from a great sweet dream, delighting to see her mother’s face and to tell a little of what she had beheld. (4) One day Christ will call us all from death. (5) Mark and Luke add, “*He commanded that something should be given her to eat.*” Health brings hunger. And so real and complete is the restoration that Christ has wrought, that the girl needs food. And while the parents are too bewildered to think, Jesus calls for grapes, or dates, or bread! Blessed Saviour, who can deliver from greatest fear—Death, and think of least trouble, our little Hunger! How strange, two such precepts in succession! “*Arise;*” “*Give her meat.*” How great is this Christ!

26. The fame of Jesus has reached us through all this distance of time and space, and still is spreading.

Note, in connection with whole subject, that those who have never needed any miracle have greater mercy to be thankful for than either Jairus’ daughter, or the afflicted woman, or the blind men.

27-31. Still another miracle; probably (as we gather from the other Gospels) wrought away from Capernaum; perhaps in the half-heathen district of Decapolis. There was, and is, a great deal of blindness in the Levant. It is said (Smith’s “Dictionary”) that there are four thousand blind in Cairo. In Ludd, the ancient Lydda, it is said that every one is blind either in one or both his eyes. One in every ten in Jaffa is said to be blind. The sun’s heat, the fine dust, small-pox, the coldness of the sea-breeze, heavy dews, and fresh fogs, all seem to contribute to produce it. Then, the blind had almost universally to beg. *These men beg of Christ.* But the alms they ask is *Sight*. Note: (1) Two are together. There is relief in society. (2) They give Him the great Jewish name, **Son of David**. He always gets a name above every common name. (3) Their faith is tried by *delay*. Not at once does He turn, but leaves them to follow Him to the house. (4) Christ’s requirement of faith and the great utterance, **According to your faith be it unto you**. There is no limit to the light, the power, the mercy,

30 And their eyes were opened ; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.

31 But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

32 ¶ As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.

33 And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake : and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

we receive from God, but the limit of our capacity to receive it, *i.e.* of our *Trust*.

30. Their eyes were opened. *The Saviour never fails with either bodies or souls.* We may seem most unpromising for His works of grace, but if we submit to His work He will not fail us.

31. He charges them to keep silence. They must *think*, and *thank* God, not talk. And He wants to be welcomed as Teacher and Saviour of men, not as Worker of wonders. Alas ! though they had faith, they did not obey Him, but by publishing the miracle limited Christ's liberty of movement, and therewith the blessings which might have come to others.

32-35. Another and different kind of miracle—fault of nature—has just been cured : mischief of Satan has now to be relieved. Christ could not select cases. He took all as they presented themselves. We also have to deal with evils as they arise : not deploring but mastering them.

32. Dumb man possessed with a devil, *i.e.* a lunatic whose madness took the form of refusing to speak, as lunacy not unfrequently does to-day. This feature probably rose from *intense despair or suspicion of men*. It cut the man off from the society of his fellows, and the more he shunned them the worse he would become. We should beware of *Reserve* as a great fault, it always having something either morbid or evil in it. Note : The Devil makes some speak when they should be silent (ver. 31), and some silent when they should speak (ver. 32).

33. In other cases, where the organs were at fault, Christ dealt with them (Mark 7 : 33). Here He deals not with the symptoms but with the cause, and casts out the devil. There is often a grave cause for trivial faults ; and he who knows how to deal with character will always try to find and destroy the root of evil. **The multitudes marvelled, etc.** The instinctive, unstrained judgment of numbers of people is rarely wrong in estimates of action. Great deference is due to the conclusions of our fellow-men, whenever these have been unwarped. For after all, in the highest things, peasant and philosopher differ very slightly in power of judging Divine marvels.

34 But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

36 ¶ But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

THE SINISTER EXPLANATION.

34. There always is one. No goodness is secure against misrepresentation, not even Christ's. It is so easy to suggest an evil reason for all goodness! It is so pleasant sometimes to do it. That misrepresentation, one of the worst, is one of the commonest of sins. Probably these men only thought their suggestion clever. We must expect our good to be evil spoken of. But let us take heed that it is good. There is one solemn lesson here: *There is no middle position between that of the people and that of the Pharisees. Jesus is either the great Saviour of men or the great Deceiver.*

THE ANSWER TO CALUMNY,

35, was sometimes given in words (ch. 12: 25-32). But here it is given in silent goodness. Sometimes it may be necessary to vindicate your reputation; but generally the best way is to go about healing, working works of mercy: *For none we bless will misconceive us.* **Villages.** Jesus is an itinerant Preacher. The Church must copy Him in His efforts to give the gospel equally to all men, not neglecting the villages for the towns, the ignorant for the well-to-do, the heathen for those at home. **Preaching . . . healing.** The Saviour seeks to afford all kind of help for body and soul. Whatever love prompts, Christ does. All good work is God's work, and the lower and higher kinds of good work help each other.

THE EYE OF JESUS.

36. The multitude grows, and by very magnitude increases the difficulty of food, shelter, rest. **Fainted** means "worn out" with following; **scattered** suggests that, being so worn out, numbers threw themselves on the ground, too weary to go further. **Moved with compassion.** He pities bodily weariness, pities still more the spiritual unrest and yearning that leads them to endure that weariness for the sake of hearing His words. *The eye with which a man looks on the crowd will tell you what he is.* Some look down on the multitudes with contempt; some look askance at them with distrust and fear; some with the knavish speculation as to whether anything can be made

37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few ;

38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

out of their simplicity ; and some look with sad and depressed eye, borne down with what seems the hopelessness of their condition. *All these views of our fellow-men are sinful.* Look on them as Jesus did, with love, the wish to help—**compassion**. Why is there so little compassion in our hearts for the masses of our people to-day ? Let God's angel, Pity, dwell in your soul.

RIPE SOULS.

37. But another feeling besides pity fills His heart—a *wonderful appreciation*. For the words, **The harvest . . . is plenteous**, do not mean only that souls are almost innumerable, but that *ripe souls* are—souls all but ready for consecration, faith, sanctity. None but Jesus would have uttered such a word. He utters it to-day. He sees, amongst the unsaved at home and amongst the heathen abroad, multitudes needing only a little work from a true harvester to gather them into the garner of God. Conscience, Affliction, the Spirit of God, Truth, are all at work, and are not so feeble as we think them. *Let every teacher, preacher, visitor, go to his work expecting to find ripe souls, ready for all truth and duty.* **Labourers are few.** There were many thousands of priests, the scribes were also to be counted by thousands ; but yet winners of souls were few. Those who can find their way into human souls and lead them Godward are *still few*. Some could be such if they would try, who shrink from the solemn work, and, when they might be soul-winners after God's own heart, subside into mere getters of money. *Ask why the labourers are so few—why men have so little aspiration after the highest usefulness man can reach.*

38. **Pray . . . Lord of the harvest, etc.** Note : (1) Great name of God, *Lord of the harvest* of souls. His deepest interest is the salvation of men. (2) *The precept given.* Not “organize,” not “educate,” but **Pray**. Only God can make gospel labourers. Those made fit for their work by God are those who can increase their fitness by familiarity with the best deeds and thoughts of men ; but God's training is the main thing. We need to multiply twentyfold our harvesters in heathen lands. *Pray God for them.* **Send forth** : with constraints of love and of necessity, overcoming shame, love of ease, and love of money, fear of failure, opposition of others. There is no greater gift God gives to His Church than such a soul ! **His harvest.** Your harvest is your income and your wealth. Saved souls are God's wealth.

CHAPTER X.

1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;

3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphæus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddæus;

4 Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS.

1. He who yesterday said, "*Pray for labourers,*" says to-day, "Be labourers." For Love and Pity for those who need such work are great elements of fitness to do it. With many prayers God deals thus. We ask Him for mercy on the poor, and He sets us to help them ourselves; for comfort to the afflicted, and He sends us with His solace. *There is a blessed peril in praying;* for whoso asks for workers is very apt to be made one of them. The word translated **authority** in R. V., really includes **power**. *They did not probably feel any power flowing into them,* and only proved the reality of Christ's endowment by attempting the works of mercy He prescribed. You will only know your power by attempting work.

2-4. **Twelve apostles.** Concerning whom note many things. (1) That there are so many already capable of receiving a great charge of grace and obeying a great call. (2) How the Christ elicits Christlikeness in men. (3) That they had grown in clusters, helping each other to be better. Eleven out of the twelve came from Galilee. Probably eight or ten from one corner of the Sea of Galilee. There is no limit to the development men may reach under the mutual stimulus of exalted piety. (4) There are two pairs of brothers (Peter and Andrew, and James and John), one trio (James the Less, Jude, and Simon the Zealot). *Brothers can have great influence on brothers.* (5) There was not a Scribe or a Priest among them. None are ignorant (for a fair education was universal), and they know their Bible well. They are all men with much Manhood in them; and many of them had been disciples of the Baptist before knowing Christ. They are brave and good, and in their spiritual life have that sober zeal

5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand,

8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

which wears so well. (6) *They are all different.* Peter, enthusiastic in his faith; Thomas, a Doubter, in spite of the intensity of his love; John, a son of Thunder; Philip, a man of practical wisdom; Bartholomew (whom we assume to be Nathanael), a soul full of gentle devotion; Simon the Zealot, one whose natural vehemence had formerly made him a conspirator against Roman oppression. You do not want all workers to be of one type. Each worker should be of his own type. (7) In choosing Judas, the Saviour chose one highly gifted, in great repute with his brethren, and professing, doubtless, great consecration; and one to whom apostleship brought a great opportunity. Doubtless Jesus felt the admixture of unholy motive in his profession, and foresaw the possibility of great evil; but said, "*The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?*" (8) While one is unfit—none of the remaining eleven is in any full sense fit for this task—yet Christ employs him. *Christ still employs us when most imperfectly fit, for His greatest works.*

5-9. In sending forth the apostles many things are to be noted. (1) The Saviour trains the apostles for world-wide work by an apprenticeship work in their native Galilee. He will do his work best who grows gradually up to it. They have to begin at home, and with those most likely to listen. *Afterwards* the commission is, "*Go ye into all the world;*" now it is, **Not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans.** (2) The great commission is, **Preach . . . the kingdom of heaven is at hand.** The gospel is the cure of all woes. (3) Christ's ordination is always an impartation of power, and not merely designation to work. He "*sends*" and He "*gives authority over unclean spirits, and to heal diseases.*" Wherever there is power to do good there is ordination to do it; wherever there is ordination there is some power to bless men. (4) Their "*authority*" is not a right to rule men, but a power to destroy what hurts men. (5) They are charged to *do the impossible.* Though there is a question whether Matthew wrote the words, **Raise the dead**—the words not occurring in some of the best manuscripts, and occurring in different positions in others; but, though perhaps their faith was not yet great enough to admit such a power, and the Saviour did not impart it, still the other miracles commanded are all impossibilities. *The Church of Christ always finds impossible tasks assigned it. Do not, therefore,*

9 Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,

10 Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves :
for the workman is worthy of his meat.

shrink from them. (6) They are to be as like Him in their message as may be ; *preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and working miracles.* They are to be, as far as may be, little Christs, whose lips will bring the same comfort and whose works will bring the same relief. (7) The words **freely give** means—give without grudging and without charge. The great generosity of God they have to take as their pattern. They need not curiously inquire whether sinners are worthy of being healed. Without stint let them give. (7) Note the curious paradox, **Freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses** (ver. 9). We can give great things even when we have no money. Thus they are sent out, bidden to expect a friendly welcome from man and carry heavenly gifts from God. We have the same charge given to all of us in some degree. Do with your money, your skill, your prayer, your love, the great miracles of saving, cheering, and blessing men.

The opening of the great missionary charge might fill them with gladness, as it intimated their enrichment with the Omnipotence that can work all miracles, from healing the sick to raising the dead. But gift carries with it duty. And the Saviour proceeds in the section (9-28) to add other charges not so welcome—equipping them with healing power, and with a message more marvellous still.

CHRIST STRIPS THEM OF ALL OTHER EQUIPMENT.

9. Provide neither gold . . . nor brass. They have to go forth full of faith in God and of faith in man ; believing God's providence will supply their need, and man's grateful welcome appreciate and reward their service.

10. They may not take the **Scrip** even, which every shepherd carried—a bag made out of the skin of a kid, in which a shepherd to-day will carry "bread, cheese, and a few olives" (see "The Land and the Book," p. 345),—but must expect neighbourly hearts to feed them meal by meal. No extra provision of any kind is to be made. "*A staff only*" (Mark 6 : 8) may be taken if possessed ; but even it is not to be "*provided*" (ver. 9) if not already owned. Two things have to be observed here : (1) *The literal precept* involved very little of either hardship or risk, in the climate and society in which they lived. Dr. Thomson states in the place just quoted, that to set out in such fashion is quite common still ; that a recent Moslem revivalist in Galilee sent out disciples in the same style ; that living and sleeping in the open

11 And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy ; and there abide till ye go thence.

12 And when ye come into an house, salute it.

13 And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it : but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.

14 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

is possible and pleasant, and the free fellowship of these lands and of former times made the supply of their needs a matter to be safely reckoned on. To go to people alien alike in race, religion, and ways, would be a much harder charge. (2) *In other circumstances*, the Saviour said, "*He that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip*" (Luke 22 : 36) ; and therefore (3) it is the Spirit and not the Letter of these precepts that bind us in all ages, viz. that no considerations of comfort should prevent our giving men the gospel ; that we should trust our lives to God when we do God's work, and should expect some at least always to welcome us. Next we have

RULE OF PROCEEDING.

11. Enquire who in it is worthy . . . there abide. Proceeding thus, they would find those likeliest to understand and receive their message ; would have the best opportunity of presenting it to him ; and by trusting, inviting, and enjoying their hospitality would elicit kindly interest. I am told by a devoted and successful missionary in China that he has found this rule of Christ wonderfully helpful in his work.

12. Having found the likeliest recipient, the evangelist has to enter with the Salutation of Peace, *i.e.* with courtesy, but with a courtesy which is a benediction. It is noteworthy that the first word is not to be John the Baptist's word, "*Repent,*" but "*Peace be to this house*" (Luke 10 : 5). A greeting of good news.

13. This salutation is to be followed up by the prayer which will secure the fulfilment of the greeting, **if the house be worthy** ; but by a withdrawal of the Benediction, if it refuse hospitality and prove itself unworthy ; or, as we may otherwise phrase it, by the behaviour which will do good to the people, or, failing in that, get good from the endeavour to do it.

14, 15. To this is added a strange rule—that neglect of the apostle's message is to be denounced by them as *a great iniquity*, the **shaking the dust from the feet** being the extremest emblem of desire to separate one's lot from others, and thus an intimation of their awaiting doom. They are to go, with the consciousness of being

15 Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.

16 ¶ Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

ambassadors for Christ, speaking what He puts in their lips, denouncing any disregard of their message as sin against Him.

15. Refusal of Heavenly light is here treated as the worst of all human sins. Yet it is one of the commonest. No one deems refusal of light, or of Christ's grace, or of his duty, as a supreme evil. Those who, without any Gospel light, have fallen as low as Sodom, will find judgment more endurable than that which visits those who turn away from the light of Heaven. How solemnly should preacher and teacher do their work!

THE PAINS OF GOODNESS.

16-22. Never has the sternness of the conflict between good and evil been made more clear than in these verses. We have an impression that will not yield either to Scripture or experience, that if we are good and kindly we are certain to be appreciated and beloved. But here the Saviour seems to indicate that goodness will only awake resentment, and service hatred; and that His disciples may expect the sort of animosity which would fit those inflicting rather than those healing sickness, and working harm rather than benediction. So that the path of saving mercy for the disciples as for the master leads through Gethsemanes and Calvaries. In considering how far such predictions of experience are to be applied as tests of the Christian character, it is right to remember: (1) The special bitterness of the unbelieving Jew, due to the Saviour being so different from the Messiah they expected; (2) the influence which eighteen centuries of its beneficent history has had in mitigating to some extent the opposition to the gospel; and (3) the fact that Christian apostles and missionaries have naturally the largest share in the resentment of the world. Yet with allowance made for all that, *it is a grave consideration that while the Saviour expected all His disciples to lead lives of service and suffering, Christians generally are living lives of comfort.*

16. Strange representation of Christian missions. Wolves seem hardly convertible things; Sheep strange missionaries to be sent to them. But so Christ describes their position. And for centuries it was their willingness to die for Christ and men; that was the greatest converting quality in the apostles of Christ. To be wise as serpents . . . harmless as doves, is one of the strange words of Christ. Harmless means "simple." The word receives some elucidation

17 But beware of men : for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues ;

18 And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak : for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child : and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake : but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

from the fact that times of trial require, and often produce, great wisdom. The prudence which avoids giving needless irritation, which allays it, which by mixture of meekness and courage withstands it and turns it into thoughtfulness, is supremely needed at all times, and specially in time of trial. But the only kind of prudence the Church may use is that compatible with the "*simplicity of the dove.*" All great missionaries and apostles have been conspicuous for the wisdom in which there was no cunning, and for the simplicity in which there is no weakness.

17, 18. Sometimes they would suffer as heretics in the synagogue ; sometimes would be charged and suffer as disturbers of the peace at the hands of civil rulers, governors and kings ; God ordering their sufferings that by means of them a wider testimony might be given of, and the attention of men drawn to, the truth of the gospel. It is strange that those richest in truth, and whose influence tends most in the direction of the good of men, should be treated as profane and injurious ! But all good men have been treated as "*troublers of Israel.*"

19, 20. When most needed, help will be most near. The more they suffer for Christ, the more will they be sustained. The Spirit of your Father suggests that infinite wisdom and infinite love will protect them well. See, for example, Paul before Felix and Agrippa (Acts, ch. 24 and 25).

21. The hardest part of their trial is to be misunderstood by those they love. Relatives are apt to resent most bitterly all divergences from the family ways. To differ from them seems presumptuousness ; to choose a different course, want of affection. What is only faithfulness to Christ they sometimes deem a family dishonour. As, accordingly, family feuds are always the fiercest, so the hatred of the confessor of Christ felt by his unconverted kinsman is the fiercest he has to bear. Missions in India to-day supply multitudes of examples of this.

22. The general statement, hated of all men, means hated of all

23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

sorts of men; for some "receive them," welcome their message, and love them with intensest love. But in the hearts of all the unsaved there is an antipathy of the strongest kind. Many things in Christian life and character move this antipathy. (1) *Their separateness from the world* is resented by our natural intolerance of those who disagree with us. And this dislike is intenser when men feel others are abandoning them because their state, course, and prospects are unsatisfactory. (2) All superiority moves envy and dislike, especially the superiority of goodness. It shames men, attracts honour they would like to have, and possesses an influence with which they cannot compete. (3) Aggressive Christianity—the only sort Christ owns—calling men to repent and warning them of perdition, seems an assault upon their credit, rouses the discomforts of a guilty conscience, and destroys all their peace. While, therefore, we are surrounded by a mass of fellow-disciples, and the Saviour of men is better known now, whoever will live "in the name of Christ" must still meet bitter hatred. We should count the cost of confession, suspect our fidelity if we have no hatred to bear, comfort ourselves if we have. With this awful word of warning there is given to the disciples comfort sufficient to console. **He that endureth to the end shall be saved.** To be saved will make up for all trials; to reach heaven with its perfection, its rest, its service, its power of doing good, its everlasting joy in the Master's love, will make up for all. Therefore **ENDURE.** Note: Some who seem to begin the Christian life do not endure to the end. With the promise of final victory there is a

STRANGE LIBERTY GIVEN THEM.

23. When persecuted, we probably would wish to be excused further testimony. Christ does not give this permission, but does give permission to *change quarters*. Persecuted at Iconium, Paul may flee to Lystra; stoned at Lystra, he may go to Derbe (Acts 14: 5, 19, 20). William Tyndale may flee from one hiding-place in Europe to another till his great work is done, and then find a martyr's death. The reason assigned is suggestive. Because the world is large, and there are so many places needing light, that it would be false economy to force it when it is resisted. The words Christ uses seem to have a double reference—a narrower one to His advent to judge Jerusalem, which happened before the Church had finished her work in Pales-

24 The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

25 It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?

26 Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

27 What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

tine; a broader one to the final advent which will happen before the work of the Church is done.

SUNDRY ARGUMENTS TO STEADFASTNESS,

23–42, follow. One little thought of, but most moving one, is an argument of Contentment.

24, 25. We ought not to ask a fairer lot than Christ's.

26. Second, to Hope. *One day all will be revealed*, and the motives misunderstood will be shown forth in all their purity, and patience, and prayer, and love come to light. This is the great judgment; *the manifestation of every soul*; the dread of the wicked; the hope of the righteous. Then the deeds of secret goodness; the victories of secret consecration will be revealed. The robe of Light will be a beautiful garment to some who wear it. Everything marches to Light. Fear, therefore, to commit sin; continue, therefore, to serve God.

27 seems a parenthesis. Because all things will come to the light, conceal nothing within the heart. Avow all thy truth, all thy hope, all I have done for and given to thy soul.

28. A third argument is to fear. It were poor wisdom to save one's body and fortune and comfort at the hands of man, and lose one's soul at the judgment of God.

A fourth argument is—

GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

29–31. If chance reigned, or evil was supreme, the work of apostle, prophet, or benefactor were hopeless and vain. But God is Master over all and loving to all. Therefore we may work with hope.

29. Sparrows (of English sort) are common in Syria. The farthing was one of the smallest of their coins. This great word teaches us, therefore, two great truths. (1) God's loving interest extends to the smallest things. There is a Providence taking care of sparrows, without whose consent not one falls, struck with stone or

30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

attacked by bird of prey. The apostles need not fear that they will be forgotten. *Children should take this comfort, that our great Father loves and watches over all that He has made.* (2) He is Master over all things. *It is the recreation of Omnipotence to attend to all details of providence.* He does not rule big things and leave little things to go loose. For in this world the greatest events are often hinged on the very smallest. In the little things which are apt to worry us, God is, and puts into all His love. Labour bravely; for God is in the world, blessing and guiding it.

30. No one knows the number of hairs in his own head. Men of science tell us there are six or seven hundred on a square inch of skin of the head, and reckon there are usually from about thirty thousand to fifty thousand on a head. But God knows and notes precisely how many are on each. He knows everything about us better than we do ourselves, and watches over us better than we can watch over ourselves. *At every turn of life God is present, ready and sure to help our work.*

CONFESSION OF CHRIST IS THE GREAT DUTY OF CHRISTIANS.

32, 33. Confessing Christ means simply *taking Christ's side.* Siding with Him as the worthy Master, as the true Saviour, as the great Helper; openly and avowedly serving Him; upholding His honour, helping His work. "*To side with Christ,*" is the call here made to us. It includes everything—from the heart-choice of Christ, to the public avowal of what we think of Him. So important is this, that the Saviour promises *to side with those* in the day of judgment who side with Him here. Note here many things: (1) *The faith that can choose Christ's side is the faith that saves.* Some side with Christ, knowing He is worthy, and are saved long before they know anything good about themselves. (2) *There must be outward change as well as inward.* Whoever is a Secret Disciple must choose between having the Secrecy destroyed by the Discipleship, or the Discipleship being destroyed by the Secrecy. (3) *There must be no timorous or selfish concealment of any religious views or convictions.* (4) *Wherever Christ is dishonoured, we must take part of His shame.* (5) *In the great day of judgment, the supreme distinction and delight will be to be owned of Christ.* Make

34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth : I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me : and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

that sure by owning Him now. The unutterable horror, then, will be to be disowned of Christ. Do not, by denying Christ now, make that your fate. (6) *We may deny Christ by simple silence and neglect ; by standing aloof from His cause.* (7) *These retributions are for those whose confessions are sincere and lasting, or whose denials are unrepented.* Judas confessed, but will not be confessed. Peter denied, but will not be denied.

CONFESSION NECESSARY EVEN WHEN DISTURBING.

34-38. Many shrink from confession because it genders strife. Here a strange word comes from the Prince of Peace : I came not to send peace, but a sword. Yet it is true. He cannot give His great heavenly peace till He has disturbed our low earthly peace. Confession will occasion variance ; but only through its disturbance can falsehood and evil be destroyed. The world resents our leaving it ; and no sanctity, kindness, or lowliness will prevent the bitter opposition of those who love us. Count the cost, and side with Christ against all that opposes Him. See that the dislike we endure does not arise from faults of wilfulness, pride, or impatience. *There is no anguish like that alluded to in these verses.* But those thus treated must never forget the affection that often exists hidden beneath the variance, and the claims of those opposing them on their patience. They must remember also the Saviour wants the disturbance to wake the conscience and thus help in salvation. Help forward that purpose by meekness.

CHRIST'S RIGHT TO OUR CONFESSION.

37, 38. For the Saviour claims our service as His due. These verses are remarkable as claiming for Himself a higher affection than any parent or any child can claim. Omitting the claims of weakness, of those dependent on us, only more love or more fitness to lead us, or more service to us, gives any a right to more love from us. We must love Christ best of all, because He loves us more dearly than all. **Worthy of Me** ; that is, worthy of being Christ's disciple. Some of us have the feeling that the Saviour should feel obliged to us for our religion. This comes of a wrong spirit. Patronage, or occasional

38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

40 ¶ He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

thought, presence at His house and table, is not all He claims. He claims the warmest love of our hearts. He follows this up by a

CALL TO MARTYRDOM.

38. This first word, predicting His own death, must have amazed them. The last word they would have expected the Messiah to say was, **Take up your cross**, *i.e.* a gallows on which to die. And still less that they would need to take up the cross in order to **follow after Jesus**. Calvary is before Him. Only sufferers can be saviours, and the great Saviour must be the great Sufferer. And if we would aid His work we must share His cross. True religion cannot be all gain and all peace, and all comfort. The true way of beginning the Christian life is by passing what Paul calls "*a sentence of death on ourselves*," and recognizing that winning Christ and heaven may cost us all, and resolving we will, if needful, part with all in order to win Him. Salvation-made-easy is a delusive thing. We must cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye when these are adverse to the Saviour. For—

THE REWARD OF DISCIPLESHIP IS GREAT.

39. In this life finding is often losing, and losing is often finding. We never have a life till we give it up to our Saviour. Withhold life from Him, and it ceases to be anything worthy of the name of life. Keep back your heart, and it is never your own. Give up your heart, and your heart is yours, full of power of enjoyment and self-enrichment. The unselfish alone are truly rich;—" *Blessed are the poor in spirit*:" they have "*the kingdom of heaven*." Do not save yourself from sacred pain and gracious trouble, or you lose your true self, your power of right feeling and gracious purpose. So here, they who are over-anxious to save their bodily life lose the life of their souls; while they who will sacrifice their lives for Christ find the life of the immortal soul for ever. Buy not gold too dear; but part with all that keeps you from Christ or give all He asks of you.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WEDGE.

40. There is a reward the disciples get themselves; there is in addition a reward they help others to get. They are to be ambas-

41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

sadors for Him, and invested with great dignity. Kindness to them (receiving them) shall be deemed kindness to the King of glory. There is a strange law of human nature taught us here. The heart opening to receive goodness in a fellow-man grows more open till it admits the Son of man, and more open still till it admits the Father who sent Him. In opening human hearts there is a sacred wedge employed, the thin end of which is lowly human goodness, the thick end of which is the great God. Happy he who takes a Christian to his heart. The Christ will enter by the same opening. We first love and believe in a brother whom we have seen (1 John 4 : 20), and rise from that to love and believe in the Father whom we have not seen. There is, therefore, great gravity in what we do to our Christian fellow-men. To hate them will grow into hating Christ, to love them into loving Christ. Part of their reward is this dignity of ambassadorship, and the fact that they thus prepare Christ's way before Him. There is more. Note further—

THE DIFFUSION OF REWARDS.

41. Their message will be a sword, an occasion of strife amongst many; but it will bring to all who welcome the apostles Rewards vastly more than compensating for it. All who associate themselves with Christ's servants in their work, Christ will associate with them in His rewards. He will reward, as if he were a prophet, him who helps the prophet with his hospitality, courage, love. He will reward, as a righteous man, whoever welcomes a righteous man as such. And even the least gift to the lowest servant will be remembered by God and rewarded. Note here the room there is in the Church for helpers as well as leaders, and the great reward which will come to all who in any way have helped good men in their work. *Help everything good you can.* Note lastly—

CHILDREN'S LESSONS.

42. In this last verse there are two lessons specially suited for the young. (1) Christ employs little ones in His work. It would have been strange if He had no work which little ones could do. He has much, and employs juvenile goodness largely in His work. *Children are the best apostles to children.* One good, kind, brave boy or girl in a

school will sometimes be enough to set a gracious style which the rest will adopt. One doing right will help another to do right. Children, besides, can pray for others. Children can also cheer and help their parents beyond measure, brightening their lives. And lastly, children can do much *heart-opening for Christ*. As He says, "*Whosoever shall receive this child in My name receiveth Me: and whosoever shall receive Me receiveth Him that sent Me*" (Luke 9 : 48). Begin as young as ever you can to love and serve Christ. (2) And the other lesson is—*God smiles on little gifts*. Every child can give a **cup of cold water**. You can do much on which God would smile, by teetotalism, missionary interest, working for the poor, going to sit beside old people and cheer them, readiness to help a mother or servant, readiness to help a duller boy or defend a weaker. There is no day through which any child need go without giving some cup of cold water, and so winning a reward. See you get this reward.

CHAPTER XI.

1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.

2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

CHRIST'S WITNESS TO JOHN.

1. Again we have to note the desire of Christ that every city and every soul should hear His gospel. If the Church of Christ had felt this longing, no part of the world would now have been in darkness. Let us repent of "eating our morsel" of the Bread of Life "alone," and share it with all who have it not whom we can reach. While on the way, two disciples of John came to Him, bearing a strange, solemn message—a question addressed strangely to the ears of Christ; and coming strangely from the lips of John. A question that has been the embarrassment of some, but the consolation of multitudes. To understand it, observe—

THE HOLIEST FIND DIFFICULTIES IN RELIGION.

2, 3. Even John, the greatest of the prophets, whose insight into the ways of God and the needs of men has never been equalled by that of mortal man, has a difficulty about Christ; feels now not quite sure, after all, whether He can be the great Christ, or whether, instead

of rejoicing in hope fulfilled, they have to endure "hope deferred," and look for another. To understand John's difficulties, remember: (1) *The dealings of Providence were mysterious.* Why is he imprisoned, after but a few months' testimony? Why is he cast as rubbish into a neglected corner, and left month after month (at least six, perhaps twelve) as if God had no use for him? Silenced by God, persecuted or forgotten by man, the condition was bewildering. And though he knew that all prophets were persecuted, yet in his case the prison comes so early; seems to stop his good work so needlessly; is so resultless; seems so to mock the prayers offered for his deliverance; that he fears he has fallen under the rebuke of God, and, not knowing for what to blame himself or how to explain God's action, he is *in the dark.* (2) *The Saviour's apparent neglect of him is mysterious.* John heard in prison the works of Christ. From St. Luke (7: 18) we conclude that they had told of the raising of the widow's son, and the other great miracles wrought on sufferers at Capernaum. The more powerful he sees Christ to be, the more strange is it that He leaves him unhelped. He that can liberate men from the bars of death, has He no miracle to liberate his servant from Herod's prison? And then: (3) *The Saviour's action in other matters was not what he expected.* He saw that the only Saviour that would suffice for man would be one who would "take away the sin of the world," and do so by being Himself the great Sacrifice, "the Lamb of God." But yet he probably expected that other attributes of the Redeemer would be the first to be displayed. He expected the "Fan" of judgment to be used; the "Axe" of retribution to descend; the "Baptism of fire" to be administered. And when the Saviour seems only meek and gentle—seems too gentle, in fact, even eating and drinking with sinners—John is still more embarrassed. And thus bewildered, a ghastly doubt begins to rise; yet only *Doubt, not Disbelief.* He asks—Can he have been mistaken? Is this the Christ? Is the Hope of man still distant? Has he been misled by what seemed Light from Heaven? Some such questions have gone through every heart in similar circumstances, and went through his, piercing it like the piercing of a sword. Learn: Our finite mind and heart can never understand all the ways of an infinite God. *We shall never, here, be without some difficulties in religion.* Our difficulties are multiplied an hundredfold by giving up the gospel; but some difficulties always remain, in which we must trust where we cannot trace. Do not conclude despairingly of yourself because of such darkness. Do not increase such darkness by adding, to doubts called forth by God's greatness, those other doubts that are caused by our suspiciousness. *For there is a relief from all religious difficulty, as we next see—*

3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:

5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

JOHN TAKES HIS DOUBTS TO HIS SAVIOUR.

3. Herod, the Sadducee, would have mocked John for the unphilosophical course of sending to Christ to ask who He was. But great goodness and great wisdom are always childlike. And shaken as John's faith seemed to be, he yet has faith in (1) God's promise *that a Saviour shall come*; and in (2) Christ's goodness and truth. Like a child, therefore, he asks Him, "*Art Thou the Saviour?*" If you have difficulties about religion, take them to your Saviour direct. Do not ask what theologians call Christ, nor stay to hear how they prove Him to be Divine. Ask Himself what you should believe about Him; sit at His feet. And while you will not get all difficulties dispersed, you will get your heart relieved, enlightened, and made strong. *The way out of doubt is "Come and see."* For observe next—

CHRIST RELIEVES HIS DIFFICULTY.

4-6. *The Saviour does not answer his question, but He does something better. He gives Him material by which he enables him to answer it himself.* We must answer our own questions, and form our own creed, if ever we are to have a creed worth having. And happily, while there is never enough light to end all difficulties, there is always light enough for our faith to know whom it may trust and what it may hope for. **Show John again those things which ye do hear and see.** How gentle and patient is Christ! He expresses no surprise, administers no reproof, and betrays no anxiety! He is calm as a physician that knows he can master the threatening illness! *This is the cure of doubt: to look at what Christ did on earth and has continued to do ever since.* He works all manner of good—greater miracles than those named. He makes the bad good, the despairing hopeful, the guilty holy, the dying blessed in the certainty of heaven. The great Jesus has wrought all that is best in all the eighteen centuries that have passed since men beheld Him. And to-day the best goodness and the richest beauty in human lives come from Him. *Tell yourself these things.* He who works these marvels must be the Saviour of men. *This answer of Christ doubtless ended John's darkness, and gave him light at eventide.* Note especially (ver. 5) one mark the Saviour gives of Himself. **The poor have good tidings**

6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

7 ¶ And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

preached to them (Revised Version). Others have proclaimed glad tidings to the righteous, the strong, the wise; the Saviour brings His good news to those who are guilty, despised, oppressed, poor. *Christ is the great Comforter of the poor.* What a proof of His Divinity!

6. The Saviour adds a bracing warning, intimating that in Him there must be *occasion of stumbling*; but those are blessed who adore His goodness, instead of quarrelling with His mysteries. As soon as they were gone—

CHRIST DEFENDS HIS SERVANT'S HONOUR.

7-14. Not till they are gone (Luke 7 : 24); for compliments are not the food John lives on. But when they have gone, then He defends His doubting servant. To understand the series of questions we must realize the surprise with which the crowd would hear John's question. They would think—Is John among the doubters? and would be apt to fancy all His prophecy had been misleading and all the claims of Jesus delusive. Christ is silent about Himself, but speaks of John, asking and answering successively three questions. Is he **A Reed shaken with the wind**? Some might think he was such when they contrasted the grand faith of his preaching with the halting doubt of his question. John's doubt He deems so slight that He does not answer this question. Is he **a man clothed in soft raiment**?—a popularity-hunter, one who plays on the weaknesses of people, skilled to enrich himself by tickling the humours, grave or gay, of those he addresses? He answers by remarking that such men would be favourites at king's courts, not chained in king's prisons. Is he **a prophet**? And Christ answers this by proclaiming that he was more; that he was the greatest of the prophets and greatest of men. John's greatness as a prophet consisted in (1) The Greatness of his message; and (2) His power of conveying to the hearts of men the conviction of its truth. Other prophets proclaimed Christ far off, but John proclaimed Him as "*One standing in the midst*" of them. His utterance of the Divine glory of Jesus, of His sacrificial work, of His judgment of all, was noontide compared with all feeble light that prophets had shed on the coming Christ, and gave nearly all the main elements of the Christian creed. And the words of John seemed to

10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

burn their way into the hearts of men and become their own deep thoughts. Note here: *When John is in despair at his useless life, Jesus is crowning his name with loftiest honour. We work for a kind Master.*

10. The Saviour gives him greater honour still. He names John **The Messenger**, of whom God had said (Mal. 3 : 1), "*He shall prepare the way before ME ;*" and calls him "*Elijah*," who was predicted, on the ground that he came in "*the Spirit and Power of Elijah*" (Luke 1 : 17), and wrought, like him, a great awakening in Israel. Note: The greatest honour any human soul can have is "*to prepare God's way*" into human hearts. *This must be the preacher's and the teacher's aim.* John had done this more than any previous worker for God.

11. **Least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he**, is a strange word, probably referring to the fact that we, who have the story of Calvary and the Resurrection to tell, have a *message much greater than John's*; and in that message, if we will proclaim it, a *power vastly greater than even his*. We forget that the gospel is the omnipotence of God to salvation (Rom. 1 : 16), and that whoever will use it "*can do all things, through Christ who strengthens him.*"

12. The greatest praise of minister or teacher is that, as the result of his testimony, men are violently in earnest to win salvation, and succeed in doing so. Why are the unconverted not in earnest to take the kingdom! Happy earnestness that leads to life!

15. A strange word, often on the lips of Christ. Here it urges the people to recall what John had said and done. Generally, this word teaches us: (1) That it is a great thing to have *ears*; but (2) that few people use and many people close them; and (3) that we must make an effort to use them, or they will do us no good. Is your ear a channel through which great words of God can go right into your heart? If it is not, you have an ear but do not use it. What lessons!

Good men get sometimes into darkness;

But Christ helps them out.

16 ¶ But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

17 And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

None appreciates us as Christ does.

We have a mighty force in the simple gospel, if we will use it.

There would be fewer lost souls if there were fewer closed ears.

16-19. From defending the character of John, He passes to describe the character of John's age. He who found sermons in lilies finds texts in the games of children. The surly child who will not play at any game, and blames another for it, is the figure under which Christ sets forth the people round Him.

UNRESPONSIVE SOULS.

16, 17. There have been different interpretations given of this figure. According to one, it is that generation that mourns and pipes, and John and the Saviour are blamed for not responding to them. According to the other, it is the Saviour and the Baptist who have to complain that their appeals meet with no response. *It is unimportant* which of the two views is accepted, for both leave the people of that generation blamed for the flippant fault-finding which prevented their getting the blessing of the ministry of either John or Christ. But the ordinary appears to me the soundest view, viz. that which sees in the parable the illustration of the way in which the appeals of John and Christ were both made fruitless. **Piped; mourned.** Truth has two voices: one grave, reproofing, warning, threatening, in which it speaks of duty, sin, danger, judgment, in tones which solemnize the soul; another in which it speaks in tones cheering and quickening, as it declares God's love, His help, His appeals, His heavenly home. It takes both sides of Truth to make one gospel. **Not danced; not lamented.** It might seem as if no one could be quite impervious to truth. But, alas! some find no side of truth to their mind, no view of God moving; and alike "law" and "gospel," John's call to repentance and Christ's offer of salvation, God's discipline and God's mercies, are all resisted, and therefore fruitless. One would have thought that if the severity of John displeased, the gentleness of Christ would have been felt to be divine; or if the graciousness of Christ to sinners was incomprehensible, the severity of John would have been felt to be a message of God. *But if we do not receive the grave truths of the gospel, we will not receive the joyful ones; and if we do not receive the joyful ones, we will not receive the grave.* They

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

who mock at the Baptist's call to repentance slight all the hopes that rise in Calvary.

THE CAVILLING SPIRIT,

18, 19, is illustrated on a large scale here. That spirit which excuses or masks unwillingness to do known duty by raising flippantly, or accepting carelessly, objections to the messenger who declares it, or to the message which prescribes it. Those of whom Christ was speaking flippantly dismissed John and his message, on the off-hand assumption that he was mad (*he hath a devil*), and his fasting and preaching due to morbid gloom. Flippantly they dismiss Christ from their minds, on the off-hand assumption that He would not be so gracious to sinners if He was not one Himself. On this cavilling spirit note: (1) *It easily besets us.* To raise objections seems clever, and excuses neglect. (2) *It grows apace.* Who could have believed that any human being could have seen the greatest mere man that ever lived (ver. 11) and treated him as a lunatic, or have looked on the infinite glory of Christ and suspected Him of knavery? But permitted to enter, this resisting spirit grows apace. (3) *It is fraught with danger.* It shuts out and keeps out all saving light and influence. It is the punishment of making dishonest objections, that we come afterward to believe them sound. They who *will not*, soon *cannot see*. We should on all these grounds aim at being childlike, candid, reverent. But there are some

HONEST AND BELIEVING.

These He puts in contrast with them. But wisdom is justified of her children. [Not "*of her works*," a reading inferior on all grounds external and internal. For meaning of word "*justified*," compare Luke 7: 29.] That is, *God's wisdom* in sending John with His message and His ways, and in sending Christ with His different ways and different message, is *justified*, *i.e.* seen and proved to be indeed infinitely wise by all who are "*the children of wisdom*." Note: (1) The great name given to believers—"the children of wisdom." It is their right name. (2) The great concurrence of devout souls in the acceptance of both sides of truth in obeying the call to repentance and believing in the Saviour of men.

The section which occupies the remainder of the chapter contains the

20 ¶ Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not :

21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin ! woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell : for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom : in the day of judgment, than for thee.

Saviour's reflections on some of the great mysteries of existence—on The Abuse of Privilege ; The Secret of Enlightenment ; and The Freedom of Salvation. Nothing could be found more solemn than the first, nothing more comforting than the last, of these. We come first of all on—

THE PERILS OF THE PRIVILEGED.

20-24. Our upbraiding is so continually a thing of anger and dislike, that we assume the Saviour's upbraiding was of the same nature. But He wept over the Jerusalem He condemned, and here there is anguish in His reproof. Not lightly can He relinquish the cities of His labours to their fate. If, as the order in which the lament is reported by St. Luke would suggest, these words are spoken when He is leaving Galilee for ever, we are to mark here how we have the sorrow of disappointed mercy, making a final effort, by the severity of warning and reproof, to wake men.

20. Because they repented not. They welcomed His miracles, crowded to His teaching ; yea, wanted (John 6 : 15) to employ force and make Him King. *Such popularity is all the success some care for.* With Christ it went for nothing. The success He wants is their *repentance*. This denied, all else is deemed worthless. Let teacher and preacher deem nothing won till souls have said, "*I will arise, and go to my Father.*"

21-24. Of the three cities here reproved we know but little. Chorazin is not named save in this denunciation. Bethsaida was the city of Peter, Andrew, and Philip. Capernaum, the city of Matthew, and probably of other disciples, was the earthly home of Jesus after leaving Nazareth. *They have long since perished, and their sites are unknown.* We learn here that, in the two former, the Saviour's miracles were as plentiful as in the last, although not one of them is recorded. Concerning these cities the Saviour laments that, rich above

all other places in privilege, their mercies have not saved them. It is specially important to mark this ; for England, and specially English people who are religiously trained, are like Chorazin and Capernaum, eminent in privilege. Whoso has once heard that God is love, that Jesus died for us, that there is forgiveness for the penitent, that God answers prayer, that there is a heavenly home for those who follow Christ, has, in his Light, a great privilege. Good examples, good companions, pleadings of God's Spirit, are privileges almost as great as the bodily presence of the Saviour. In addition, reckon amongst your privileges health, education, wealth, powers. Like the men, therefore, of those cities, we are all highly favoured, have "*seen wonderful works,*" and been **exalted unto heaven** by the greatness of our opportunities. Note, therefore, carefully : (1) *Privileges are of inestimable worth if we use them.* (2) *They bring grave responsibility.* More is expected where more is given. (3) *Sometimes privileges produce pride.* They did so here. The men of Capernaum were doubtless proud of having Jesus as a resident, and of the miracles they had seen. And we are apt to grow proud over our privileges, and take the special mercies and light of God as something to which English people have a right. *Some grow proud even of the strivings of God's Spirit.* (4) *There is a day of judgment,* on which we must give account of the use of our privileges. (5) *There are grave penalties for sin, and for abuse of privilege.* (6) *Some favoured with richest gospel light will have sterner punishments than the wickedest heathen.* **Sodom** was notorious for its corruption, and was destroyed by God. **Tyre and Sidon** were two of the oldest cities in the world (Sidon is mentioned in Gen. 10 : 19) ; the great ports of Phenician enterprise, the cities of antiquity most resembling London in commerce, enterprise, and wealth. But they were notorious for a worship of Astarte, or Venus ("*the abomination of the Sidonians*"), a religion which made people bad instead of good. **Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon** were names suggesting to every one in Israel everything vile in creed and character. Yet Jesus predicts a worse fate for the children of privilege, if impenitent, than theirs. Amidst so much that is awful, mark two points in the Saviour's words that somewhat relieve their gloom. (1) The words, **They would have repented,** indicate that where Divine punishments have fallen on men, there are yet some remains of susceptibility. And (2) the words, **More tolerable,** indicate a Divine fairness in all judgment, which may permit us to trust the fate of all to His hands, feeling that "*the Judge of all the earth will do right.*" Let us not *awake* by our impenitence the sorrow of the Saviour, who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but humbly avail ourselves of the nearness of Jesus and our season of opportunity.

25 ¶ At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

26 Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

The Saviour's feeling is not all disappointment. We next mark the Saviour's joy as He witnessed

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE CHILDLIKE.

25-27. St. Luke assigns the lament over the cities to the occasion on which the Saviour sent out the seventy, and the utterance of praise over the simple-hearted believers to the occasion of their return with glad reports. Matthew relates them in succession, feeling that they supplement each other. It is not only failure that Jesus finds in His work. From these cities came some childlike souls, the most of the twelve apostles, and, probably, of the seventy also. Over these He rejoices with exceeding joy. Here, again, note many things: (1) *The Childlike are the best.* These appreciate the Saviour, mingle no policy with their piety, employ and do not abuse their privileges. (2) *The best will often be found growing amongst the worst.* Obadiah keeps pure in Ahab's household; there are names in Sardis that are undefiled; there are in Chorazin and Capernaum childlike souls. Do not conclude that, because you are in unfavourable circumstances, surrounded by the godless and careless, you cannot be holy. Resist evil influences, and you will be stronger for being exposed to them. (3) *The childlike alone can know the Lord.* The words used by the Saviour need translating into our idiom after being put into our language. What Christ means is that *the great things of God are revealed, not to wisdom, but to teachableness; not to reason, but to the trustful spirit; not to speculation, but to obedience; the Hebrew idiom preferring to speak of persons, where we would speak of qualities.* It is a blessed thing it is so; for only the very few can have Wisdom, Learning, Intellect, but all can have the childlike qualities. And by a very profound word Jesus shows the childlike alone can receive Him. He shows the Redeemer is too great to be known by reason. **All things are delivered to Him.** There is such an infinitude of being about Him that **no man knoweth the Son, but the Father.** When the redeeming God is so great and Reason is so small, the secret of the knowledge of God is not the workings of reason, but a revelation to the teachable soul. *Trust God, and you will know him.* Take His way, and you will learn how good it is. Carnal wisdom is an obstacle to salvation; for worldly wisdom is suspicious and unbelieving. But the childlike

28 ¶ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

heart that gazes heavenward is filled and flooded with the smile on the face of God, and thus knows Him. If, therefore, you would know the truth about a redeeming God, purge your heart from sin, and with lowliness ask the inspiration and illumination of God. (4) *The childlike are not the feeble.* True growth adds qualities to those we have, does not change some qualities for others. Where there is true growth the simplicity of the child is kept along with the vigour of youth, and both are kept to the wisdom of age. The childlike are the wisest, the bravest, the manliest among men. *Let us cherish the childlike spirit which finds the great God revealed to it.* Crowning this word we next have brought before us—

THE OPPORTUNITY OF ALL MEN.

28-30. How wonderful that to those who so abuse His mercies He should give an invitation so gracious ! *This word was more wonderful, perhaps than any work He had wrought in Capernaum.* It is so pitiful, so lowly, so great. Amidst many things, note chiefly these : (1) *The Saviour upbraids us when impenitent, but does not cease to love us.* (2) *Without Him every soul labours and is heavy laden.* The double phrase refers to the bigness of the loads of life, and the littleness of our strength to carry them. We are laden with duties, regrets, fears, evil tendencies, temptations, sorrows, cares, darkness ; and we have small souls which labour, *i.e.* are strained by carrying these loads. (3) *All want rest, above all other things, and none can find or give it ; but* (4) *Christ can give to every soul rest.* How strange the assumption of this text ! He is meek and lowly, and yet He feels within Himself a power to give to the weakest soul with the heaviest load that strong peace which He calls *Rest*. Facing the burdens of all mankind, He is not dismayed. (5) *He gives a true Rest ; not the rest of letting us off our duty, but the rest of a great duty, borne by a great strength given.* (6) *He gives a strange rest ; for His Yoke gives, and His Burden imparts it.* Many find unrest by shirking duty, who would find rest by facing it. (7) *The meek and lowly find it.* The meekness learnt of Him does not murmur and does not shrink. The shelter of Christ's cross gives one-half of rest, but our service beneath Christ's yoke alone can give the remainder. Let your religion call Christ Master as well as Saviour ; obey as well as trust. What countless multitudes have come to Christ and found rest ! Why should not we ?

CHAPTER XII.

1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn : and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

JESUS AND THE SABBATH.

The sabbath was one of God's greatest gifts to Israel. It relieved labour by its periodic rest. It preserved the self-respect of men, by making, once a week, every servant his own master, and every master his own servant. It gave the soul of man leisure to worship ; and gave families leisure to enjoy each other's society. Its opportunities of common worship laid the basis of the best of all brotherhoods. It has, through the thirty centuries during which it has been observed, been the source of all manner of good things to those observing it. In this section we have instances of the ways in which men abused and the Saviour used this gift of God.

INNOCENT LIBERTY.

1. Disciples . . . began to pluck the ears of corn. The first service in the synagogue was before the morning meal, and they are hungry. Israel, instead of a poor law, had a law permitting any one to eat of the fruit of a neighbour's vineyard or cornfield (Deut. 23 : 24, 25), though no grapes might be carried away in a vessel, nor corn cut with a sickle. *Possibly there was no other meal for them.* The disciples use their liberty and eat. But the Pharisees deal in

SLAVISH INTERPRETATIONS.

2. Thy disciples do that which is not lawful. They allowed logic, instead of wisdom and right feeling, to interpret God's Law, and argued, "To pluck is to reap ; to rub the ears is to *thresh the corn*—therefore this is '*Work*,' and **unlawful**." Observe, God's laws are rightly kept *only when we enter into the mind of God in giving them.* Otherwise we break them in keeping them. Thus this sabbath law, which God meant to be a great blessing, became a great burden. As interpreted by them, you might not carry a weight of more than half a fig. They deemed it sinful to wear artificial teeth on the sabbath—

3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him ;

4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests ?

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless ?

6 But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

it was carrying a burden. Every detail of cookery was carefully limited, and men could hardly move without breaking the law as thus interpreted. At the same time, they could always find some means of circumventing the law. If you very much wanted to carry into the granary a sheaf of corn on the sabbath, it could be done, without breaking the law, thus:—It was lawful to carry a spoon you were to use for food ; lawful to do so in your hands or on something else ; therefore lawful to carry it on a sheaf of corn. Place the spoon, therefore, on the corn, carry it on the sheaf into the granary, and the corn is garnered without the sabbath being broken ! (Edersheim, ii. 56). Strict legalists are poor moralists. And here the Pharisees, with hatred in their soul, pounce upon the innocent. *To obey God's laws, understand them and get into the spirit of them.* But the Saviour gives

A DEFENCE OF LIBERTY.

3-8. God seeks not service of slaves, but the enrichment of His children. There are four arguments used by Christ in favour of the disciples' liberty—arguments which *all* go beyond mere defence of disciples to the heart of the matter. First, Christ suggests that *The Letter of every law of outward action is sometimes with propriety broken, if the spirit of it is kept.* David's hunger (1 Sam. 21 : 6), rightly, was allowed to have priestly bread ; priests in the temple slay and offer sacrifices on sabbath days ;—these examples showing that when keeping the letter of a law intended to bless would injure us, we must keep the spirit and neglect the letter. Secondly, *Obedience to higher laws gives some relief from lower ones.* They who serve the temple are free from some sabbath prescriptions. They who consecrate themselves to One greater than the temple (ver. 6) are freer still. The third argument of Christ is, that *God wants goodness of heart (mercy) rather than slavish precision of life (sacrifice)* (ver. 7). And to treat God as if He were a *Master of ceremonies* is profanity. His last argument is—as given more fully by Mark (2 : 27, 28)—“*The sabbath was made for man ;*” to enrich, not enslave him ; and therefore the Son of man—

9 And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue :

10 ¶ And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

man's Guardian and Saviour—may modify its usages. The lesson of this is : Accept the sabbath as a gift of love, not as a bond of slavery. Profane it not by any "work" the motive of which is greed; but work on it like a slave, if mercy prompts you. Keep it sacred; for it still is *for man*; but let gratitude to God, rather than fear, teach you how to do so. Such might seem conclusive even to the Pharisees, but we soon find

THE SABBATH DISPUTE RENEWED,

9, on another Sabbath (Luke 6 : 6), when He entered a synagogue. The Pharisees wish to convict Him of sabbath-breaking, because the penalty of such an offence is death.

10. The presence of a man palsied in the arm favours them. For the Saviour looked on no disease without relieving it. Lest the man should be overlooked, they raise the question of the propriety of curing him. Their own views were clear. The sudden illness, especially if dangerous to life, might be treated; the healing of any illness which was chronic must be deferred till next day. But they hope Christ's pity will prevent His postponing the healing, and thus they will find an excuse for putting Him to death.

11, 12. Casuistry is no match for the child-wisdom of the Son of God. The Saviour always asks questions, simple and unanswerable! The saving of the one sheep in danger was a thing they would set themselves to do, instinctively, not waiting to consult the law. If so, **How much then is a man better than a sheep?** And, therefore, **it is lawful to do good (R. V.) on the sabbath day.** Notice here : (1) The Saviour's way of looking at all religious matters from the standpoint of common sense. (2) The great truth that **man is better than a sheep**—immortal, spiritual, made for God. (3) *Mercy is the best sabbath-keeping.* Having said this He again shocks the sinfully scrupulous, as He had previously done in Jerusalem (John 5), and heals the man before them. In this, again, notice many things : (1) Though it endangers His own life, He heals the sufferer. (2) We

14 ¶ Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

15 But when Jesus knew it he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;

should not shock any one's religious scruples when truth or duty does not require it; but when they require it, we ought to do so. (3) The illustration of the harmony of opposite views on theology. The spirit of Calvinism would say, "The man cannot stretch forth his hand until it is healed." The spirit of Arminianism would say, "He cannot be healed until He stretches it out." Both are right. He cannot stretch it out till Christ heals; He can stretch it out, for it is healed in the act of endeavouring to obey Christ's command. (4) He is one of a great multitude that found blessings in God's sanctuary. There the Saviour keeps the sabbath of mercy, and the poor man keeps his sabbath of gratitude.

THE SABBATH PROFANATION,

14, of those professing to guard it is marvellous. They deemed it sinful to pluck the ears of corn, or to heal the palsied man, but not sinful to spend the day in plotting the Saviour's death!

Note: (1) Many strain out gnats, and swallow camels. (2) All fault-finders are hypocrites. (3) Let us be in earnest to get the heart of religion into our very heart.

THE PEACEFUL CHRIST.

15. He withdrew Himself. The hatred and plots of the Pharisees send Christ for the time away from His usual haunts—to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, borders of Tyre, Cæsarea Philippi, Perea. There is in Him no fear that avoids, no impatience that hastens, the peril threatening His life. He will give time for animosity to settle and change, if it may be, into a better mind. When, therefore, His enemies rage, He withdraws. He might use some of His miraculous power to blast them. He spares them yet a while. If we resist He withdraws. He will not force Himself on any soul. His enemies think they achieve something if they can only drive Him away. He knows the grip taken by truth, the endurance of His influence, and that His work will go on well even when He is away.—There is a time for "*withdrawing*" before danger, and a time for "*steadfastly setting His face to go up to Jerusalem.*" Great multitudes followed. Pharisees can prevent Christ staying; they cannot prevent the people following. Already the world begins to go after Him. He healed them all, the multitude including many sick and those who led or brought them. Oppo-

16 And charged them that they should not make him known :

17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen ; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased : I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.

sition to Christ outwits itself : it makes the people more eager, and sends the power and name of Christ to influence a larger space. Probably in such circumstances we should have lost some of our kindliness and become resentful and indifferent under ill-usage. But whoever frowns on Christ, Christ still smiles on all who need Him.

16. Not make Him known. There are some to whom Christ says, "*Go home to thy friends*" (Mark 5 : 19), or "*Go ye into all the world and preach*" (Matt. 28 : 19); and there are some to whom He says, "*See that no man know it*" (Mark 5 : 43). There is a preaching and a preaching. That which rouses only curiosity is forbidden ; that which conveys salvation is prescribed. Christ deemed the gaping wonder of men only an impediment to His work, and prefers quiet, peaceful methods of extending His preference.

This brings into view

THE FORCES OF CHRIST'S EMPIRE,

17—21, as they are prefigured in a prediction of Isaiah. "*The servant of the Lord*," is a phrase which in Isaiah's lips seems to have several distinct applications. "*Israel*" is sometimes thus designated, as in ch. 44 : 1. Sometimes it is the Israel within Israel, the remnant, the real heart of Israel, which is to be identified as heir of the promises made to the nation. Sometimes it is the personal Christ, who is the heart of that heart of Israel who is foreshadowed and described. These applications are not conflicting or confusing, so much as concentric ; and no man can read these verses, and still less the fifty-third of Isaiah, without feeling that here "*The Servant of the Lord*" is the Christ within Israel who is the Heir of all the promises. So taken by Matthew, it is very suggestive.

18. First, Christ is equipped for His work by soul fitnesses, dear to the father-heart of God, filled with God's Spirit. **He shall shew judgment to the Gentiles ;** i.e. Do judgment amongst them, end their wrongs, their oppression ; such wrongs as thrive in the dark places of the earth—slavery, subjection of women, the usurpations of the strong, the sufferings of the weak. He is to do this all the world over, not in Israel only, but in all heathen lands. He is fitted to be the King who comes in the name of the Lord, and who "*will save the children of the needy.*"

19 He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

22 ¶ Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

19. Secondly, the forces He employs are not the vulgar forces of the world. It might seem as if no throne could be got without some self-seeking, nor any empire without conflict with opposing wills. But in Christ Jesus self supplies no motive, ambition stirs no effort, impatience stirs no zeal. He does not strive in any way, nor employ any constraint, or any inducement in the furtherance of His kingdom. He will not even strive in argument, or give a sign from heaven to prove His title. He does not cry, nor lift up His voice in the streets. Other empires are won in strife, gained by "blood and iron." But Christ's kingdom grows unseen, unsuspected, by outward influence of truth, inward movings of grace, inward allurements of redeeming love. The loud and worldly ways are not Christ's ways.

20. But, third, His great force is *the Gentleness of infinitive mercy*. The reed, growing by millions in every marsh and riverside, was a type of commonplace insignificance. A bruised reed, that same insignificance intensified by injury, is a type of feeble, down-trodden souls, broken hearts. Christ does not crush them, but cares for and revives them. The smoking flax is the smouldering wick—type of degenerate souls whose better life has died out of them. Christ does not quench the seeming hopeless remains of life, but heals backslidings, pardons transgressions, saves. This gentleness is His omnipotence, and is the guarantee of His world-wide reign.

21. In His name shall the Gentiles—*i.e. the Heathen*—trust. To-day a third of mankind call themselves Christians, and a multitude, daily growing, trust in Him with the faith that works everlasting salvation.

A BRUISED REED,

22, is brought to Him, whose case resembles that described in ch. 9: 32, as a case of *morbid reserve*, the unclean spirit closing eye, ear, and lips, shutting off all friendly intercourse with man. The extremity of helplessness is here. Happily the infinite pity of Christ is here also, and He sets the man free.

23. The Revised Version omits the word *not* in the question, **Is not this the Son of David?** making it a rather more tentative question, indicating the beginning rather than the strength of faith. These

24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

questions, so reverent to the greatness of Christ, always rise in men's hearts when they look to Him.

THE REPEATED CALUMNY.

24. On the previous occasion, when He healed a similar case, they had explained it in this way. Then He had ignored it, His only reply being His healing others. It is one of the awful penalties of doing wrong that we tend to repeat it and get ever deeper into sin. So, more boldly they blaspheme Christ. How wicked man may grow! This time the Saviour will reply, and begins by showing them

THE CREDULITY OF UNBELIEF.

25, 26. Since when has Satan become so foolish as to divide his power and dethrone himself? The foolishness that can believe this is only equalled by the waywardness which indulges such an imagination.

27. It is the more foolish, because they valued highly the gift possessed by some of the holier amongst themselves of casting out devils; mental and nervous diseases being pre-eminently responsive to what we name "*authority*" in character—the combination of the strenuous will with wisdom and nobility of feeling. There is an *influence* in some natures, potent to calm and heal the hurt mind. To-day in China the "*casting out devils*" is a common practice of Christian converts, and has features about it by which even men of science are bewildered (Miss Cumming, "*Wanderings in China*," pp. 237-246). If Christ's work is to be discredited, they must treat their own holiest brethren as in league with Satan. Mark this credulity of unbelievers, for the difference between faith and unbelief is, not that one is credulous and the other wise, but this, that *faith believes in the majestic, but unbelief believes in the monstrous*; Faith believes in a great love of God, unbelief believes in the great deceivableness of man.

THE TRUE INTERPRETATION,

28, 29, might in justice have been withheld from the cavillers; but in mercy Christ tells news which might have saved them. The secret

29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

31 ¶ Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

of the miracle is, **The kingdom of God is come**; and One is present "*stronger*" (Luke 11:22) than the **strong man** who rules the evil of the world; who is binding him, and despoiling him. Christ is stronger than all evil, and will triumph over it; and history has ever since been the story of His growing victories. He adds—

GRAVE WARNINGS.

30-37. First, imputing fellowship with Satan, falsely, to the Saviour, they are falling into it really themselves. **Not with Christ**, they are **against Him**—as Satan is, and doing his work for him. This word, with others like it, is of grave importance; as it shows, that when Christ comes to us, there can be no neutrality.

31, 32. Secondly, such sin as they are indulging may grow till it is incurable. There is confessedly much difficulty in representing in express terms the elements of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. The following considerations may lessen this difficulty: (1) **Blasphemy** (originally meaning only "evil-speaking") is *the acutest form of active hatred*, implying intensest dislike and inflicting keenest wrong. (2) *The Holy Spirit is the most unmistakeable form of God.* God in the form of Jesus of Nazareth may be mistaken; His lowly state may mask His glory. He is outside of us; and education, prejudice, or distance may make it easy for us to mistake Him, and to **speak a word against the Son of man**. But the **Holy Spirit**, who is *the God within us*, in all His pleadings and witness, is unmistakeably Divine. We know His light and impulse to be from heaven. Obviously, therefore, when by long presumptuous waywardness, the heart comes to hate the God within it, guiding or pleading, there is a much graver position than when it only blasphemes, with more or less of accident, *the God without it*. Hatred of God when He is clearly recognized is the highest sin against light, and prevents our being forgiven by destroying His power of repenting. Mark the charitable light which is thus cast on the future of those who disbelieve in Christ through misconception and not perversity. **Neither in this**

33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good ; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt : for the tree is known by his fruit.

34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things ? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things : and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

38 ¶ Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

world, neither in the world to come. A word which, probably, means simply “*Never*,” though many, from St. Augustine down to Lange and Stier, have gathered the subsidiary suggestion that some sins are forgiven in the world to come, which had not been forgiven here.

33. *Make*, *i.e.* Accept the fact that both tree and fruit are good, or, both tree and fruit are evil ; but do not believe that the tree is bad and its fruit good.

34, 35. Their charge comes, not from any “*unction*” by which they know all things, but only from the treasure of evil in their hearts.

36, 37. He adds a *third warning*. *Words may be great crimes damning the soul*, just as other words may be noble confessions saving it. We may all attach too slight importance to *our words*. Every virtue or vice which prompts them grows in their utterance. In a brave word of confession the soul may take Christ’s side, and “*pass from death unto life*” (ch. 10 : 32 ; John 19 : 38) ; in a word denying his Master, Peter may for the time cut himself off from Christ. Words are often the most grievous of injuries, and sometimes heal, like a medicine, the broken heart. So by our words we may be saved or lost. *Idle* is here, as often, used in a sense which implies a word mischievous as well as needless ; such as this word of the Pharisees. *It does not mean the innocent jest.*

A SIGN FROM HEAVEN,

38—43, is now asked, *immediately after a great miracle had been wrought*. It does not occur to them that what they ask for is before their eyes ; and what they need, is not light, but sight. More than His deeds, Himself is the great sign, than which none could be greater or more Divine. But having learned the art of evading truth, they do not see the significance of either His works or character. And, accordingly, when in this chapter He puts forth great claims—to

39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas :

40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly ; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

be "*greater than the temple*" (ver. 6), "*Lord of the sabbath*" (ver. 8), One to speak against whom is "*blasphemy*,"—they ask Him to demonstrate His right to make such claims by "*giving them a sign*." And it must not be wrought on men or earthly things, but "*in heaven*"—in the sky above them—where they seem to think the devil could not reach with his beguiling arts ! Alas, how easily might they be deceived by a false sign in heaven ; and how easily would they have found arguments to countervail the witness of a Divine sign ! What can the Saviour do with those who thus grope in noonday, especially as the request is insincere as well as superfluous ? What they want is, not the sign, but a failure in an attempt to give it. In inquiring into the truth of Christianity, always remember that the supreme necessity is the faculty of holy judgment. If the gospel is of God its evidences must be open and general, not requiring minute search to find them, but only *the vision of heart* (Matt. 5 : 8), which recognizes God's work when it sees it.

39. The request cannot be granted. Nothing would be a sign to a generation evil and adulterous, *i.e.* wicked and forsaking Him who said, "*Thy Maker is thine Husband*." Often they who ask for "*evidences*" think themselves candid, philosophic, and pursuing the proper course, when the faithful and true witness would call them evil because of the hardness that blinds them to Christ's glory. But while they cannot have a sign which would convey belief, they can and will have a sign which will overwhelm them with dismay. The re-appearing of Jesus, after they had slain Him, this dread sign should be theirs. Like Jonah, lost ; like Jonah, returning to call them to repentance.

40. *Whale's belly*. It is a pity the word which means *any large fish* is translated *whale*. A large shark can swallow a man, a whale cannot for narrowness of throat. **Three days and three nights**. One Hebrew word expressed the phrase "*day and night* ;" so, also, the Greek word used here. There is, therefore, not the emphasis on the days and nights in the original which is in our text. The word simply means *three days*, and the Jewish usage reckoned any part of each separate day a whole day. **The heart of the earth** seems to mean rather the abode of the dead, into which the soul of Christ entered, than the mere grave in which His body was laid.

41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

42 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

43 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

From this warning He proceeds to denounce the essential faults of that generation, and shows

ISRAEL CONDEMNED BY HEATHENISM.

41, 42. It seems as if those who boast of privileges never use them, and those who use them never boast of them. Two characteristics especially ennoble life—Penitence and the Love of Truth; Penitence wishing to do God's will, Earnest Love of Truth wishing to know God's heart and ways. Christ points out that they had less of penitence than even the heathen *Ninevites*, who, though wicked exceedingly (Jonah 1:2), obeyed at once the call of a stranger, who wrought no miracle, and gave no proof of his message, save what proof lay in his intense sincerity; while they, with prophets and psalmists to prepare them for His message, and the Saviour Himself to call them, resist every moving to repentance.

42. And they have less of love of truth than some other heathens; for one came from the South of Arabia, all the way to Jerusalem, to get the great questions of the soul answered, though a woman, at risk of much danger to her person and her authority; while they, hearing Him speak as never man spake, hear only to lie in wait for some word for which they may slay Him. We ought to extend the Saviour's remarks and note all directions in which heathens shame Christians. The abstinence from intoxicants which happily blesses half of heathen Asia will rise up and condemn many indulgent Christians. The faith in some sort of immortality which all heathens hold will condemn others. The Stoic patience of the Indian peoples, their submission to whatever God sends, condemns our murmuring lives. Consider the zeal to learn and to spread what they held as truth which inspired those who carried Buddhist and Mahometan doctrines over half the world; the virtues of many Catholics, whose errors we denounce, but whose godliness we hardly aspire to; the virtues of some not able to accept the gospel as the truth of God;—and we shall find many considerations productive at once of lowliness and charity.

THE DANGER OF ISRAEL,

43-45, the danger to which things empty of good are always exposed, viz. being filled with evil. Broadly, Israel was like a man

44 Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

46 ¶ While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

out of whom an evil spirit had been cast out, without goodness taking its place. The evil spirit of idolatry had been cast out after the Babylonish captivity, but faith in and love to God did not fill the void. It remained from the days of Ezra **empty and swept, and garnished** itself with the conceit of superiority to all other lands. In these circumstances the devil ejected would return with greater force and invade successfully his lost abode, and they would sink into worse sin than even their idolatry had been. Such seems the meaning of the figure; **dry places**, being places which man cannot inhabit, the figures of any homeless, joyless state in which the evil spirit might find himself. There is a great lesson for all here—Only good in us will keep evil permanently out of us. No one is safe who remains **empty**, even though he be **swept and garnished**. The drunkard must do more than *abstain*, else when he prides himself on his victories, the enemy will enter him again. Doing no harm is a condition that will not continue unless we take to doing good. Mere faultlessness is not safe. Get love and sympathy into the heart. Only *progress* will prevent backsliding. The prediction of Christ was awfully fulfilled, for they preferred Barabbas to Christ, and slew their Saviour.

A STRANGE INCIDENT.

46-50. We wonder that His mother could have so acted, that Christ could have so spoken, that His disciples could be so described. The more strange, the more instructive the incident should be.

46. The reason for the interference of His mother and brethren is given in St. Mark (3: 20, 21): "*They could not so much as eat bread. And when His friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself.*" Doubtless Mary made no such remark, and was rather used and put forward by her sons and daughters, some of whom did not believe in Jesus (John 7: 5). Note (1) Mary, though probably the best woman who ever lived, is not immaculate; for here she errs by presuming to interfere, albeit she does so modestly. (2) Friends are sometimes by their very solicitude hindrances to our work.

47. There is in Jesus no anger against the presumption of His

48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?

49 And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

brethren; but there is no submission to it. *We may not submit to man when obeying God's orders.* He denies all authority to mother and brethren over Him. Catholics, who sometimes seem to think Mary may dictate her will to Christ, should here learn the reproof which would await any such action.

49, 50. The kinship Christ emphasizes is that of soul, not flesh. Brothers unbelieving are not so near as disciples believing. Note: (1) The Saviour who has enriched the world with vast increase of family affections, yet does not permit even love to parents to lead us into sin: (2) The new brotherhood, with one another and with Christ, which comes by grace: The bliss of the new friendships of the holy life: (3) The humility of Christ, which calls such as we are Brother, Sister, Mother: (4) The essence of the discipleship which makes us Christ's kinsmen is doing the will of our Father who is in heaven.

CHAPTER XIII.

The following quotation from Dean Stanley, describing the Plain of Gennesaret, may elucidate the opening parable, that of The Sower:—
 "A slight recess on the hillside, close upon the plain, disclosed at once, in detail and with a conjunction I remember nowhere else in Palestine, every feature of the great parable. There was the undulating cornfield descending to the water's edge. There was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence or hedge to prevent the seed from falling here or there on either side of it or upon it; itself hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule and human feet. There was the 'good' rich soil which distinguishes the whole of that plain and its neighbourhood from the bare hills elsewhere descending into the lake, and which, when there is no interruption, produces one vast mass of corn. There was the rocky ground of the hillside, protruding here and there through the corn-fields as elsewhere through the grassy slopes. There were

- 1 The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.
- 2 And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat ; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.
- 3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow ;
- 4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up :
- 5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth : and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth :
- 6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched ; and because they had no root, they withered away.
- 7 And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them :
- 8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.
- 9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

the large bushes of thorn—the ‘Nabk,’ that kind of which tradition says the crown of thorns was woven—springing up like the fruit-trees of the more inland parts, in the very midst of the waving wheat” (“Sinai and Palestine,” p. 425). Such a scene occasions this parable, with which the Saviour commences the great series of parabolic teachings.

1, 2. The same day. The Saviour is glad to get away from controversy with the scribes and Pharisees, and address the people. Every place was consecrated ground to Him ; with boat for pulpit and sloping beach for church, He can freely speak to all.

3. Parables. The profoundest lessons of the Saviour are given in this form. They disclose truth exactly in the degree in which men can admit it ; hiding it from those who would abuse, imparting it to those who would obey, it.

4. Fowls. Stanley mentions “countless birds of all kinds, aquatic fowls by the lake-side, partridges and pigeons” (“Sinai and Palestine,” p. 427).

5. Stony places are not places where earth is mixed with stones, but where a thin layer of soil lies on the face of the rock.

6. Sun. The climate of Gennesaret is tropical, from the deep depression of the Jordan valley.

7. Thorns. “The combined heat and dryness of the climate seem to develop a tendency to form thorns, even where we should least expect them.” “All plants become more spiny in rocky and parched situations” (Tristram’s “Nat. Hist. of the Bible,” p. 423). Before ploughing, the regular process is to burn off the thorns. This had doubtless been done here ; but some “*roots of bitterness*” had been left.

8. Good ground. The plain of Gennesaret was the richest in the land. Josephus calls it “the ambition of nature.”

9. He reproves indifference, and calls to the study of the parable.

10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

10-17. This parable surprises the twelve. Why He should use such a figure—perhaps only telling a vast multitude what by turning round and looking they could see—and telling this as if some mighty meaning were in it they could not tell. So they ask **why**? It is good to ask why this or that is done; for unusual events of Providence or methods of grace have special meanings which it is well to master.

THE USE OF PARABLES,

11-15, is explained. As far as Matthew's report is concerned, the Saviour's words might be understood to mean that He employed parables to engage and awake and remove the dulness of apprehension which marked the people; but a comparison with Mark and Luke shows that a judicial meaning must be attached to Christ's words, and that He uses parables to reveal truth to those who would accept and appreciate it, and to conceal it from those who would resent or abuse it.

11. It is given unto you to know the mysteries. **Mysteries** are *secrets that have been made known*—such as God's purpose to become incarnate and to make the Gentiles fellow-heirs with the Jews; not the unintelligible, but the hitherto unrevealed. Note: (1) The deepest things of the Gospels are to be found in the parables. (2) The child-like heart of discipleship can understand them. (3) There are some to whom light would not be mercy, so certainly would they resist it; as here, if the warnings of these parables had been clearly stated, some of His hearers would have been roused to fury, not to penitence. (4) It is a great law of life illustrated in the regions of knowledge, wealth, friendship, and religion, that whoso "*has*" something, some true beginning, gets more; but the apathetic soul that "*lacks*," loses what he may accidentally possess. To the disciples that "*had*" some light by having welcomed it, more is given. The Pharisees, who had none of Christ's light because refusing admission to it, were fast losing the light of Old Testament Scripture which they had.

13. There is a **seeing** which is not *vision*, which does not penetrate to the meaning of anything it looks at.

14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

14, 15. The perceptive instincts are supremely delicate; and all indulgence in forbidden things, or neglect of things required, rapidly destroys them. Still more do these deprive themselves of the power of understanding truths who close their eyes . . . lest they should see, and be converted. Beware of destroying the higher reason, the faculty of faith, the delicacy of power of conscience; for we can easily destroy them. The children of privilege are under great temptations to do so. And the loss of these things is the most irreparable loss we suffer.

BLESSED DISCIPLES.

16, 17. Oh that we knew the pricelessness of truth! **Prophets**, like Isaiah; "*Kings*" (Luke adds this word), like David—or the Queen of Sheba; **righteous men**, like many in every nation who lived up to the light that reached them,—would have given their lives to know the story of the Gospels. Let us not leave this treasure unused.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

In vers. 18–25 we have the solemn exposition of this great word. Observe at the outset: (1) This parable holds true of every one proclaiming truth. In the next parable the Sower is "*the Son of man*" (ver. 37). But this is the story of the seed of truth, as sown by any preacher, or teacher, or writer. No matter who utters it, it is a great opportunity and responsibility when the truth of Jesus is brought to our ears. (2) Many were expecting the kingdom of God to be set up by a mighty Divinely equipped warrior, extirpating enemies and oppressors in battle. But it is set up by a great Sower of seed, and extended by many lowly sowers who have followed Him. The greatest power in the world still dwells with him who can sow "*living and incorruptible seed.*" (3) This parable leaves much untold; viz. why soils differ; how the track got trodden; what made the rock; whence came the thorns; what made some soil good; what other influences are working towards fruitfulness, such as tendance by labourers, rain, dew, sunshine. Do not let us feel that we are *Fated*

18 ¶ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

to be what we are, and cannot alter ourselves. The parable teaches great truths, but not all truths.

18. Sower. All men are sowers, all words and deeds are seeds, and all hearts are soil. The greatest service man can render is sowing the good seed of Truth and of High Example. A minister or teacher is pre-eminently to be a sower of seed; not a prescriber of manners, but one who puts into souls the great truths and impulses which transform, inspire, ennoble men. It is further implied that the gospel is pre-eminently "*Seed*;" i.e. the most vital form of matter, that which transmutes to its own nature earth, sap, sunshine, and changes these dead things into living beauty.

19-23. Four different sorts of souls are successively specified here: (1) Those of whom the saving truth of God takes *No Hold*; (2) those of whom it takes a *Superficial Hold*; (3) those of whom it takes a *Disputed Hold*; (4) those of whom it takes a *Full Hold*. Ultimately there are only two classes—those who do and those who do not bear fruit. But the fourfold distinction enables us to identify ourselves more easily. **Way side.** The first, and one of the largest classes of men, is that of which truth takes *No Hold*. The image used suggests that though the soil might be good enough, a crust is formed above it; it is *trodden down* by traffic of other thoughts and feelings, so that no great and quickening truth can get into it. There are many souls properly so described; souls with great latent powers, it may be, but with a crust of thoughtlessness between them and Truth; and in whom, accordingly, conscience, aspiration, expectancy of immortality, are never stirred. Nothing gets through the hard surface into the depths of the soul. Note concerning this crust: (1) *It is sometimes the misfortune of circumstances.* Some children grow wild, with nothing to wake the depths of their soul. The only examples and surroundings they have harden their nature against the entrance of anything good. Some have such a fight for existence, that everything needed for winning bread comes to the surface, and encrusts the immortal part within them. The traffic of hunger, work, anxiety over the soul, beats down its surface so that higher things cannot easily enter it. (2) *The crust of the soul is more often its sin.* Pleasures, gaieties, ambition, worldliness, greed, fence the soul round and round so as to keep all high things from entering. When the surface of the heart is thus hard, Truth, even from the Saviour's lips, passes unheeded. **The**

20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it ;

21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while : for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

wicked one snatcheth (R.V.) away what is sown. As the birds follow the sower, so their neglect is assisted by our enemy, who fears that, if left on the heart, it might perchance get in and germinate there. What a calamity to have a Crusted Soul, out of which God and Truth are kept ! Examples of this first class are found in those who dismissed both John and Jesus with the remark that the one " *had a devil,*" and the other courted popularity with sinners ; in the soldiers, who threw dice below the cross for Christ's clothes : in Pilate, who asked, " *What is truth ?*" and did not wait for the answer ; in the men of Athens, who said of Paul, " *What will this babblers say ?*" in the multitudes that give no heed to their soul, to the duties of life, to salvation, or to eternity. Be not wayside hearers.

20, 21. **Stony places.** Here there is again a crust, but it is not on the outside of the soul, but a little way within. The mass of the heart is inaccessible, but the surface can be touched. Truth cannot reach the Reason and set it brooding, or the Conscience and set it to change the whole life, or the Heart and turn the current of its desires. But it can reach the surface of the soul ; Imagination, desire of heaven, fear of punishment ; the desire to stand well with others ; amiability ; the nerves of excitement. *There are many hearts of stone which have an outside covering of flesh.* And of such the truth can get a Superficial Hold. The sweetness of the gospel charms them ; the beauty of the Saviour's character commands their esteem ; they would like to have the complacency of goodness ; they would like to go to heaven when they die ; they like the companionship of the good, and *cannot bear to be left outside.* So the seed roots itself in the surface of the soul and changes the conduct, but does not enter and change the heart. *For long there may not appear any difference between them and true Christians.* But **When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by-and-by he is offended.** [By-and-by, at the time our translation was made, meant *immediately*, and correctly expressed the meaning of the Greek term.] Such discipleship was directed to getting comforts and advantages. And when a cross has to be borne, the sentimental part of their nature is not strong enough to carry it, without the help of a great penitence and a great purpose and a great gratitude within. *So they wither away.* Examples of such are to be found in a large portion of those who came to John's baptism, but became not disciples of Jesus ; in him who said, " *Lord,*

22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word ; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it ; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

I will follow thee whithersoever Thou goest ;" in the crowd that would have made Christ King, but yet repented not ; in many touched by the excitement of revival meetings without being converted ; in all the Pliables who set out to win "the brave country," but get no further than the Slough of Despond. The wayside forgot the birds, and took no pains to seize the seed ; the shallow ground forgets the scorching sun, and seeks not to submit the entire heart to the influence of truth. What a disappointment ! What a loss when *discipleship* withers away. Think ! Count the cost !

22. Among . . . thorns. We have next the case where the gospel takes a *Deep Hold* of a heart, but a *Disputed Hold* ; where something opposed to it is permitted to exist. The heart is often a rich and fruitful soil, which, if only clear of thorns, would bring forth fruit abundantly. This represents souls thoughtful and reverent, capable of regarding the immortal scope of human actions, touched with a sense of Christ's glory, wishing to serve Him. But they spare some one fault or neglect some duty ; and this is a *Thorn-root*. Often the hope is seriously cherished that the wheat will choke the thorn. But in the event, every spared evil gathers strength, grows and chokes the good. The thorns mentioned here are the **Cares of this world, and the Deceitfulness of riches**. The delusions of those who have, the distraction of those who desire, gold. Mark mentions "*the lusts of other things.*" Note : Not only is care a thorn, but the deception of wealth is also one. *It makes those who have it believe that they are rich, that they are free to neglect duty, that they have need of nothing.* Examples of this class are many : The rich young Ruler, who wanted eternal life, yet went away from Christ, sorrowful, because he had great possessions ; Herod, who "*did many things gladly,*" but could not do the one thing John required ; Judas, wanting the next world, but clinging to this ; those "*all but persuaded,*" who are never quite persuaded. How many such are these !—appreciative of all that is good, but perishing through clinging to some one thing that is evil ! How strange that men are not afraid of these thorns !

23. But some are good soil of whom the seed takes hold ; into whose whole soul it enters, filling mind, heart, and conscience, and engaging the will ; who set themselves to **understand** it ; who yield to its suggestions ; who give it fair play. In these the seed produces

24 ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field :

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

force, decision, large love, deep penitence, faith binding to Christ, the likeness of the Lord, power of doing good, salvation and power of saving others. When once the seed gets entrance to the soul and control there, it has a wonderful growth, realizing thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. Examples of this last sort of soul are to be found everywhere ; in such disciples as Peter, Matthew, and the rest of the eleven ; in Zaccheus, the publican ; in the Dying Thief ; in Paul ; in multitudes of disciples everywhere.

PARABLE OF THE TARES.

The next section (24-30) gives us the second parable of the group of seven. A parable of patience and of judgment. One whose lessons uttered plainly would have embittered blasphemous resentment, but uttered in parable find their way into hearts fit to profit by them. Its lessons are much needed and much neglected. Again the fortunes of truth and of grace are compared to those of seed ; the most vital form of life and the most marvellous in power of growth. All mishaps are not avoided when the good seed finds good soil free from thorns.

24. **His field.** In view of ver. 38, note this expression, as it asserts the Saviour to be Owner, Lord, Husbandman, of this world of man.

25. **While men slept.** At night, secretly. We can do good openly ; we must do our evil secretly. There are few faults of character more to be avoided than *Secrecy*. In it evil thrives and goodness languishes. *Do nothing you cannot avow.* Others' faults may be kept secret by you ; do not keep your own. The young should be urged always to *tell their* parents or guardians *especially those things they would not like them to know.* A secretive boy is apt to grow into the sort of man described here. **Enemy . . . sowed tares.** Tares are a kind of rye-grass rarely met with here, but common in Palestine. Thomson ("The Land and the Book," p. 421) says, "The taste is bitter, and when eaten separately, or even when diffused in ordinary bread, it causes giddiness, and often acts as a violent emetic. . . . It is a strong soporific poison." He further says, "When the grain has *headed out*, a child cannot mistake them for wheat or barley ; but when both are less developed, the closest scrutiny will often fail to detect them. . . . Very commonly the roots of the two are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them without plucking up both" (p. 420). A form of revenge happily rare, but one against

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy had done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

31 ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

which laws were made in Rome, and still occasionally practised in all lands. The mischief aimed at was the poisoning of some of the wheat, necessitating great labour to get rid of it, and the lingering presence for years of some seeds of mischief. How wicked men become when they give way to revenge! Such crimes occasionally happen in England. Dean Alford, for instance, had once a field belonging to him sown with wild mustard (commentary on parable).

28. Gather them up. This would have to be done when ripe, as Dean Stanley saw them doing at Gennesaret; but the servants are impatient.

30. The wise course of patience. Burn them. Useless for any purpose, and their seeds being light, burning was the only safeguard.

Such is the strange parable; full of deep truths. Happily in subsequent verses the Saviour explains it for us.

Other pictures are added to the picture-gallery. The two parables already given present the failures of the gospel so prominently, that had the Saviour stopped with these, the impression might have remained that failure was the rule and success the exception, and that the work of the Master was at the mercy of the malice of the enemy. He therefore adds five other parables, the first two of which indicate the power of growth and conquest stored up in the gospel; the second two the charm it will exercise over the hearts of men; while the last is a parable of judgment, enforcing the lessons of the whole with its solemnity. We come first to the parables portraying

THE CHURCH'S GROWTH.

The mustard seed tells of the growth of the Church in outward obvious magnitude. The leaven tells of the growth of its *influence* and the spread of its *spirit*.

31, 32. A grain of mustard seed. The mustard plant, as we

32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

33 ¶ Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

know it, is never large enough for the figure employed here. But mustard *Trees* of ten feet high—tall enough for a man to climb or for a man on horseback to ride under, are mentioned by a modern botanist, an ancient rabbi, and a modern traveller. The points of comparison were, accordingly, the seed—the least of all seeds [*i.e.* in common use]—and the plant—the greatest among herbs. To show forth the growth of His kingdom, the Saviour takes *The Instance* in common observation of *The Greatest growing Force known*, and employs it to show how from what is least His Church is bound to grow to what is greatest. The Church was at first bound up in Christ: a Babe in swaddling clothes, and then a Man of Nazareth. But soon the Saviour gathers twelve apostles; then seventy. Then the number of the names was a hundred and twenty. Then three thousand believe at Pentecost, and the work goes on until to-day one-third of mankind accept the gospel as their creed. Not quite a hundred years ago William Carey started his work as the first modern English missionary to foreign lands. What a “*Mustard Seed*” for the world to laugh at was “the consecrated cobbler”! But already there are at least three thousand European missionaries in heathen lands, and more than three-fourths of a million of Christian converts round them. The Church may fail to convert individual men, but it will never fail to grow, and to grow vastly. *Birds of the air . . . lodge in the branches thereof.* Souls are sheltered by it, and all good causes fostered by its shade. Liberty, mercy, contentment, education, peace, are birds whose nests seem to be built in the Church. All good things thrive beneath its shadow.

33. Leaven. Fermented dough, sour in taste, put into fresh flour, with the result that it sets gradually and swiftly all the dough fermenting. “*Leavened Bread,*” once common, made thus, is light, pleasantly acid in taste, and nutritious. The process is one chemical and vegetative; each minute fermented cell setting its neighbouring cell fermenting. The bit of leaven hid is a few ounces in weight. The “*three measures*” is enough to make about twenty quartern loaves. Yet in a single night the bit of leaven would leaven all the dough. The “*mustard seed*” tells how the Church will attach soul after soul till it becomes a great tree. The leaven shows that the Church

34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

changes those she attaches from earthly to heavenly patterns. *She vitalizes* as well as attracts. The Saviour not only wins disciples, but after winning inspires them. What a force Jesus hath shown of making hearts feel as He felt, and minds think as He thought! And the saints of God have that same quality. Put them anywhere, and the leaven transforms the lump. Their faith, patience, purity, compassion, have infective power, and the Christian purpose, creed, and feeling replace with gradual but swift and unconscious influence all others. The degree in which Christian leaven has leavened the thoughts, morality, politics, of men is as marvellous as the degree in which the Church has grown to its present dimensions. The lessons of both are very important. (1) Believe that all goodness, however little, in the world, in the Church, or in the soul, has a great future. (2) Happy the child or man with a mustard seed of grace within him; a little love to Christ; the faith to make some little venture of service; *for it will grow*. (3) Do your Christian work with strong faith that the gospel you utter has *a mighty vital influence of its own*, apart from you altogether. (4) *Be on God's winning side*.

35. A word quoted from Asaph the Seer (Ps. 78: 2). Where the English version has "*dark sayings of old*," Matthew translates **Things which have been kept sacred from the foundation of the world**. He quotes thus, not the prophecy, but the precedent of Asaph.

37. **He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man**. In the last parable, "*the sower*" stood for all proclaimers of truth; here, for Jesus only. The "*good seed*" there was truth; the **good seed** here is *Lives which embody such truth*. Souls are growing things—sent into the world and into the Church to grow.

38. **The field** ("*his field*," ver. 24) is the world. According to ver. 24, "*the kingdom of heaven*," that is, *the Church*, is set forth in the parable. Here it is said **the field is the world**. There is no contradiction, and there should be no confusion. Only note: (1) The story is, *Generally*, a history of mankind at large; but (2) *Especially*

39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

of that part of it which enjoys the richest activities of the favour, viz. The Church; and (3) Christ means the Church to fill the world. *What a Christ is presented here—a Creator and Regenerator of souls, who scatters them for a world-wide and eternal harvest! Children of the kingdom . . . children of the wicked one.* What differences of nature are suggested here! None draw their origin from the wicked one, but many mould their character by his promptings, and so are called his children (John 8 : 44).

39. The devil. In this and the previous verse the Saviour explicitly teaches the existence of a *personal spiritual enemy of God and man, by whom evil is prompted in the world.* Two great mistakes are corrected by this parable: (1) The mistake of ignoring the existence and power of the enemy. We cannot do this without dishonouring God by attributing all evil to Him as its Author, and damaging ourselves by unwatchfulness. And (2) the mistake of overdreading the enemy. He is not a God; his works are burnt up eventually. He cannot hurt us without our consent. "*Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*" **The enemy that sowed them.** God makes the world, and Satan sets himself to mar it. There is here given the principle of mischief on which the enemy of man acts. *His effort is to mar rather than destroy; to do it secretly; and to do it with things that look like good things until rooted and ripe. The resemblance of the tare to the wheat in its earlier stages, conjoined with its poisonous character, is the reason of its choice.* The devil spends his time in sowing tares to mar Christ's Church and kingdom. *The chief aim of the enemy of the Church is to introduce into it unspiritual members—sufficiently like true saints to be unsuspected; sufficiently different to be the ready roots of heresy, worldliness, and strife. As he acts here, so everywhere.* Side by side with all God's wheat of truth and goodness he plants some tares, resembling but opposing it. *Saints are God's wheat; Fanatics, the tares mixed with them. Reformers with loving hearts are God's wheat; Reformers with motives of hatred are Satan's tares. Lovers of truth are God's wheat; Haters of heresy, devil's tares. Candour ready to receive all new light, is wheat sown of God; Suspicious Doubting of old light is a tare sown by the enemy. Zeal is wheat; Persecution, tares. Childlike Conscientiousness is wheat; Servile Scrupulosity is tares. Reverence is wheat; Dread is tares. Charitableness is wheat; Latitudinarian Indifference is tares.* It is a very solemn thing to remember that two activities fill the Church of Christ; one, that of God, who brings wheat into His Church; one, Satan's, who labours with evil

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire ; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity ;

zeal to bring tares into it. These tares and wheat man would always be for separating, *even on suspicion* ; but God allows them to grow together till they are ripe. Many marvel that in the world God leaves the tares growing ; and many marvel that in the Church He does so. Many would like to try tare-grubbing. *But it requires more grace than man possesses.* Try to pluck up your neighbour's tares, and you will very likely pluck up wheat with them. You pull a fault up, and you find you have plucked up with it self-reliance, self-respect, or energy. You pull up superstition, and religion comes up along with it. You pluck up narrowness, and somehow with it enthusiasm comes as well. Still more is this the case with tares in the Church. Pluck away hypocrites, and you will pluck up formal Christians who are not hypocrites along with them. Pluck up those "unsound" in doctrine, and you will pluck up some sincere Christians who are travelling by paths of sincerest inquiry to the grandest views of truth. *When ripe, tares can be dealt with: when Unspirituality becomes immorality, or deadness—a denial of redemption—then removal from the Church field is necessary, safe, and easy.* *But patience, that leaves the destruction of tares to the future and to the Saviour, is our highest wisdom.* Our most useful employment will be sowing wheat, not hoeing tares. *Do all the good you can, and leave God to destroy the evil.* **The harvest is the end of the world.** The enemy sows tares ; the Saviour allows them to grow. *But there will be an end of the present mixture of things.*

40-43. The eternal future of sorted souls is unfolded here. Man's tests are too rude for Christ's work ; but the angels can separate the saint in aspect from the saint in character. How awful is the suggestion of this separation ! *The fate of the tares cannot be made light of after this word. The utter destruction of the tares is affirmed. What experience of the immortal soul answers to that none can exactly say ; but it is something which with all our energies we should labour to avoid.* What horror to those in Christ's kingdom who did not know they were tares, to discover it by their rejection ! Build not too much on your church-membership, for you may be one of the tares. **Things that offend.** The word means "a trap ;" and all evils entrapping souls are meant. The judgment destroys evil things and evil persons. **Them which do iniquity.** *God does not call any good man a tare.* It is *The Traps* and *The Workers of iniquity* that are cast out. The triumph of the Saviour over evil is what creation longs for.

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

44 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

43. Then shall the righteous shine. *Radiant*, because no longer obscure in dubious surroundings, because perfected, because rewarded. **Ears to hear.** Obey this call to ponder these solemnities, and fit yourself for glory. This word added not so much to the parable immediately preceding as to the whole four which He has spoken. Now the good is mixed amongst the evil—hid in the meal. In the great day of judgment it will be manifest in glory. Note carefully: (1) The end proves the work, and the question is, not how things look or are esteemed to-day, but how they will appear *then*. (2) There is no true glory save that of soul. (3) Of all soul glory that of goodness is supreme. See that you have a soul of beauty; for one day all love, all faithfulness, all service which modesty left unprofessed and neglect undiscovered, will be a "full and everlasting and passionless renown."

44-46. The two following parables explain the growth which the two last parables have illustrated. The kingdom of God grows, with good reason. Some systems have won acceptance because man is easily deluded; because they have indulged men's weakness, or because their holders have pressed them by point of the sword. The gospel extends its sway because, in the individual experience of all accepting it, it has brought wealth, they rejoice to win; a beautiful pearl they are glad to get. The growth of the church is not blind destiny, but the result of men's wise choice of the good and the beautiful.

44. Treasure hid in a field. A field used to be, and in some Oriental countries still is, the only bank. It is said that to this day wealthy natives of India will trade with one-third of their wealth, turn another third into jewels for easy carriage and disposal, and bury another third. It was not uncommon that sudden death prevented the secret burial-place of treasure being disclosed to the children of their owner. The finding of such was, therefore, not uncommon. The Emperor Nero, giving credence to a dream which some one had dreamed, sent forth a great expedition to discover some ancient treasures supposed to be hidden by Queen Dido at Carthage. In that case the dream misled him. **A man hath found.** Digging or ploughing. There are men who, like the pearl-merchant, are seekers, and so become finders. But this man is a type of some who light on the

45 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls :

46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

gospel treasure while engaged and occupied with other things. The Samaritan woman was such a person—coming for earthly but finding heavenly water. The dying thief another. All “*the last*” who become first are examples of this class. The publicans and harlots who repented at John’s preaching were instances of thoughtless spirits lighting on unexpected treasure. There are many like Saul, who find a kingdom while seeking asses, and who, thoughtless about their soul, come unawares on the story of the gospel. For joy thereof, etc. This man had to part with all to get the field. *We have to part with all in order to make room in our hearts to hold the treasure.* This man with joy made the small sacrifice to get the large wealth, and represents multitudes who have suffered the loss of all things, and yet, “*have counted them but dung that they might win Christ.*” In the field of Scripture men still find all that makes them rich—Life, Salvation, Knowledge of God, Peace, Immortality, or, all in one word, *Christ.* None is rich till he finds Christ ; none poor when he has found Him. And the kingdom of God grows amongst men because it enriches them with boundless wealth.

45, 46. If the gospel enriches men with its wealth, it gladdens and charms them also with the beauty it discloses. And this everlasting beauty of the Lord which gleams in it is another spell which brings men to believe in it. **Merchant man, seeking goodly pearls.** The diamond now holds the supreme place amongst precious stones ; but then the pearl did, and vast sums were given for good specimens. Pearl-merchants were, and in the East still are, great travellers. If such an one found a pearl of great price (such an one as Cleopatra gave £80,000 for and destroyed), it would be worth his while to part with all his stock to gain this gem of exquisite form, size, and beauty. We are made for the love of the beautiful, and the gospel holds us because it brings to us the uncreated and infinite beauty of God. In it the beauty of God’s love appears ; the beauty of the Saviour’s purity and mercy and self-sacrifice ; the beauty of a perfect creed—of an example full of sweetness, of a hope full of joy. And while the gifts Christ gives have charmed some, “*the beauty of God*” in Him has charmed others. So that the growth of God’s kingdom does not come from reasons unsatisfactory, but from the wealth and beauty which are in it. On these two parables mark : (1) We do not know Christ if we do not love Him. (2) *The joy of sacrifice is the richest of all joys—“the*

47 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind :

48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

49 So shall it be at the end of the world : the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things ? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

joy of the Lord”—and the Church is rich in it. (3) We must part with poorer joys and wealths to gain the true wealth of God. (4) If you would find wealth and beauty, seek Jesus Christ.

47-49. The Saviour closes with a parable of judgment, in which some of the features of the parable of the tares are repeated, together with something not there. The *Enemy* mixes tares among wheat. But the *kingdom of God*, by its own vigour, attracts and includes many it cannot save. When surrender is imperfect, choice divided, and the effort is to make the best of both worlds, it comes to pass that the kingdom holds in outward membership some it cannot change, gladden, or save. This feature is represented in the parable of the draw-net.

47. Net. The thing and the name survives. What the Greeks called *sagene*, we have and call “seine.” The long net, with floats on upper side and weights on the lower, seen everywhere on our own shores, in the sweep of which whatever is in the water above the level of its lower edge and within its circle is brought to shore. **Gathered of every kind.** There are unconverted people in the Church of Christ, *caught* by terrors of truth or promises, but not conquered by grace ; wishing for salvation, but wilful in refusing to take the way leading to it.

48. Souls now mixed will at last be separated. How awful the solemnity !

49. Angels. *Men cannot sort souls.* It will be done infallibly at last.

50. The awful punishment of sin ought to alarm the unconverted, and move the converted to efforts to save them.

51. The teacher ought always to see that his pupils understand him. The demand for understanding assists it.

52. The description of a true teacher. He is : (1) **One instructed.** (2) **Who has profited by his instruction, instructed unto the king-**

53 ¶ And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.

54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?

55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

dom. (3) Fatherly in his relations to his class [an householder]. (4) One who has treasures worth giving and receiving. (5) These treasures being *the Old Truth* common to all saints; and some New Wisdom, experience, and light, which each should have for himself. If your lessons are only new, they are not true; if they are only old, they are not living. *Give old and new treasures to those you teach.*

53-58. St. Luke describes (ch. 4: 16-30) a prior visit at an early stage of the Saviour's ministry. Matthew alludes to it in the words, "*Leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum*" (Matt. 4: 13). This, therefore, is a second visit, probably about the middle of His ministry; and, so far as we know, His last.

SECOND CHANCES.

54. He taught them in their synagogue. To some it might seem as if His first visit had conclusively proved that there was no receptivity in the Nazarenes. The Saviour is never easily moved to despair. The Barren Fig Tree has another chance, and the presumptuous neighbours another season of visitation. Become not careless in the abundance of privilege, or the lengthening out of opportunity.

FAULTS REPEATED.

55-57. At first it seemed as if they had grown wiser, in the interval which was so full of mighty deeds; for they seem to forget His plainness of speech to them and their resentment, and feel and express wonder at His Wisdom and His Works. But the low spirit of envy and unbelief rises afresh within them. They can believe in a God far away, but not in one who worked in Nazareth; and apparently they would rather God stopped outside their city than distinguished one of their number above the rest by making him His dwelling-place. Others asked, "*Can any good come out of Nazareth?*" They seem to ask, "*Can any Divine good come into it?*" The two questions explain each other. So the common sin which is always the first from which prophet, righteous man, or Saviour suffers is committed: *They resent His superiority*, asking, *Is not this the Carpenter's Son?* Near-

57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.

58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief,

ness to Christ does not necessarily help us. More privilege often produces more presumption. Note here : (1) There is no contempt thrown on the trade of the carpenter—which was highly esteemed—but their question suggests that they feel as good as He is. (2) The mention of Brethren in connection with Sisters and Mother, seems to forbid absolutely the exposition which the spirit of monasticism suggested, and which some Protestants have accepted, viz. that the persons here named are not Mary's children, but her nephews and nieces, or Joseph's children by a former marriage. The difficulties of the natural view (ch. 1 : 25) are very slight ; those of the "perpetual virginity" of the Virgin, very many and very great. For some of these see Alford's note on this passage. Christ dwelt in a true and common home ; was one of a large family, with brothers and sisters to play with and to care for. Not much can be made out of the names, for Jewish names were like the Welsh, very few in number. None can say after whom the individuals are named, whether after the first bearer of the name, or some later person. Mary herself has the name of Moses' sister, Mary being the same as Miriam. James is Jacob ; Joses is the same name as Joseph ; Judas is Judah, and he may have been named after Jacob's son, or after Judas Maccabeus. It is a touching fact, that not only did Nazareth not believe, but His brethren did not (John 7 : 5). *Complain not of solitary discipleship ; Christ knows its sorrows.* But they came to believe on Him, and James and Jude lived to write the Epistles that bear their names.

PROPHETS AT HOME.

57. A very distressing fact, due to our unbelief in a God working in our neighbourhood, and to the tendency of familiarity to obscure whatever is remarkable. Blessed are the eyes that see goodness and greatness when near at hand as well as when far away.

THE DISABLED CHRIST.

58. He did not many mighty works. Mark says He "could not do." Their unbelief shutting out His mercy and making Him unable to bless them. Note : (1) He does some works, and leaves them as a testimony. (2) Take heed lest when Christ wishes to save you, you make Him unable to do so by your distrust.

CHAPTER XIV.

1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus.

2 And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

The lessons of the section (1-12) on sin, superstition, temptation, providence, are of supreme importance. Royal transgressions warn us against common evils, and one of the most tragic crimes in history against faults that easily beset us.

1. **Herod the tetrarch.** Herod Antipas, one of the six Herods mentioned in the Gospels; son of Herod the Great, brother of Archelaus, and of two Herods both called Philip; and uncle of the Herod Agrippa of Acts 12:21. His tetrarchy embraced chiefly Peræa and Galilee. **Heard.** Kings sometimes are the last to hear the tidings of great joy. He had good people about him—Manaen and Chuza—but fully one-half of the Saviour's ministry is over before Herod knows it has begun.

2. **This is John the Baptist.** From several indications in the Gospels, we conclude Herod was a Sadducee in creed, while a libertine in character. Yet he believes John survived death and came back from the dead! How does this thought arise? Partly because we instinctively believe in immortality; partly because, whenever we injure another, *we feel we are not done with him*; partly because even the dullest conscience would feel that "God was the Avenger of such" as John; and partly because all who cast aside religion tend to become the prey of superstition. *Guilt has always some ghost by which it is haunted.* Indeed, there is some evidence that Herod was haunted by the thought of John the Baptist to the very end of his life. Many years after this, a Roman poet, addressing Herod, and speaking of a *birthday feast kept by him in Rome*, says—

"Thou mov'st thy lips, yet speak'st not, and in fear
Thou keep'st the sabbath of the circumcised;
And then there rise dark spectres of the dead,
And the cracked eggshell bodes of coming ill."

(Quoted by Plumptre.)

The idea of the transmigration of souls seems to us very strange; but it should be remembered, that *wherever men have had no hope of heaven, the passing of the soul from one body to another has seemed the only method of immortal life.* One-fourth of the human race believe this

3 ¶ For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

4 For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

to-day—the Buddhists especially. With what agony the king would fear the face of the Baptist returned omnipotent! *Innocence goes without guilty pleasures, but it is unharassed by guilty fears.* This account introduces

THE STORY OF THE SINNER AND THE PROPHET.

3, 4. Many envy greatness. Here we see its perils. Herod is beset with the infirmity of wealth; viz. the supposition that law and duty are things only for the poor. The sin committed has many elements of vileness. (1) He has a wife of his own. (2) Herodias a husband. (3) Neither was young. (4) Had not been married; as near blood-relations—uncle and niece—their marriage was forbidden. (5) Ambition seems to have moved Herodias as well as passion—as her husband had not been heir to his father's throne, as he expected, and, though very rich, was living as a private individual. So, though his brother Archelaus had lost his throne by a similar transgression, and he knew the universal abhorrence his act would cause, Herod leaves his wife; she forsakes her husband; and they contract an infamous union. Many murmur; but apparently only one speaks. Priests and Pharisees are silent; but John, finding such opportunity as Elijah found with Ahab, confronted the king, and face to face with holy, tender strength, announced to him, *It is not lawful for thee to have her.* For faithfulness John's reward is a prison, perhaps the very cell that still survives in the ruins of the Castle of Machærus, on the east of the Dead Sea, on a height 3800 feet above it. Note here: (1) The poor have one inestimable advantage over the rich—they get their duties and their faults more freely told them. (2) The strength and fitness to reprove are rare. Many can repeat a scandal, but few can reprove the wrongdoer; and fewer still can do it with that holy love that leads him to repentance. (3) What a service John rendered to the whole nation, who would have had their conscience blunted by the sight of an unreprieved transgression! And what a service it might have been to Herod! For *John was his Peniel-angel, had he but known it.* (4) There is an exceeding great reward for faithfulness, but not immediately. Do thy Christian duty and expect heaven ultimately; meanwhile, prison. (5) Observe how one sin leads to another, and then another. Break the law, and you will first wrong and then kill the prophet.

5 And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

6 But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.

5. A long time and various changes are passed lightly over in this verse. Comparing this account with Mark 6 : 18-21, you find : (1) *Herod rages*, and would have killed John ; but (2) *Fears the people*, already unsettled by his shameful conduct ; (3) *Talks with his prisoner*, moved by the curiosity which we know filled him (Luke 23 : 8). Many are curious in religion who are careless to obey its duties. It was a new sensation to converse with one like John. He had many questions to ask about the promised Messiah. Then, as he finds John all love, strength, and goodness, his rage changes to reverence. He asks his duty, and John, prisoner as he is, is obeyed by him ; but (4) *Herodias' hatred gathers more intensity*, the more that Herod's hatred subsides. Their marriage is *everything to her* ; only one of many things to Herod. And with fiercest hate, instinctively feeling that, while John lives, her hold of Herod is insecure, she seeks to kill him (Mark 6 : 19). (5) Herod now protects the prophet from her (Mark 6 : 20 ; Revised Version, "*kept him safe*"). (6) Months pass, probably nearly a year, and Herod remains *in the Valley of Decision*—"*almost persuaded* ;" doing everything prescribed, excepting *the one thing needful*, viz. putting away Herodias ! What a battle-ground is that soul ! One day the courtiers will say, "*Is Herod among the penitents ?*"—the next, some lapse shows their conclusion premature.

6. *Birthday kept*. "*Seek first the kingdom*," is a precept to be kept in mind by awakened souls ; nothing being more dangerous than *Festivities* in the midst of spiritual *Solicitudes*. *The Jews did not keep birthdays* ; perhaps because the heathen did, and mixed idolatry with them. Policy, perhaps, moves Herod. He will secure the aristocracy, if the common people censure him. From Mark we learn that "*his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee*" were present. Probably the feast took place either in Machærus, or another southern palace, Julias, two and a half hours further north. A deeper policy moved Herodias. Mark—

THE PLOT.

Herodias danced. There was a dancing which was religious, and which was one of the chief observances of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lightfoot on this place). But the dancing of *one maiden as an exhibi-*

7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

8 And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.

9 And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

tion, amongst a company of revellers, was disgraceful. Such dances in the East were and are *indecent*, and only practised by the immoral. Pleased Herod. (1) He was glad she acquiesced thus publicly in the deed, which *had wronged her*. (2) He was probably excited with wine, and open to sensual impressions. (3) The women of the Herodian family were famous for their beauty. *Had Herod known what Herodias was plotting, he would not have been so pleased*. He expresses and she perceives his pleasure. *And, as the Greek word translated "promised," in ver. 7, indicates, she begged, like a professional dancer, for a gift at the close of her performance.*

7. **Promised.** Putting the accounts of Mark and Matthew together, we see that she (1) asked a gift. (2) When he promised *whatever she would ask*, she made the king *swear* he would do so. Then (3) she makes him swear a second time (ver. 9, "*oaths*," Revised Version), which he does, adding the phrase, "*to the half of his kingdom.*" How wise to be teetotal, and keep reason in its throne! We never know the temptation coming on us. Watchfulness and prayer alone give that presence of mind and that presence of heart which keep us out of folly. *What was sheer folly, he thought was royal magnificence.*

8. **Before instructed.** Better, "*Urged on.*" From Mark we learn she went out and consulted her mother. Give her the credit of needing some urging. **John Baptist's head.** What a horrible change, from the graceful witchery of smiles and pleasing gestures to fiendish bloodthirstiness! How cruel the cunning that leaves Herod no loophole! She asks **John's head** to be given her; not on his shoulders, but **in a charger** (dish); and asks it "*forthwith*" (Mark 6: 25), leaving the king no time nor margin. *People have to pay heavily for pleasures.* For we have next to mark the

SUICIDE OF SOUL.

9. **The king was sorry.** Pity him! A crowd of nobles round him, but *amongst them all there is not one true man or faithful servant: Many courtiers, but no friend!* All fear the serpent-queen. And so none tell him, what all see, that *John's head is not his to give; that honour and duty require us to break an oath it is sin to make; that in giving John's head he will give more than half his kingdom, more than all of it, more than a world—even his immortal soul.* Pity the poor man!

10 And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

11 And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.

12 And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

13 ¶ When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities.

A week ago within a step of salvation, and now with eyes open plunging into ruin! He commanded it to be given her. The tragedy is not that John was killed by Herod; it is that Herod here slays his own soul:—or say that king, queen, and daughter leap into the bottomless pit.

10. John, perhaps, died in sleep. Sleeping or waking, he died joyfully. Doubtless, like Elijah, *he wanted to die* now his work was over. Doubtless his soldier heart preferred exactly such a death. It fitly crowned his life. It was a candlestick to his light. It was a throne. It was something that brought back to all men's minds his testimony and enforced it; endeared him to them; so that perchance his death led more to Christ than even his life had done. Blessed are the martyr-dead that die in the Lord! Pity Herod; pity not John!

11. Did Herodias smile when she saw that head? Pity her also, turned into a fiend by simple *wilfulness*. Learn how sin leads always to further and darker sin. *Beware of fornication.*

12. A strange funeral follows, of the poor headless remains. In which note: (1) Courtiers may fear the new Jezebel; but others are fearless. (2) Around the quiet sorrow is a nation's reverence. Josephus ascribes all Herod's disasters to this act. (3) From the dead, John has been a prophet of repentance to all these centuries. (4) Herodias was ultimately Herod's ruin. (5) John's disciples take their sorrows where we should take ours. They went and told Jesus.

THE MULTITUDE FED.

The following section (13–21) presents a very different story of another sort of feast. The last awful in its horrors; this sweet in its homeliness. Simultaneously, the twelve had returned from their first journey, and John's disciples come to Him with their sad tidings. Both need rest. From Josephus we learn that the people were moved against Herod by this murder of John. From John 6: 15 we learn that they wanted to crown Christ King by force. *The Saviour will not avail Himself of men's passions and resentments to augment His popularity*, and therefore turns from the crowd to the desert.

13. The Son of man does not always get what He desires. For the

14 And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

15 ¶ And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

16 But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

17 And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

18 He said, Bring them hither to me.

people "*see them departing*" (Mark 6 : 33), and go round the head of the lake on foot to the desert place near Bethsaida, then and now wild pasture land. Note : part of the art of life is adjusting one's self to what breaks our plans, and turning it to good account. The Saviour is denied *the Quiet*; so He embraces *the Opportunity*.

14. Went forth from the ship. Moved, not with annoyance at being thwarted, but with compassion; His heart being ever ready to melt over the darkness or the need of men. "*He spake to them of the kingdom of God*" (Luke), and "*healed their sick.*" Surely this is enough! But they linger, and the story presents us with the picture of

ANXIOUS DISCIPLES.

15. They are afraid of *responsibility*. Putting together the numbers, the desert, and their own poverty, they naturally feel they cannot help them, and, somewhat forwardly, suggest that Christ should dismiss them. Christians are too much afraid of responsibility. The multitudes of heathen lands want feeding, and many at home want blessing, and we say, "Let them go elsewhere and buy," and assure Christ we cannot help them. But the Saviour takes

A DIFFERENT VIEW.

16. Two marvels. *Christ's calmness*: They need not depart. *His command*: Give ye them to eat. He feels pity; while they feel responsibility. *Love knows no impossibilities*. Whatever needs to be done can be done by us, if there is no one else to do it. The pity that prays becomes power with Christ and with us. The disciples, however, represent

THEIR POOR RESOURCES.

17, 18. Five loaves, and two fishes. John states, "*Andrew said, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes.*" And Christ turns to the lad. Probably he belonged to the boat, and what he had was the provision his mother had prepared for his father and himself for a day. [Three loaves were wanted for the table for the friend at midnight.] *When men are pleading that they cannot feed*

19 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

the multitude, bring the lad forward. Some boy or girl in your class has something the Master can multiply till it feeds thousands. [“Barley loaves” were the food of the very poor. “Small fishes” were a sort of sardine (Edersheim), salted and used as a relish. The loaf was evidently something between a biscuit and a loaf, as it was broken, not cut.] Such a contribution does not seem likely to relieve the difficulty much. But Christ thinks it does, and asks for it. Do not slight a child’s contribution to the saving of a world. That interest in the needy, that love, that prayer, which seem only five loaves and two fishes, may multiply, under Christ’s hand, till it feeds a whole continent like India or China with the Bread of life.

A MEAL OF FAITH.

19. Commanded . . . to sit down. What faith! Some would have waited till the victuals appeared. *But human need has large expectations from Jesus Christ, and will sit down expectant, if He so commands. This sitting (1) proved their faith; (2) increased their comfort; (3) secured for the modest, the women and the children, their fair share. Took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and . . . blessed. What faith the Saviour shows! He knew “God heard Him always” (John 11 : 41, 42), and would arm His pity with Omnipotence. Go thou with thy five loaves to feed thy multitude, and in faith give thanks beforehand for the vast blessing you are carrying. Grace before meat is a beautiful usage. Here is the most exquisite instance of it. We next see the Saviour employing*

THE MEDIATION OF MAN.

Gave the loaves to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. Why does He employ the disciples? Some angel-ministry would have done it better, and more expeditiously. But He had great reasons for keeping a rule He always keeps, *That of sending His gifts through human hands.* (1) *The people ate more freely.* Bread of miracle direct from hand of Omnipotence they might have feared to eat; but by going through the disciples’ hands the food became more homely. (2) *The disciples caught Christ’s spirit by sharing in His work.* If they had been onlookers only, they would have been critics of the worth of the receivers and of the wisdom of the gift. In distributing the gift they catch Christ’s generosity, see the need, behold the gratitude of men, and have at the close kindlier feelings

20 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

21 And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

and more love. *Observe*: there is *one Mediator who wins God's gifts*; there are many mediators who distribute them. Mutual ministry is God's plan of the world. He gives to mothers that they may give to children; to the strong that they may give to the weak. Even the gospel He sends through our hands. Like the bread of miracle, the people accept it more freely when it comes from those who have tasted it, who commend it and hand it to them. We are made Christ-like by helping Christ to save men. Let old and young remember that *All Disciples receive in order to give*. The disciples give, and come on a great mystery.

BREAD BROKEN MULTIPLIES.

20. They did all eat, and were filled. Spare, and you have not enough for one; share, and you have enough for multitudes. None can tell *how* the miracle was performed. But when the love of Christ, a lad's consecration, and the need of many meet, Omnipotence has a threefold reason for blessing, and does bless. The four evangelists all use the words *were filled*, meaning that each found in what he got an ample meal. "*Two hundred pennyworth*" of bread of sale would not have sufficed, but less than two pennyworth of bread of gift feeds all. *Consecration increases all our powers.*

FRAGMENTS.

Twelve baskets full. They gather them at Christ's command (John 6: 12). Waste is the enemy of generosity. We have enough power to bless thousands if we know how to use it; but we have none to waste. There is a great mystery about these fragments. The loaves and fishes, to start with, would probably not have filled one basket; and yet, when you have taken away from them what would feed many thousands, there is enough left to fill twelve. *Often it happens that people who have for Christ sacrificed, or with Christ lost, most of their bliss or treasure, have more left than they began with.* Some give, and grow rich. Some suffer affliction, and have the chief joys of earth taken away; but when they begin to gather the fragments of comfort left them, these give them a far richer joy than their unbroken store afforded. Some throw their life into some cause of good, and come out richer by far than they were when they went in. Usually the whole is greater than the part; but *not here*, nor in this sort of thing.

22 ¶ And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

Note further the lad's reward. He felt rewarded enough when Christ fed the multitude with his bread. But good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, Christ gives him; and he can take back home more than he can carry, to feed his father and mother and the rest, and to fill them with proper pride in having such a boy, and with thoughts deeper and holier than such pride. What lad, what girl, will give Christ the loaves and fishes to work on to-day?

The next section (22-36) gives a story precious to all believers, which seems to bring the presence of the Saviour into every storm, and make the night light around us. It is all the more striking from its being a cluster of unexpected combinations, each of them significant and instructive. We observe at the outset—

STORM FOLLOWS SUNSHINE OF JOY.

22. Constrained His disciples to get into a ship. No day had been so bright. Now, they thought, *Christ's cause triumphs, and their discipleship has reward.* For the enthusiastic people would force Him to be King (John 6: 15). They want to march at once on Tiberias and end Herod's crimes. When lo! Christ forces the disciples on board. Storm comes on almost as soon as they have started, and for nearly twelve hours they struggle in a fight with the storm for life. *The bright day needed the troubled night.* There was more danger from favour of the people than from the fury of the storm. We know why Christ sent it, and how the storm simplified and purified them, taking the ambition out of them. They knew not, and marvelled at the change four and twenty hours could bring. Say not "Life is a dream, only a little more inconstant;" nor blame what you consider fickle fortune; for the bright day and the stormy night together work your good. [For storms on Sea of Galilee, see notes on ch. 8: 24.] We observe next—

HUMAN NEED UNITED WITH DIVINE POWER.

23. He went up . . . to pray. Afternoon, you see Him very God of very God, full of creative energy. Night, you see Him very Man of very Man—a Suppliant at prayer, so fervent that for nine or ten hours, in a storm, He prays; probably at first with "*strong crying and tears,*" at last with transfiguration joy. None can explain how

24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

the Godhead and the Manhood blend; but recognize both. Adore Thy Maker; trust thy Brother—Christ.

SEEMING NEGLECT IS WATCHFUL LOVE.

24, 25. Evidently the storm had come on almost immediately after they started. Why has He sent them out into it? Why does He leave them hour after hour wrestling with it, till ten or twelve hours of danger have exhausted them? Once He bade the storm be still, why not now? *He seems to neglect them.* But all the while He, unseen, watches them by the light of the nearly full moon [it was near passover time (John 6: 4)]; prays for them, and, when the right time comes, walks on the waves to come to them. Christ may seem to neglect you, but He that keepeth thee will not slumber. The **fourth watch** was from three to six a.m. We next find a strange blending of

ALARM AND SALVATION.

26, 27. **It is a spirit.** "*A ghost.*" Night and spray and excitement of danger, and their non-expectation of Christ's presence, moved them to deem Him some ghost come to welcome them to the abode of death. The Saviour rarely comes to us without alarming us. We dread His purity, we dread the working of His grace, we dread even the obligations of His love. The duties He enjoins are greatest mercies, but we fear them. And the afflictions He sends meeten us for the inheritance above. Yet multitudes greet Him with the inquiry, "*Art Thou come to torment us?*" But He who seems a spectre proves a Saviour! They cried out for fear; but **straightway** Jesus speaks. **Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.** These words can be read as uttered either in (1) a majestic or (2) a motherly tone. If in the former, **It is I** is the right rendering; if in the latter, **It is Me** would be the better equivalent, in spite of grammar. I think the latter would better represent their colloquial tenderness, soothing and peace-giving. The majesty of the approach is perfected in the gentleness of the address. And such a word at once instils peace; for it is equivalent to saying, "*It is your Friend, your Help, your Deliverance.*" *Saints and sinners alike meet with storms, but the former will always find*

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

Christ's presence if they look, and hear Christ's voice if they listen. The Saviour seems to give here the meaning of every storm. In the heart of the wildest storm, a voice says, "It is I." All dread is needless, for the presence that alarms us saves us. At once another strange mixture comes to view—

PETER'S STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS.

28-30. He walks on the waves, so fearless is His faith: He begins to sink, being afraid. To understand the action, observe that "*Christ would have passed by them*" (Mark 6: 48). *He did not seem about to come on board, but as if He meant to walk on to the other shore.* The wish to be with Christ rises in Peter's heart, and therefore he asks, **Bid me come unto Thee.** When Jesus gave permission, he went down out of the ship and **walked on the water.** What daring! *How great is his faith,* that in the midst of the sea, in the dark, in the storm, he should attempt the impossible and do it! Note: How the sight of Jesus allures men to attempt the impossible, and enables them to *walk on the storms* of opposition and temptation, of affliction and weakness, and achieve marvels of character and of usefulness. *To follow Christ in discipleship or work may seem as impossible as walking on the stormy waves; but attempt it, and you will succeed.* Such is his marvellous faith. And yet weakness mingles with it; for when he has proved it could be done, suddenly, **When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid.** Perhaps some squall whistled with keener shrillness, or some crest of a wave smote him, and *turned his eye from Christ.* Then, lo! suddenly *he fears, and he fails,* and when all but reaching Christ begins to sink. Looking at Christ, He could have reached Him; looking at the storm, He cannot. Always if you fear, you fail. Courage is necessary for every virtue and every duty. He does not *drown, nor even sink—the Master prevents that*—but only *begins to sink.* Still it is strange that in one heart there should coexist such strength and such weakness, such power of walking on the storm and such tendency to sink. We all have this sort of mixture. We should not despair because unbelief adulterates our faith; for the Master saves the true hearts when they ignore their weakness, and act on

32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

34 ¶ And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.

35 And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased ;

36 And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment : and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

the impulse of their strength. Mark particularly how much storm-treading Peter lived to do—at Pentecost ; before the Sanhedrim (Acts 4) ; in a life of faithful service ; and believe that you will succeed in many things in the first efforts to do which you fail. There is still one more strange conjunction—

THE STORM AND THE CALM.

32, 33. One moment (ver. 30) the wind is stormy ; the next, the wind ceased. Christ is Peace, and is at the centre of every storm. Let Him come to you, or go you to Him ; and where He is you will find the great calm. It is not wonderful that they that were in the ship—fishermen as well as apostles—came and worshipped Him. We are to observe that the Saviour did not stop them (as Paul and Barnabas did), but accepted the title **Son of God**, and permitted the adoration.

“A DAY OF VISITATION.”

34. Gennesaret was the fertile plain on the west of the lake, some miles to the south of Capernaum.

35. A kindly trait. These men had the proper spirit of a missionary, or a teacher. *They wanted others to get Christ's blessing, and brought many.* The word implies “carrying them.”

36. Besought Him that they might . . . touch. We pray well when we bring others with us ; and these can pray better when our confidence helps their hope. The Saviour delights in a spirit so kindly and so prayerful, and does mighty works. Note how the example of the woman with the issue is followed. Seek thou the Saviour in thy distress, and many will follow thee to Him.

CHAPTER XV.

- 1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,
 2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.
 3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

1-20. Another rude interruption. Surely, though they were Scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem, they might have looked in silence on His healing a multitude of sick, and forbore to interrupt action so holy. But the Legalist cares little more for the sufferers than he does for the Saviour, and, void alike of humility and love, interrupts the great Benediction. The words, of Jerusalem, suggest a deputation of inquisitors.

THE RITUALIST'S QUESTION.

1, 2. Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? They cannot accuse them of breach of the Law of God. But the tradition, Jewish or Catholic, is always *the* matter that carries greatest emphasis with Ritualists. The customary is accepted as the Divine. Often they made it carry more weight than the Divine. And just as some men visit more severely a breach of manners than a breach of morals, so they attached more importance to a breach of tradition, than to a breach of the Law of Scripture. The Council of Trent, in its decree "*Concerning Canonical Scriptures*," requires that "all the Books of the Old and New Testament, and the Traditions of the Church, whether relating to faith or practice, as being either direct from the lips of Christ, or dictated by His Holy Spirit, should be received and venerated *with equal devotion of piety and reverence*."

3. The great crime of which the apostles had been guilty was, not washing before they ate. Perhaps the accusers had watched them when Christ fed the multitude, and observed how none of them had performed the ablution required by Pharisaic usage! The question was, not one of cleanliness, but of ritual. If any one touched a dead body, or other object denominated unclean, he must by the Law wash before he ate. But in the common intercourse of life he *might unknowingly* touch some one who had touched some unclean thing. Therefore, *to be sure* of being right, he must always wash before eating.

4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;

So it had been laid down by the two last great Rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, eighty or a hundred years before this time, who, rivals in other matters, had agreed in this. Spiritual dangers were declared to attend the neglect of this precept, the devil easily entering a man in any food made unclean by being taken with unclean hands. And it was considered one of the greatest of sins! It is strange how always the bitterest animosity levels itself against the small and unimportant divergencies from custom, rather than against the greatest evils. The immoralities of the Cavaliers were unnoticed, when the refusal of Puritans and Covenanters to "conform" were punished on a vast scale with imprisonment and death. Intolerance calls itself zeal, but will find itself condemned of God, when it deems itself worthy to be commended.

QUESTION FOR QUESTION.

3, 4 Usually they who think there are motes in others' eyes have beams in their own—much more those who find fault with Christ. He has His question, *Why do ye . . . transgress—not traditions of elders, but—the commandment of God by your tradition?* And He gives an instance of common occurrence. Vows are always in great favour with those whose religion is of an artificial character. And their binding nature is eagerly insisted on by those who are likely to derive some advantage from their being kept. As God is greater than man, it seems reasonable that duties to God should take precedence of duties to man. It was therefore argued that, if any man vowed to the service of God land or gold or any gift, however much a parent's need might seem to constitute a holy claim, and a son's duty be imperative, he was not at liberty to break his vow, even when rashly uttered. The parent in such case must go without. There was in such a course often the extremest wrong; for usually the vow was general and negative, *i.e.* it said, "*Thou, or He, shall not be profited by this,*" and thus shut out whosoever was thus named. But the word, "*It is Corban*" (Mark 7: 11), or "*gift,*" left it undecided *when and how* it was to be given. One might utter this vow, and keep field or house, and enjoy the fruit or the possession of it, to one's death. Only the property was held to be God's. Then no relaxation of this was allowed, except in extremest circumstances. If a parent was

6 And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,

8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

actually starving, a son might then give something to a third person, who might give it to the parent; otherwise, though they had arrangements whereby absolution from vows could be had in extreme circumstances, no relaxation of such vows was permitted.

DENUNCIATION OF TRADITION.

6. It is better to read this verse as in the Revised Version, **He shall not honour his father**, *i.e.* in one of the most essential forms of filial piety—the support of his old age. **Of none effect**, *i.e.* annulled it. *This charge lies against all Ritualism and Traditionalism.* None can add to God's Law without in effect substituting their own for His. Ritualism is, for instance, a prolific cause of uncharitableness toward man, and distracts the mind from the supreme necessity of faith in God.

7. **Ye hypocrites.** Formalists must become hypocrites, however sincere their observances were originally. For *the observance* of external forms from rule, instead of instinct and inward necessity, inevitably leads to the offering to God *service void of soul*; and such observance has of course an element of falsehood in its professions.

8. "*Mouth-worship*" is, as Matthew Henry puts it, "*Piety from the teeth outward*"! How strange his idea of God must be who imagines Him to find delight in mere ceremonies!

SOME CONCLUSIONS

from the whole subject may be noted with advantage. Observe:

(1) *Vows generally are discouraged by the Saviour.* He prefers that we should keep to the simple lines of Duty and of Love, rather than that we should pretentiously strike out peculiar lines.

(2) The Saviour will not allow us to subordinate what seem only natural duties to religious duties. He teaches that natural duties are religious duties, and must come first.

(3) *Parent first, priest second*, is evidently the order of authority which the Saviour wishes us to recognize.

(4) *Bondage of Spirit* in any direction He looks on with disfavour.

In view of the spread of Romish principles in our own land, it is

10 ¶ And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand :

11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man ; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying ?

13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

well to mark how every word of this and the following paragraph tells equally against the Ritualism of Jerusalem and of Rome.

A STRANGE APPEAL.

10. He called the multitude, and said . . . Hear, and understand. He appeals from *the theologians to the people* ; from the Casuists to common sense ; from Legalists to the human heart with its native instincts. None must part from the self-respect which recognizes that the oracle for each man's guidance comes to the man himself. We are not at liberty to let others judge for us. And we must remember that the unsophisticated judgments of honest and gracious hearts have much more authority than mere *learning* can ever carry. This appeal from the Scribes to the people must have kindled a still more furious hate. Especially when He indicates—

THE GREAT PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM.

11. Not what goes into the mouth, but what comes out of it, is the defiling thing. *This principle contained within it the repeal of all the ceremonial part of Judaism ; and was the most revolutionary utterance that the Saviour could have made.*

12. Even the disciples were troubled ; ver. 12 suggests that their report that the Pharisees were offended, was a report of those who had sympathy with the feelings which took offence, and felt the Master had gone too far. Disciples of Christ must not give too much heed to the popularity or unpopularity of truth. Pharisees will always be offended at true doctrine. He gives in His reply—

A GREAT CONSOLATION.

13. Every plant . . . rooted up. The plant meant is, not the men, but the doctrine. The teaching is, *that every error that obscures the truth of God and hurts the soul of man, will be rooted up.* We, in the bitterness of our faith, often think that errors and evils are the things that are the most firmly rooted and most enduring. But there is a hand of God at work in all lands and ages, and every plant of evil will be rooted up by it.

14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

14. Let them alone, *i.e.* "Leave them unheeded." When we want human help our wisdom is always to go to lowly hearts that live in the Light of God; not to priests and scribes, for theirs is still a learning that blinds and blunts the heart; and following the lead of such learning we fall into the ditch.

DISCIPLES' DIFFICULTIES.

15. Peter speaks for himself and others. He had been very scrupulous (see Acts 10: 9-16), and this principle which seemed to abrogate the Law of Moses altogether, troubles him. He does wisely in bringing his difficulty to the Saviour.

16. It strikes the Saviour as strange that what He deems obvious truths like elementary truths of mathematics, should surprise any. But His gentleness gives

THE EXPLANATION OF THE PRINCIPLE,

17-20, which, though seeming simple, is very far-reaching. Defilement is of the heart. What we swallow goes, not into the heart, but the belly; and anything in it unfit to build up the body is ejected. (Draught is "Drain.") It may infect the body with disease, but it does not get near the soul. Although some things entering by the mouth seem to defile the soul by exciting passions, etc.—*e.g.* excessive amount of intoxicants—yet even there, every one would feel, that had these things been swallowed by mistake, or administered to an unconscious patient, no harm to the soul would come. Which shows that even in the case of these, it is the appetite for them, *i.e.* something in the heart, that is the polluting power.

18. The Saviour attributes more importance to *words* than we do (compare ch. 12: 37).

19. All the evils named usually employ the mouth. **Evil Thoughts** are hardened by being uttered; **Murders** are plotted through the lips; **Adulteries** and **Fornication** employ the seductive influence of flattery; **Theft** lies to hide its fault; while **False Witness** and **Blasphemies** are pre-eminently sins of the mouth.

20 These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man.

21 ¶ Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

20. These are the things which defile a man. Though the Pharisees would not for a moment admit it. The conscience of all of us needs quickening and refining. We should labour for the essential purity of Love and Righteousness.

The next paragraph (vers. 21-31) relates an experience following on the discussion of Ritualistic cleansing. They sought His death. But the proper time to die had not yet come, therefore he **withdrew** (ver. 21, R. V.) from the scene of conflict to pursue a path of mercy. The story of the woman of Canaan is full of consolation; of light on prayer; on Providence; and on missions to the heathen. We observe, first, he journeys in

A STRANGE DIRECTION.

21. Coasts of Tyre and Sidon. "*Go not into the way of the Gentiles*" was His precept to the twelve on sending them out, yet here He takes them in the direction of Tyre. The time has not come for them to go into all the world and preach; but He is sent for a single deed of mercy outside the Holy Land. Why does He go there? Partly because He wants rest; partly because another wants mercy. From Mark we learn He "*entered into an house, and would have no man know it*" (ch. 7: 24). But His rest is invaded by

THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

22. Three terms are used to describe her: "*Canaanite*," "*Syro-Phœnician*," "*Greek*." "*Canaanite*" means Lowlander, and was the term applied to the Phœnician people whom Joshua found in the fertile plains and sea-coasts of Canaan; already a highly civilized, wealthy, enterprising, corrupt race. "*Greek*" means Gentile, being used somewhat as "*Frank*" is used in Levant to-day, to designate all non-Jewish people. She was, therefore, a heathen woman, or had been. The Phœnicians worshipped a great mother-goddess called "*Ashtoreth*," or "*Astarte*," or "*Queen of Heaven*," whom they held to be the giver of all life in plant, animal, man. Associated with her was Baal, her husband, called also Moloch; with whom were associated the ideas of fate, death, vengeance. Astarte was the favourite deity,

for she gave them everything good, and was so indulgent as to permit them to do almost everything evil. Her worship, like that of a similar deity in India to-day, was at once a consolation and a scandal. It hallowed gratitude, yet it encouraged vice. Doubtless this woman had enjoyed her religion, festive and luxurious as it was, until overtaken by

A CHANGE.

The child, for the gift of which she blessed the Great Mother, fell ill. Next to loss of character, loss of reason is the greatest; and some form of epilepsy or lunacy overtakes her child, and evidently has become worse till she is in despair. *Probably widowhood has overtaken her as well.* Her prayers to the goddess are unavailing. Her joy in her worship begins to fade away. From the name she gives the Saviour, and her words of love and faith, we can see exactly the process through which she had passed. The revelry of her religion grated on her heart. Her mother-love grew deeper with the child's affliction, and purified her soul. A deity regardless of wreck of character was felt to be one regardless of wreck of joy as well. The pure God of the Hebrews, who once had seemed morose, begins to charm her by His very sanctity. For she feels *purity is the immortality of love*, and only a pure God can give immortal love and immortal joys. Besides, Jehovah has a character Astarte had not. He was "the Answerer of prayer;" "*the Refuge and Strength, and present Help in trouble;*" the Husband of the widow, and the Father of the fatherless. Further, Judaism had a hope of a coming Saviour. Some said He had come; and some from Tyre and Sidon had seen Jesus, and been healed by Him (Luke 6 : 17). Should she not turn unto THE LORD? She does so, and prays, doubtless with great fervour, that she might have the Saviour's help. Note : (1) Affliction is not all pain and loss. (2) Love and sorrow do more for us than any two angels could do. Sorrow is a sort of Law that purifies the soul; Love is a sort of Prophet that assures us that with the Lord there is mercy. (3) Afflicted people reason very boldly, "If they were God they would succour the helpless—why should He not do it? God cannot be without the sweetest of all joys—that of blessing men." So the woman is drawn Godward and Christward. The storm strands her on the Rock of Ages. At last the time to favour her is come, and the Saviour, feeling the drawing of her broken heart, yields to her and comes. Note her cry : reverent, brief, loving. *At once she knows Him, and reads His glory*, and cries, **Have mercy on me, . . . my daughter is**, etc. ; as if there was only one soul and one interest between them—so fondly are they bound up together. It is the hour she had

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

prayed for. But her faith is not at once successful; she has to endure

THE SILENCE OF THE LORD.

23, 24. **Not a word.** So sometimes we are treated. Is He like her old deity, regardless of human woe? She might think so; but the infinite love which beautifies His face, contradicts His silence. Christ has more reasons for silence than we think of. One of them is seen when *the disciples, though strict Jews, begin to pray for this heathen*; for their request is, of course, that He should send her away, as He did all supplicants, with her wish fulfilled. To them He explains that He is not sent but to the chosen people. They do not see the margin of liberty which His reply still reserves. For He may welcome and bless those who from without come to Him, though for the present His charge is *not to go to them seeking them*.

25, 26. They easily acquiesce, as it is not their sorrow. She "knocks" at the door closed against her, in the unargumentative cry, **Lord, help me.** The terms of the Saviour's reply do not destroy her hope so much as the fact of His replying increases it. The afflicted want mercy, but not others' mercy. She owns that she and her people are dogs—outsiders altogether, and with no claim. But the dogs get scraps; and what she wants would not impoverish the children, while it would enrich herself. Note: (1) How prayer grows in force, fervour, faith, the longer we keep facing Jesus. (2) If Zacchæus was a son of Abraham, is this woman not a daughter of Jacob—of the Israel who wrestled and prevailed with God? (3) What joy it was to Jesus to be thus trusted and besought! Therefore pray. Delay makes answers larger and their gladness more complete. When the silence has done its work, the great Joseph makes Himself known unto His brethren. Note—

THE GREAT REPLY,

28, which approves her boldness, honours her faith, grants her her

29 And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee ; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

heart's desire. *There never has been a true prayer which did not somewhere, sometime, and in some shape, get completely answered. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt is always Christ's last word ; nor is it ineffectual, for her daughter was made whole from that very hour. Sometimes, as here, the very letter of the request is granted. Sometimes the heart of the request is granted in some form more fit than we had asked. But Christ grudges no gifts. There is no stony ground in His heart to deny admission to the seeds of prayer we cast on it.*

29. Combining this with Mark 7 : 31 (R. V.), we find that Christ's route led Him from Tyre to Sidon, and thence to Decapolis, on the east of the Sea of Galilee. *He had made a journey of a hundred miles, crossing four mountain-passes, some of them higher than any British mountain, to heal this one broken heart. Carry your sorrows to Him. There were other ends served, however, besides the chief end sought. (1) The apostles have seen a new side of heathenism ; the preparation of many hearts by love and sorrow to welcome Christ. To them the heathen are no longer dogs, but souls capable of rising to purity, appreciation of Christ, faith in Him. (2) They have peeped into their future spheres. Cyprus was visible from the passes of the Lebanon. They began to think of the "other sheep," not of the Jewish fold, which Christ would bring. (3) While the devil was cast out of her daughter, the Spirit of God more largely entered herself. (4) Christ made His first convert from heathenism. She came out a suppliant ; she went back a missionary. Now began the church at Tyre, which grew to large dimensions afterwards. (5) If we will carry the gospel to-day to heathen lands, we shall find that in innumerable cases love and sorrow have prepared the way for Christ. Other creeds will not satisfy the afflicted. *The broken heart admits the Saviour by many doorways.* He prolongs His absence from Capernaum, coming round by the semi-heathen district of Decapolis. How long He sojourned we cannot tell ; but evidently some days—perhaps a week or two were spent there. We again note—*

THE GATHERING OF THE NEEDY.

From St. Mark's account it looks as if the movement had begun with the healing of one deaf and dumb man (ch. 7 : 32). *When one seeks Christ and gets salvation, others always follow.*

30 And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

31 Inasmuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

32 ¶ Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

30. What variety of woes Christ ends! Take your trouble to Him. He healed them, *without delay*. Only strong faith is tried to strengthen it still further.

31. They glorified the God of Israel. Well they might when He had given such a Saviour. We learn, besides, from Mark that they glorified Christ. *They* uttered the word which has become a formula of gratitude and joy—

“HE HATH DONE ALL THINGS WELL.”

32-39. Another miracle of feeding a multitude, this time in the midst of Decapolis (Mark 7: 31), a district containing a group of half heathen cities. It has much in common with the former miracle (see notes on ch. 14: 15-21), but some features of its own. Note

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST.

32. Not moved by any prayer; it rises spontaneous in His breast. It embraces Jew and Gentile, perhaps Pharisee and publican. This instinctive, spontaneous compassion is one of the great glories of God and of those who are like Him; whereas false spirituality and a cold philosophy chill men's hearts. *This compassion is very rare*. Where it exists, making a man into a John Howard, a woman into a Sister Dora, it is very omnipotent; for compassion still works large miracles, achieving what all other forces of the soul find to be impossibilities. **Three days.** Our sermons to-day are not too long, if they were only of better quality. People may have too much of a good thing, but rarely complain of it. When the length of the sermon is complained of, it will usually be because either the sermon or the hearer is dead. These people stayed *three days listening!* Lest they faint. How motherly is the heart of Christ!

THE OLD EMBARRASSMENT.

33. Whence should we have so much bread, etc. They said something like this on the former occasion (Mark 6: 35, 36); and now

34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

they repeat it. Some cannot understand this, and yet the same critics will to-day commit the very faults of yesterday. *There is a great sameness in our faults.* It is not surprising they do not suggest a miracle. Why should they have expected a repetition of one so stupendous? They might fancy that His power exhausted itself in action; that if He had meant to perform a miracle, He would have done it on the first or the second day, and not have left it till now; that the mixed multitude around Him was perhaps embarrassing. So they do not think of omnipotence, but permit their consciousness of impotence to speak. *It is strange how old is the plea of inability to help!*

CHRIST'S QUESTION.

34. How many loaves have ye? Note: before despairing of usefulness, it is well to take stock of our powers. *We cannot give the whole support of a missionary; but how much could we give to it?* We cannot convert a neighbourhood; but is there nothing we could do to help it? *Blessed are the souls who, when an appeal comes to them, ask, "Can I help?" instead of assuming that they cannot.* Seven, and a few little fishes. Not enough for one meal for the twelve, but apparently quite enough for the Saviour's purpose; for *Christ seems never to care for more than just enough to make a beginning with. Learn this of Him.*

FAITH,

35, has two marvels here. Christ's faith that the multitude will be fed, the people's faith that He can feed them, are both marvellous victories. Some that would not sit side by side with others in house or synagogue do so here. A common mercy unites all participants of it.

GRACE BEFORE MEAT.

36. Some would hardly have given thanks over so spare a meal. But apparently barley biscuits and salted sprats (Edersheim, i. 602) formed the regular meal of the Saviour and of the twelve. It is probable that the worse the meal, the more grateful the grace which is said over it. As Charles Lamb has pointed out, no one can be devout over a sumptuous dinner ("Essays of Elia:" Grace before Meat).

37 And they did all eat, and were filled : and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

39 And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

THE MEAL,

37, satisfies those who partake. They are not afraid to partake of the food of miracle. Each finds the piece of food he gets increases, till it perfectly satisfies him. **They took up of the broken meat . . . seven baskets full.** There should be no waste even when God supplies our need miraculously. "Fragment-gathering is one of the great secrets of *manufactures*, of joy, of wealth, of usefulness." The **basket** here named is a different article from that of the previous miracle. It is a large basket, used for storing things in. One of them was big enough for Paul to be let down the wall of Damascus in it. The "*basket*" of the previous miracle was a *hand-basket* or scrip which travellers carried. Then, of the smaller baskets they filled twelve; now, of the larger ones they fill seven.

38. **Four thousand . . . beside women and children.** Who would have thought that in the one Christ there was a power of blessing the thousands and millions that have been enriched by Him?

39. **He sent away the multitude.** Not left them. There is a courtesy which acts the host, and will not leave till the guests have gone with a benediction. **The borders of Magdala.** The Revised Version gives the name "*Magadan*," in accordance with the best manuscripts. St. Mark says "*Dalmanutha*." Neither place can be identified, but from the next chapter (16 : 5) it may be surmised that the shore on which He landed was the western shore of the lake.

CHAPTER XVI.

Once before (ch. 12 : 38) the scribes came with the same demand which we find in the opening section (vers. 1-12) here. To ask a sign looks like candour on their part, to deny it would look like weakness on His. They, therefore, take the high ground of putting the Saviour on the defensive. *They did not know that in asking for a sign to look at, they were proclaiming their inability to see the signs abundantly before them.* There is much that is of instruction for all to-day in this matter.

1 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.

2 He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather : for the sky is red.

3 And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day : for the sky is red and lowring, O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky ; but can ye not discern the signs of the times ?

4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

1. The Pharisees also with the Sadducees. Usually at war with each other, they make a truce in order to oppose the common enemy, the Saviour. Sometimes common antipathies are the bond of friendship. We should beware of such friendships. They are eager, they are pleasant as relieving us from self-reproach ; but they generally spring from and lead to evil. **From heaven.** Feeding thousands with a few loaves and fishes was confessedly a great sign. But it was earthly. They ask for something unmistakably from heaven, from the skies, in which they profess they would admit the presence of a Divine testimony. *They had Christ Himself, the great Sign,* standing before them, more miraculous than any of His acts. But they are blind to all that glory, and ask for something further still. Persons who, after looking at what Christianity has wrought in the world, and the kind of influence it has on the souls of men, still ask for evidences of Christianity, are of the same sort as these. They forget that demonstration is only possible of the visible or the tangible, and that there cannot be any scientific demonstration of such a thing as the Godhead of Christ. *What all such persons want is sight, not signs ;* the power of seeing and appreciating the Saviour's moral glory, not evidences of Christianity.

THE REPROOF OF CHRIST.

2-4. Where they pretended to candour, the Saviour reproves them for ignorance and wickedness. Unless ignorant, they would discern the signs of the times as easily as those of the weather ; and would know that abounding sin like that of their generation was a sign of approaching doom, and that goodness and greatness like His were signs sufficient of His mission from on high. The Saviour assumes that God's signs are always very simple. Evil is always a sign of judgment ; goodness, always a sign of coming mercy.

4. He attributes their asking a sign to their wickedness also. It is a very bad sign of any one to be unwilling to be convinced of the truth of the Saviour's claims. Every good man wishes the gospel to prove true. It is a strange word that he adds of the sign of the

5 And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

6 ¶ Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.

prophet Jonas. Jonah was the first of all the prophets. What was his sign? That when men threw him overboard, he turned up again, and went and preached to the heathen. The re-appearance of Jesus from the grave was more startling than the re-appearance of Jonah. Not by slaying Jesus Christ will they get rid of Him. They will find they have to face Him again and again—some day with signs of power and great glory that will change their unbelief into despair.

JUDGMENT.

He left them, and departed. They were not conscious that this leaving was a judgment, and that He was leaving them to their fate. Thus it often happens to the presumptuous, who demand unusual demonstrations of Christ's glory and peculiar proofs. The special proofs are withheld, and the Saviour departs, leaving them in the hardness of heart that thinks no evidences can be given.

WARNINGS (vers. 6-12).

6. The leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. There are several noteworthy lessons here: (1) The Church is always tempted to decline either into *Rationalism* (the error of the Sadducees), or *Ritualism* (the error of the Pharisees). These two dangers beset the Church to-day. Beware of both. (2) We need the more to be on our guard, for both are like leaven, spreading unnoticed, infecting men unconscious of their influence. Ritualism appeals not to Scripture, or reason, or to its service to religion—yet it spreads. Unbelief does not show how, in the absence of the gospel, men are to be blessed—yet it spreads. (3) Phariseeism and Sadduceeism have the same essential fault, are one leaven, not two. They are both intensely *earthly*. The only service rendered by the Pharisee is an earthly service; the only help expected by the Sadducee is an earthly help. Both believe God to be selfish. The Pharisee tries, therefore, to drive a hard bargain with God; while the Sadducee, on the same account, enters into no bargains at all with Him. To-day Ritualism blinds the heart to the glory of Christ as much as Rationalism does. *Only one who is essentially unbelieving in the heart of God can be a Pharisee.* So that Christ does not need to say, "leavens:" the two

8 Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?

9 Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

10 Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

12 Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

13 ¶ When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

forms of error spring from the one fault. The meaning of the Saviour becomes plain afterwards, but at the same time they fancy He is warning them against the loaves they would be likely to buy on the eastern side.

8. It is strange that where we should have expected Him to say, "*Ye of little understanding*," He says, **Ye of little faith**. He seems to intimate that *all errors have their root in a want of proper faith in the heart of God*.

9, 10. His questions are a sweet reminder that it is unimportant whether any loaves at all, leavened or unleavened, are forthcoming, since He can supply all their need, as He has abundantly proved; so that His warning is of something deeper than the leaven of bread.

11. There is a wonderful tendency in men to take the words of the Saviour and spoil them by taking them in a bald, unspiritual literality. This superficial regard for what Christ seems to require, produces almost as much mischief as a presumptuous explaining away of what He actually enjoins. We have to bring to Scripture that ardent, sympathetic appreciation which will catch its spirit, otherwise "*the letter killeth*."

12. **The doctrine**, *i.e.* the teaching. Let us beware of all Ritualism, and of all Unbelief.

The next (13–28) is a great section, full of solemnity, both in its encouragements and its warnings. The Saviour is still keeping on the outskirts of Galilee, Cæsarea Philippi being a city of mixed nationalities. Beset with opponents, who only seek some ground of accusation, He goes away and works where speech and mercy can be more free. We note first—

THE CATECHIZING OF THE DISCIPLES.

13–15. **Whom do men say that I . . . am? . . . Whom say ye that I am?** Anything is of service which assists or enables us to clear up our views of Christ. We should pay regard to what men say

14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

of Him. We should, however, have something to say of Him ourselves. Listen and read, that you may answer the first of these inquiries. Go to Christ and commune with Him; trust and obey Him, that you may answer the second. For the great question of mankind is still that about Christ, and we know nothing till we know *Who He is*.

14. In this reply observe several things: (1) Even an unbelieving world never gives a small name to Christ. For the names here suggested are those of the greatest of men. (2) The peculiarity of unbelief, that it can believe in old prophets brought back more easily than in new prophets raised up. *Be a believer in a living God, who not only has given in the past, but in the present is giving heroes, sages, saints, and prophets.* Happy those who see God at work around them! (3) A certain grudging spirit marks their estimates, reluctant to ascribe more dignity to Jesus than they can help. *Beware of that spirit.* We next observe that—

PETER CAN ANSWER THE QUESTION.

15. It is not easy to admit into the soul the greatness of Christ, and it is harder still to state it. But in Peter there is the greatness that can discern and describe the glory of Christ. Observe: (1) The reply of Peter is more marvellous in the lips of a *Jew*, whose great creed was *the Unity of God*, than in the lips of any other. (2) That in all ages, in some form or other, men have expressed their faith in the Divinity of Christ. (3) The more refined the soul, the more adoring is its estimate of Christ. (4) They who truly honour God will very readily believe that He has love enough to become incarnate and save men. We next note—

PETER'S FAITH APPROVED.

17. The meek and lowly Saviour does not blame Peter for a mistake, nor disavow the tribute of his adoration; but He approves Peter's view, and declares its inspired origin. Note: (1) Only in a Divine light can we see the greatness of the Son of God; we should, therefore, seek that light. No fellow-man (*flesh and blood*) can convey

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

a right idea of Christ; only divinely-given insight can understand Him. Just as you would not take a candle and go out at night to see Mont Blanc, but would wait till the sun rose and revealed all his vast dimensions; so you cannot see all the Christ in the candle-light of reason. A heavenly light must illumine the continent of Being which is in Him before you can see how great He is. We next mark—

PETER'S FAITH EMPLOYED.

18. Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build. The name Peter, given by Jesus to Simon, means Rock. It is, therefore, *Peter believing*, not Peter's belief, that is the rock on which Christ builds. The Church rests on living stones. Christ the great Foundation-stone; other living souls the lesser foundations. There are some men on whom Christ cannot build, and on whom men would not—soft, yielding natures, that others mould too easily. But there are others, like Luther, Knox, or Wesley, who are rock-like men, on whose force, purpose, convictions, multitudes rest. This honour is here promised to Peter. We all need more of the strength of the rock. Seek the *Faith* which can thus make you stronger, and which will let you be a strengthener of others. **Gates of hell.** The Gate was in every city the spot where the rulers did judgment and took counsel. The Sublime "*Porte*," i. e. Gate, is still the expression used for the Government of Turkey. **Gates**, therefore, means "powers of hell." How largely this promise has been fulfilled! Yet some timid Christians, after eighteen centuries of victory, fear the powers of hell will prevail!

ANOTHER GREAT PROMISE,

19, is given to Peter, the believer, and to all who have like precious faith. The words are misunderstood when applied to *men of a particular office* rather than to men of a particular spirit. Not place, but spirit, is the condition of this gift. **Keys** were symbols of authority (compare "*keys of hell and death*," Rev. 1: 18), and this may be a promise of the guiding inspiration of God which is the essence of all spiritual authority. It assists the understanding of the word when we remember how at Pentecost Peter was the first, by preaching, to open the kingdom to multitudes of believers; and how again at Antioch he was the first to admit the Gentiles into the Church of God. He who adores and obeys Christ has still **keys of the kingdom**,

20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

21 ¶ From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

and brings in the souls of men. *Sympathy with God and sympathy with man are the great keys of the kingdom of heaven.* Every teacher should seek them. **Binding** seems to mean binding sin to the conscience in words of reproof, calls to repentance, warnings. **Loosing** seems to mean comforting the conscience, assuring it of forgiveness. And the promise is that so long as Peter and others (for this promise is afterwards made to believers generally) act in the spirit of adoring Faith, a Divine sanction will support them, and a mysterious approval be felt by others investing them. If this is a strange promise,

STRANGER WORDS FOLLOW.

Ver. 20 is partly a *temporary precept*, postponing the disciples' testimony until after Calvary, on the ground that already the curiosity of the nation was over-roused, and interfered with the Saviour's teaching; and is partly a precept of perpetual guidance. Tell people what Christ has done; *and only assist them to find out for themselves who He is.* A ready-made definition of the Saviour, saving people the trouble of thinking, is not a real service to any soul.

21. Very remarkably the Saviour first elicits and confirms the avowal of His Godhead, and then on the background of this great creed writes the prediction of the cross. He thus asserts that, owning heaven's highest throne, He voluntarily stoops to earth's lowest curse. *In the death of Calvary is seen the self-sacrifice of God.* Note the word *must*. (1) A moral necessity exists by which every saviour must be a sufferer. (2) The Saviour is full of the *Spirit of Duty*. No sooner have we seen Peter's faith and power than we see

PETER'S WEAKNESS.

22, 23. It is no unconditional and personal infallibility which is promised to Him. The Divine support promised is only his when he acts in the Divine spirit he had shown. When the poorer Peter speaks, he gets reproof from the same love which gave Peter's better nature approval. Our friends often intervene to save us from making

24 ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

sacrifices. Here Peter wishes to save Jesus from that cross which is His Throne, His power, His means of saving men, and the source of richest bliss. The Saviour felt that no one was so much an enemy as one who would keep Him from dying for men, and so says, **Get thee behind me, Satan.** Note here: (1) How in the best of men there are weaknesses. (2) How mistaken kindness makes us often the tempters of our brethren. (3) That we must never allow our standard of duty to be lowered because friends seek to spare us. The section closes with

THE COMMENDATION OF THE CROSS.

24-28. It is good that the Saviour should take up His cross; thus He enlarges His Divine delights. It is good for us that we should take up our cross; thus only can we reach the high delights that are possible to us. *He who bore the cross advises it.* Note the successive lessons in the successive verses.

24. In this He shows us that *the Essence of Discipleship is Self-Sacrifice.* He is a Christian who lives or dies for the good of others.

25. He shows that *the Essence of Wisdom is Self-Sacrifice*; for Sacrifice is the secret of all true wealth.

26. In this He shows that *Self-sparing is the essence of unwisdom*, involving us in that vital loss of soul which is irreparable.

27. In this He shows that *Self-sparing is a great sin*, which will be punished at the judgment-seat of Christ.

28. In this He shows that those who take up His cross will not have so long to wait for their reward as they fear; for shortly, when the Resurrection has followed Calvary, and Pentecost the Resurrection, they will see His kingdom come with power. All these truths are very solemn. The philosophy of the world is, "Spare thyself; the cross be far from thee." This doctrine still has entrance into our souls, even though converted. Let us aspire to follow the Crucified Saviour, and find, not earth's ease, but Christ's likeness and reward.

CHAPTER XVII.

1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,

We need special grace to approach and apprehend the foretaste of heaven described in the opening section (vers. 1-8) of this chapter;—Christ's brief land of Beulah, with its delectable mountains. One side of the Saviour's life finds great illustration here—His communion with God, and the soul-enrichment He found in it. In it we see what prayer might do for us.

CHRIST'S CLOSET.

1. **High mountain.** Luke says, "*He went up to pray.*" He had not where to lay His head, but He had always somewhere to pray. We can, if we will, always find or make time and place for prayer. Here only the night and the mountain were available, but He made them serve His purpose. The shadows were thickening round Him, and His refuge is prayer. It cannot be foolish to expect answers to prayer; for Christ prayed. Nor can it be needless or fruitless for us, when He found it a secret of strength. Many who think they pray are mistaken. They do not *settle to the work of prayer*, and they leave off before the contact of the soul with God is made. [The mountain was probably one of the many summits near Cæsarea Philippi; some height on the slope of Hermon. *Not* Tabor, which had a town and fortress on the top, and was at a distance from Cæsarea. The time is **six days** according to Matthew, and "*eight days*" according to Luke. The one excludes from, and the other includes in, his reckoning the day of last event and the day of this event.]

THE COMPANIONS OF HIS RETREAT.

He taketh Peter, James, and John. Only a week has elapsed since Peter received his great rebuke. Faults are not falls, nor reproofs rejections. A good man swiftly rights himself; and so Peter is again fit to be his Lord's companion. *The fresh favour with which Christ treats him will supply the healing His weaknesses require.* In Christ's taking these men with Him, observe: (1) His delights are with the children of men. His very perfectness and wealth of being

2 And was transfigured before them : and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

enabled Him to derive more bliss from the fellowship of men than others could do. He wants them to “*watch with Him*” in His sorrow, to “*rejoice with Him*” in His joy. The delights of heaven will be sweeter to Him if earthly faces are round Him. The Saviour has no solitary joy. (2) Not all were fit to bear the vision. (3) There is a help in prayer derived from the presence of sympathetic souls.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

2. According to Luke, “*As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered.*” The sequence of events seems to have been : The Saviour commences to pray, probably at first a prayer of sorrow, “*with strong crying and tears.*” *The disciples sleep* (Luke 9 : 32). As His prayer is prolonged through the hours of the night, it at last becomes transfiguration. Then Moses and Elias appear, and before they depart the disciples are awaked. Here note many things. (1) *Prayer is usually a transfiguring thing.* The best in man comes out in prayer ; and the brightest smile of God shines on us when we pray. Selfish, anxious, unkindly looks relax, and sweeten into those of trust and hope, of peace and love. And the brightness of God’s face is found there. Many begin with look of woe, sighing, “*Out of the depths do I cry unto Thee!*” and they end with looks of triumph, singing of “*Plenteous Redemption.*” (2) *With Christ especially prayer was transfiguring.* He could not display all His greatness down amongst men ; but in prayer He arose and shone in the glory of the Lord, which arose and shone on Him. Often God would “*cause His face to shine on us,*” if we would give Him the opportunity. (3) *When enemies plot and disciples misunderstand and the Cross appears in view, then God comes nearest.* We shall have no trials to face without some special help to face them. (4) *When Jesus was with men God might not show all His approval ; but here, on the mountain-top God can disclose all His infinite delight in the self-sacrifice of Christ.* Pray, and, as you pray, you will be transfigured.

THE GLORIFIED COMPANIONS.

3. Where God’s smile is, the glorified are never far away. *Perhaps we all owe cheering and comfort to some in heaven, only our “eyes are holden,” and we do not see them. Certainly the dead invigorate the living with their best purposes and brightest hopes. Here the eyes are not holden. There appeared . . . Moses and Elias. Possibly the*

4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here : if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles ; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

exceptional circumstances of their departure permitted them to be visible. But the chief reason for sending them was—they were the best to send. Moses and Elias knew the sorrows of saviours. One saved the people from Egyptians, the other from apostasy and unbelief ; they endured the contradiction of sinners against themselves, and both had found a reward infinitely surpassing their sorrows. They are fit to be heroic comforters of the great Christ. *Heed the witness of the dead ; your best heartening will come from them.* **Talking with Him.** Luke says, “*They spake of the decease He should accomplish at Jerusalem.*” Peter wished Christ not to think of the cross nor to accept it. Moses and Elias talk of it with rapture. *Face all troubles till you see sweetness in their look.* How much would they have to say on the blessing Calvary would bring, on the pardon and purity it would effect, on its revelation of God that would charm the hearts of men, on the adoration with which the glorified would gaze on the Saviour's cross, on the world-wide salvation it would work ! If they spake, we ought to meditate on and adore that great decease. Moses was the lawgiver, Elias was the great prophet. All true teachers of duty and all inspired witnesses for God are found at last commending and adoring Christ. And all that is good fits into the gospel and helps to prepare its way. Note : (1) Man, like the Son of man, has latent glory which the presence of God brings out. (2) Obey God, and the glorified befriend you. (3) The cross of Christ is not the weak point in the gospel, but its grandest feature—that into which the glorified desire to look.

PETER'S MISTAKE.

4. They had slept. Losing much of the vision by their sleep, but gaining freshness of eye and heart. They shall not miss all, and Christ, who woke them in Gethsemane, wakes them here. He does not punish them for slumbering when they should have watched, but rewards them for having believed when others doubted. Peter answered. How ready we are with our speech ! The necessity of utterance is a form of weakness which is common. If he speaks now it should be either to pray or inquire. But “the expressive silence which doth muse God's praise” would have been more congruous with the occasion than any speech. Here Peter begins admirably with his premiss, but falls lamentably in his conclusion. It is good for us to be here. How good, indeed ! Animate with high fellowship, enriched

5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

by sight of Christ's glory, comforted by vivid proof of immortality instructed by the high discourse upon the cross! *Go up with Christ and pray, and you will find it good to be there.* But the inference, **Let us make here three tabernacles**, is as wrong as his premiss is right. [Revised Version, **I will make**, is insufficiently supported, and old reading to be preferred.] For it is often good to be where it were not good to remain. For Moses and Elias *to be* on the mount was bliss; to remain would have been exile. For Christ to be there was rest and refreshment; to remain there would have been to lose the glory of redemption. For the three apostles to be there was a soul-enlarging, faith-conferring experience; but to remain there would have been to shrivel for want of work. **Tabernacles** were huts made of boughs; *a poor sort of dwelling for Him who inhabiteth eternity, and dwells with him also who is of a contrite heart!* *We are perpetually falling into Peter's mistake—the desire to fix the transient, and to sacrifice the future to the present.* Movement, not rest, is our lot here. Raptures may not continue. Hermits have built their tabernacles in order to perpetuate their emotions, when they should have *applied* the forces given by these emotions in work in the world.

THE GLORY RESTING ON THE DISCIPLES.

5-7. They are to be more than witnesses; they are to be sharers of this glory. **Bright cloud overshadowed them.** From Luke (9: 34) we find the word **them** includes the three apostles. It was something to witness Moses and Elias in their glory; more to see Christ in His; most to feel the cloud of God's presence embracing them. That cloud approved the Saviour's consecration and their discipleship, and bound them to each other. In this are many things to note. (1) There is something awful even in Divine approval. (2) God's emblem is still a **bright cloud**. Like a cloud His presence is still vague, mysterious; but the cloud-presence is bright, shedding a radiance of hope and guidance. (3) The presence of the Father honours and strengthens consecration to the Saviour. (4) Bear the cloud, be patient with its mystery, and at last from its midst a **voice** will come. (5) God's testimony to the Saviour is ever proceeding. A heavenly Witness still declares His Divine Sonship, and God's delight in the redeeming love of Calvary. Brace up your heart to believe this

8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

Witness. (6) The presence of God overpowers them, but the friendly touch and familiar voice of Jesus restores them to peace. They look again, and the *Homely Vision* of

JESUS ONLY,

8, gladdens their hearts. He is the same as of old, but not quite the same, for they now know the *latent glory in Him*. And they have a strange light, in some measure relieving the gloom of the future. Note all generations have felt there is significance in the Divine withdrawing of Moses and Elias from our view, and the leaving JESUS ONLY to the gaze of man. To learn duty, go not to Moses; to find God, inquire not of Elias; but for all thy wants JESUS only will suffice. The story closes with a cluster of

STRANGE THINGS.

9. It is strange to come down to common work after being so highly privileged. It is strange to be forbidden to supply complete definitions and demonstrations of claims of Christ.

10. It is strange how, with new light, come new questions and new difficulties. Is this transient visit the widely expected and predicted coming of Elijah?

11. There is a strange description of John's work. He shall restore all things. These words ascribe vastest influence to what seemed to some a failure. They describe the work of every saint and prophet. *Covet to be a restorer.*

12. Strangest of all, Christ comes from His Father's embrace talking of Suffering at the hands of men.

The next section (vers. 14-17) introduces us to the great contrast which is exhibited between the summit and the base of the Mount of Transfiguration. On the summit all is sublime; in the valley all is confused and deplorable. What differences are found between the one home and another, or between yesterday and to-day, in this world

14 ¶ And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oft-times he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

of contrasts and of change! But Christ's rest was sought for service; and the same compassion which brought Him down from heaven to earth, brings Him down from the mount of rapture to the vale of service. Philosophers, like Peter, still fancy Christ builds "*tabernacles*" for Himself far away from sin and suffering; but He comes down amongst us even now. The incident which took place on His return is narrated by Matthew and Mark and Luke, Mark telling it with most fulness. Turning away from His sacred rest, the Saviour immediately finds Himself face to face with

THE TROUBLES OF THE WORLD.

14-16. A perfect specimen of them is here: a trouble mysterious, long-continued, incurable. Every element of pathos is in it. It fastens on a peculiar delight—a child; is more bitter because the child is an only son. It withstands all cure, and grows worse with the lapse of years! How easy it is to summarize in a sentence such an experience; how impossible to describe all the anguish of parental love and hope deferred! There are many homes and many lives to-day burdened with similar mysterious miseries. Those free from them should be more pitiful, thoughtful, thankful. What a world of despair this would be without God! Through long, dark years of training these parents' hearts were fitted to receive a great mercy, by enduring a great sorrow. **Multitude.** These show all the faults and better qualities of a crowd; curiosity, readiness to blame disciples for failing, eagerness to turn to the great Christ when, *mysteriously*, as they seem to feel, He appears on the spot. St. Mark says they were "*greatly amazed*" (ch. 9: 15). From Mark we learn that a fierce strife was going on with the Scribes, who probably argued that failure in one case, proved deception in all. How true to nature is this picture! If they had encouraged the disciples to *try again with prayer*, and had knelt with the father of the boy asking God to give the disciples power, they could have prevented the failure which they denounce! It is like the world—to withhold help, and then give blame for what it might have prevented. Pity the woes of men, so often intensified and perpetuated by men disputing as to who is to blame for them, instead of uniting in the effort to cure.

15. Love and anguish make the sufferer bold. So while the scribes are abashed by Christ's appearing, and the disciples depressed by their

16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

failure, the father speaks. In his statement (compare Mark) you note an intense solicitude to secure Christ's succour by enlarging on the details of the illness, and to hide his fear that the boy is too hopeless a case to admit of cure. The prayer is not perfect; but *it is a prayer*, and, like every true prayer, links weakness to Omnipotence.

16. The world in all ages has been bringing its troubles to the Church, and then to the Church's Saviour for help.

THE SORROW OF CHRIST,

17, is mixed with anger. It was perpetually a grief to Christ that there is in the world so much of needless sorrow; that so many hard hearts make these sorrows greater; and that the true and good make so little use of the power of help that is in them. There was a sting in the statement of the man, of which he was unconscious: "*They could not.*" And it is still a pain and a wound to Christ to see His Church stand impotent and depressed amidst woes she might cure, if only she would stir up the power that is in her.

17. O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? A rebuke, first, of the scribes, to whom the epithet *perverse* is to be applied; second, to the disciples and the parent, both of whom are included in the reproof of the word *faithless*. Sometimes the troubles of this world are rendered so hopeless by "*perversity*" and "*unbelief*," that in our despair we say, "*I loathe it; I would not live alway*" (Job 7: 16). How much more must the pure soul of Christ have grieved over unrelieved, unhallowed sorrows; over woes embittered needlessly by strife, or left unhealed for want of the daring of faith and devotion. But no disappointment nor anger lessens His love. For to the word of reproof he adds the sweet invitation, **Bring him hither to Me.** The wounds of Christ are the faithful wounds of a friend. His blame strengthens us and liberates from weakness. And the man and the disciples are the stronger for this reproof.

THE GREAT RELEASE.

18. St. Mark relates in detail the bringing of the boy; the fit which seized him; the inquiry, "*how long*" he had suffered, discovering the anxious doubt of the father, which shows itself in the cry, "*If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us;*" the strange

19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

reply, throwing the burden of the situation back on the parent, "*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*;" the great cry, honest and earnest, asserting faith, but admitting unbelief, and asking for a bigger blessing than his faith can hope for. After this interval, in which the man becomes a wrestling Jacob, and "*out of weakness is made strong*," Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him. Note: (1) There is no impotence in Christ; every woe of the human heart yields to His control. (2) Where He finds any faith, even as a grain of mustard seed, He can and will impart salvation. (3) When we fail, He will come and turn our failure into humility and victory. (4) There are many ills in life which, though physical, have their origin or their aggravation in the soul, and must find their relief or cure there. (5) There is no morbid condition of the body which the enemy will not take advantage of. (6) When Christ heals He works a permanent cure, saying, "*Enter no more into him*" (Mark 9: 25). What gladness Christ brought and still brings into the world! Let Him cast the evil out of your heart.

THE LOWLY QUESTION.

19. Why could not we cast him out? Many fail, and never ask why. They assume success was impossible, and bid farewell to great victories or great usefulness. But the true man—teacher, preacher, worker—will not take failure as a matter of course, but will ask, "*Why did we fail?*" Happy they who ask it, and especially *who ask it of Jesus*. For He who succeeds can tell us why we failed. Some through feebleness, some through pride, some through resentment, refuse to inquire into the cause of failure. *It is strange* that the Church of Christ to-day, compassed with failure, does not ask this question, but assumes all sorts of reasons to account for its failure but the right one. Here the Saviour gives

THE SECRET OF ALL FAILURE.

20. Your unbelief. It was not because *God willed* that the boy remain uncured; not because they were merely human, while He was Divine; not because He was absent from them, and Peter, James, and John away; nor because they were depressed by prediction of His death;—but because of unbelief. What the Saviour adds (ver. 21).

21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

22 ¶ And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men :

23 And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

“*This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting,*” is not a different explanation, for by prayer and fasting faith is fostered in the soul. What the Church wants to-day to change her failures into success is, not a new creed, or new methods, or eloquence, or learning, or music, but **faith**. The great requirement is more realization of God, reliance on Him, trust in His loving guidance, obedience to His impulse, rest in His heart. And “*fasting,*” would complete faith's power. Simplicity and spare use of food (still more of drink) would afford some help to spirituality, by preventing indolence and making all self-denial easier. Prayer helps spirituality and faith, because communion with God permits, invites, and receives His direct quickening influence. And if faith exists in smallest measure, it is a link with Omnipotence, which makes all things possible. To ask how much a little faith can accomplish is like asking how large a fire could a small match kindle. The great want of every church and Sunday school is *Faith*. When it grows, the **mountains** of drunkenness, of infidelity, of impurity, will remove at the Church's command. Let love pray, and fervour fast—and the Church will be nerved and strengthened for her work.

LINE UPON LINE.

22, 23. Some time later, for at least the third time (see ver. 12 and ch. 16 : 21), the Saviour gives them an intimation of His approaching death. It is strange how, reluctant to hear of it, they do not *receive* the tidings. *It is more strange that we forget them.* Note : (1) *How much of our sorrow is mistaken.* **They were exceeding sorry** for that very death which is the cure of all sorrow and the fount of all joys. (2) How even when Jesus preaches, half the sermon is unheeded. None even of the twelve take any notice of the words, **He shall be raised again.**

LOWLY WISDOM.

24-27. *The tribute is the Temple Tax.* When Moses wished to erect the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, he asked from each man of twenty years of age and upward half a shekel (Exod. 30 : 13-16). The rich were not to give more, nor the poor less, to show that rich and poor were equally precious to God. What Moses asked for at intervals, whenever a census was taken, became, after the time of the Macca-

24 ¶ And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

25 He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?

26 Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

bees, a *yearly demand*, the Pharisees insisting on the imposition of the tax. Its yearly payment was therefore no scriptural obligation. The priests, and probably the rabbis, were not called on to pay it. At the time when the authorities sought from Christ the payment of the tax, they were conspiring to secure His death!

24. Doth not your Master pay tribute? was probably either simply a polite way of asking for the money, or invited a refusal, which they might have laid to the charge of Christ.

25. Peter should have left the Master to speak for Himself; but, knowing His habit, states it. The Saviour will pay tribute, but wishes so to pay it that His action shall not be misunderstood. As the Son of God and Lord of the temple, tribute should go from the temple to Him, not from Him to the temple.

27. But, lest we should offend them, He will pay it; for to refuse might be misunderstood as a disapproval of the temple, of sacrifice, of prayer, of religion altogether. No one will act rightly who limits his inquiries to his necessary duty and his liberty. We have all to think of *how our action will affect others*. That consideration will make us do more than we are bound to do, and use less liberty than we possess. There is great need of the gentle wisdom, whose preamble is, **Lest we should offend**. He who becomes penniless that we may be rich will find money for His needs in strangest ways. How easily difficulties melt when we are on the right path. Peter, the fisherman, never caught such a fish before or after; for this had the half-crown in its mouth that paid for Peter and his Master. As Christ did, so let us try to rely on our Father in heaven, as little children, and our every want will be supplied by Him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

The chapter opens with a section (vers. 1-14) of great interest to teachers. Hardly anywhere is there to be found doctrine more sweet, warning more solemn, encouragement more gracious. It is the Magna Charta of workers amongst the young; disclosing the glory of their work and the reasonableness of their hopes as nothing else has ever done. The great theme is the blessedness of childhood and of the child-spirit. The occasion of the discourse is

A QUESTION OF AMBITION.

1. **Who is greatest?** Even converted men have failings; and it is strange how, when the man gets a heart-change, his faults are apt to change their surface aspect, in order to get permission to accompany him. *Self-will*, for instance, turns into a *more respectable Zeal*; and worldly ambition turns into an *ambition to be distinguished* for piety or usefulness. Perhaps the special promises made to Peter (ch. 16: 18, 19), and the special privilege accorded to Peter and James and John (ch. 17: 1-8), may have moved this question. Perhaps Judas was at the bottom of the matter, and either put or prompted it. Beware of the risings of pride, of selfish desire, especially of desiring God's grace to set off one's nature, or to be a ladder on which to mount to distinction; for even holy hearts lie open to this temptation. And mark

THE SAVIOUR'S CORRECTION OF AMBITION.

2-14. The whole of the section is devoted to it. And while each argument is important in itself, the chain of arguments is especially so. He shows: ver. 3, that the unambitious alone enter the kingdom of heaven; ver. 4, that the unambitious alone reach greatness in it; ver. 5, that the unambitious alone give Him, the Saviour, welcome; vers. 6-9, that ambition leads men to **offend the little ones**, by acts of deepest guilt, which wise men will avoid at every sacrifice; ver. 10, that there is no such spirit in the angels of God; nor (vers. 11-13) in the Son of man, who comes to save the lowliest; nor (ver. 14) in the

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them.

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

great Father, who is so meek and lowly that He seeks to save all children. Pride easily besets men. We delude ourselves by calling it by fair names—"Proper Spirit," "Self-respect," "Energy," "Emulation." According to this word of Christ, Pride is full of gravest mischiefs and peril. See what room there is for repentance and watchfulness.

2. Called a little child. Old enough to be called, but young enough to be "*taken in His arms*" (Mark 9: 36). Apparently, He purposely spends a little time in setting him thus in the midst of them; a preliminary, meant to stir curiosity as to His reply, and misgiving as to their question. And when He has done this, He administers His first set of testimonies against ambition by commending

THE CHILD-SPIRIT.

3-5. Except ye be converted, and become as little children. "Conversion" means "turning," and here the Saviour speaks as if two conversions were necessary for our salvation; viz. one conversion, backward, of the man into a child, and then a second conversion, forward, of the child-like man into a Christian. We must *put off* our suspicious knowledge of the world, and *put on* obedience to Christ; must first "come to ourselves" before we can "*arise and go to our Father.*" Christ does not say, "Except children are converted into men" by flow of time, "they cannot enter the kingdom;" but, except men are converted into children, *they* cannot. Children have only to learn, not to unlearn; only to do, not to undo. Ambition keeps men from entering; but children easily enter the kingdom. What are the elements of the child-spirit? I answer: (1) *Simplicity*, which acts only on simplest grounds and from directest motives; which, for instance, chooses Jesus because of His great love, and follows Him because it loves Him in return: (2) *Freedom from self-consciousness*, which makes so many grown-up people *self-entangled*: (3) *Freedom from calculation*, as to what other people will say, or other days may bring. Children live in to-day, and live less overawed or influenced by "the world" than men: (4) *A belief in love and all things high*. A child lives in a *home*, i.e. in a land of love; men live in the *world*, i.e. in a land of conflict. The child believes in man—that all women are like its mother, and all men like its father; and the *child believes in God*—that it is just like Him to come and save us. While man

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 ¶ Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

suspects man, and suspects God: (5) *Humility*—contentedness to be little and obscure if only loved. These are the qualities having which it is easy to enter the kingdom, lacking which it is difficult. Observe, when the disciples are asking about *greatness in the kingdom*, the Saviour tells them men **shall not enter** it unless they cast away the lust of greatness.

4. *The simplicity and faith of the child is the secret of entrance into the kingdom of heaven; and humility, like a child's, is the secret of eminence in it.* Observe that *something of a childlike nature is necessary for all greatness.* The poet is one of fresh and childlike heart, that sees the bloom on all things. The philosopher is such because of childlike candour. The hero, is one whose courage is as uncalculating as a child's. *Humility* that can stoop, can obey, can love, can forget itself, is the secret of Christian greatness. The wish to be great, therefore, destroys the power to be great.

5. **Receiveth Me.** The same *Lowliness* which enables the soul to enter the kingdom, *permits the King to enter the soul.* For Jesus, Divine as He is, always comes in lowly disguises. And whoso can give welcome to lowly things, finds that in treating honourably the child, the weak, the poor, he has admitted to his soul *the Lord of glory.* So that, if we have pride instead of childlike lowliness, it keep us from entering the kingdom, keeps us from greatness in it, keeps us from admitting the King. Let not your pride disable your soul in these ways. The Saviour next reproves our pride by alluding to

THE INJURY WROUGHT BY AMBITION.

6, 7. The connection of the next four verses with what goes before suggests that *Ambition is an impatient thing, trampling on others, hustling them on one side, hurting feelings, injuring interests.* Its rudeness discourages, its example injures others. The weak especially suffer from it, being either depressed or misled by it. The same openness of heart which permits the little one to be led easily into the kingdom, permits it to be led easily astray; so that to **offend a little one**, *i.e.* to injure its spiritual character, is a very easy thing. *It is a terrible sin to injure an immortal soul in its shaping-time.* Better to

8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

suffer shameful bodily death than inflict this spiritual injury on susceptible souls. [Death by drowning in deep sea seems to have awaked a special horror in the minds of the ancients, from the impossibility of recovering the body for burial or burning.]

8, 9. These verses prescribe proper treatment for ambitious workings. We are to slay them, and not indulge them. The **hand** of ambitious rudeness should be **cut off**; the **eye** of ambitious coveting should be **plucked out**; the foot of ambitious wilfulness should be **cut off**. The Saviour seems to think ambition the great force, that sinks men to perdition, and makes them sink others with them. Note: *Faults only die by violence*. We must *crucify* this pride of our heart. Having shown that ambition of spirit injures ourselves, and also grievously injures others, the Saviour next indicates

THE WORLDLINESS OF AMBITION.

10-14. It is of the earth, earthly; everything heavenly being free from its taint.

10. *Angels are free from it*—the very highest, those who behold the face of **My Father**, being their (the children's) **angels**. Their guardian protectors, glad to stoop to take care of the little ones.

11. [This verse is omitted in the Revised Version, on the ground of its not being found in some of the oldest manuscripts and versions. There is, however, strong evidence on the other side which has constrained many of the best critics, from Bengel to Alford, to retain it.] Christ here suggests there is no ambition in Himself, he having come to save the lost—the "*little ones*" spoken of in ver. 14. And, in enforcing this great fact, He utters the parable of the *Lost Sheep* (vers. 12, 13); showing how, Himself void of pride, mercy moves Him to come and save the perishing.

14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

14. Lastly, He shows that the great God has none of this ambition, His infinite tenderness being moved with the great desire that not one of these little ones should perish. Thus, through this great argument of fourteen verses, the Saviour depicts and reproveth the great sin of ambition—of wanting to excel others for the sake of being greater. Let teachers and scholars lay to heart this lesson; for we all apologize for ambition, and think it a useful failing. On the whole section, observe how rich it is in light on

THE BLESSEDNESS AND PRIVILEGES OF CHILDREN.

(1) *Christ appreciates children*, and commends the child as the finest form of human nature. (2) *Childhood is the convenient season for conversion*. The man with difficulty, the child with ease, enters the kingdom of God. Try and bring the children in while they are children. (3) *He employs children and the childlike*, using them for His greatest work—they make an entrance for Himself (vers. 4, 5). (4) *He seeks to protect them* (vers. 7-9). (5) He teaches us that *the highest angels of heaven are guardian angels to the children*, they being full of the Saviour's helpfulness and love. (6) *He is the children's Saviour* (vers. 11-13); made like unto His little brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest to them. (6) *Their Father in heaven wants every child to be saved* (ver. 14). Children should mark these things, and seek salvation now. Parents and teachers should help them to reach it; and should worthily discharge the office which they share with the guardian angels.

15-20. The subject of offences is continued in this section. An injury done by one Christian to another is apt to become an offence to both the person committing the wrong and the sufferer from it. He who injures another will, if he do not repent, grow coarse by self-justification; will lower his standard of action; will hate the man he injures; will find his unrepented fault prevents prayer and communion with God. The injured party is likewise apt to receive damage; the calmness of his spirit is broken; resentment will easily rise within him; contempt and indignation coarsen his soul. So that any strife between brethren is a grave thing, and may easily become the "offence" which causes one to stumble and prevents further walking in the paths of holiness. *A quarrel is in a large percentage of cases the beginning of backsliding.*

15 ¶ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

THE TREATMENT OF INJURIES.

15-17. Here there are many things prescribed, which differ from our common thoughts upon this matter.

15. **Go and tell him his fault.** *Not treating him with contempt,* nor waiting for him to come and confess his fault, as the Saviour elsewhere (ch. 5: 23, 24) bids him do. Christ binds both the doer and the sufferer of wrong to seek to end it. But here He teaches us that the more innocent we are in the matter, the more power we have to heal the variance, and the more responsible we are for doing so. To receive an injury is to be invested with special power and duty; *no one else can act the priestly, healing part so well.* **Alone—gained.** These words show the way and spirit in which the injured person has to act. He has to act *with manliness*, braving the chance of the other's anger, of a repetition of insult or wrong. He has to act *with privacy*, not tattling, not exposing, not embittering feeling by communicating with others. But full of the charity that covers sin—he is to go alone. The further precept that in case of failure he choose **one or two more**, is conceived in the same spirit. The minimum of publicity is to be aimed at, and only when the influence of the injured party and of mutual friends, chosen because respected, wise, and friendly to both, has been in vain, is the sin to be named to the Church. The phrase **gained thy brother**, especially when connected with the prominent place given to prayer in this matter, shows further that the Spirit in which the proceeding is to be carried out is *the Spirit of Love* seeking to win the brother back to brotherliness, not to get a victory over him. Happy the man who, falling into sin, has friends so faithful. Happy the man who, being injured by another, turns with love to help that other to repentance.

17. **Tell it unto the Church.** Already once, in a previous chapter (16: 18), has the Saviour used this word. Then he used it in its comprehensive sense of the whole brotherhood of the saved (Col. 1: 18); here it is used of that miniature of the kingdom of God—any company of believers (1 Cor. 4: 17). Those who were believing in Him had not as yet realized that they were to form in the future communities as separate from the Jews as the Jews were from others. But the

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Saviour speaks with a prophetic vision of the future, and gives here a rule that will do for all time. **Heathen man and a publican**, *i.e.* as one who has put himself outside the circle of the Christian brotherhood. The power of the Church goes no further than to refuse to have fellowship at the Lord's Table with any one. ¶ She needs no greater power than this, for it is a serious thing when the Church visits any one with the grave censure involved in refusing to sit at the Lord's Table with him. Note, however, that separation must not become hatred (compare 1 Cor. 5 : 11 and 2 Cor. 2 : 7).

ENCOURAGEMENTS TO FAITHFULNESS.

18-20. Some encouragements are needed; for our weakness shrinks from giving a direct private reproof of one who has done us harm, fearing it will be either misunderstood or withstood, and may so involve us in humiliation. Here are great encouragements: (1) *A Divine sanction endorses all Christ-like faithfulness.* Whoever in this spirit of devout, manly love, seeks to reclaim a sinning brother has the promise, that **whatsoever he shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever he shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.** This is not a promise to ministers, or even to churches, but to those who act as prescribed. The meaning is, when men acting in Christ's Spirit are resisted, and the wrong-doer will not repent, the sin they bind on his conscience as needing to be repented of, God binds on His conscience also. When they succeed and win the wrong-doer to repentance, and forgive him the injury done to them, God forgives the sin as well, and looses it from His conscience with the great pardon. There is awful solemnity, therefore, in the attitude the Christ-like take toward our evil; for God probably takes precisely the same. (2) *The prayers of the Christ-like secure great answers.* If **two . . . agree**, say, you and the friend who goes with you to reclaim the erring, **it shall be done.** The Saviour has no knowledge of wasted prayers or ineffectual supplications. *Put not your doubt against His faith.* The important word in the promise is the word **agree.** It is the heavenly prayers in which alone hearts concur. The selfish prayer does not rise to God. The pure breathing of unselfish love does rise to God, and can be answered, and is answered. (3) *The gathering of*

21 ¶ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Christ-like hearts has more than Divine help with it; it has the Divine presence. Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I. As Dean Alford points out, this verse, obviously spoken of others besides ecclesiastics, shows that ver. 18 was spoken of others besides ecclesiastics also. This is the crowning encouragement to faithfulness: that *Christ is with us whenever we are faithful*, guiding and helping us. It is more than this. This verse is the charter of the Church's freedom. To have Christ's presence needs no ordained priest, no prescribed ritual, no particular order. If two or three meet "in His name"—that name being their attraction and their bond, their comfort, and their hope—*there Christ is*. Sometimes the cottage meeting has this royal presence when the stately service goes without it. Note further that this verse gives us a philosophy of prayer. True prayer is all inspired—the result of the Master's presence. It is not strange that He is able and willing to answer the prayers He prompts.

The chapter unfolds itself. Beginning with the commendation of the child-spirit, the Saviour advances to the commendation of the forgiving spirit and the condemnation of the opposite. According to vers. 15-22, to receive an injury is to have an opportunity of and a call to the highest service. By appeal (ver. 15), by bringing in the aid of others (vers. 16, 17), by bringing in, through prayer, the aid of God (ver. 20), the erring brother is to be won back. This teaching is crowned by lessons on the unforgiving spirit which we have much need to mark. The occasion of the lessons is

PETER'S SOLICITUDE,

21, about the unlimited duty of forgiveness. The current doctrine had imposed no such burden. From the prophecies of Amos (chs. 1 and 2), in which God denounces punishment on Damascus, Tyre, Judah, and other lands, in a formula beginning always "*For three transgressions of . . . and for four*," they had concluded that in four transgressions men reached the limit of forgiveness. Three offences might be pardoned, but the fourth we were at liberty to avenge. Peter goes beyond the current generosity of the day, and asks if **Seven times** is a limit of forgiveness the Saviour would approve. The question showed a great confusion of soul. For **forgive** means "*forth-give*," i.e. to *dismiss* absolutely from our thought. And he who really forgives does not keep count of the offences pardoned. Some say they forgive,

22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

23 ¶ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

but do not forget. They do not forgive if they do not forget, so far as any resentful memory is concerned.

22. The answer of the Saviour prescribes forgiveness, until seventy times seven times; i.e. endlessly, so often as it may be required. And as even Peter had not entered into the spirit of this grace, the Saviour adds a Parable to show our infinite obligation to forgive, and begins by indicating

OUR GREAT INDEBTEDNESS.

23, 24. Note the great initial assumptions made here: (1) That God is our Master. (2) That duty is a debt to Him, neglect of which is registered against us. (3) That our sin in some sense impoverishes our God, robbing Him of that love and service which is His wealth.

24. Ten thousand talents. Between two and three millions of pounds: such a debt as only a servant of the state—a prime minister, or ruler of some province—could accumulate during years of speculation. The adoption of such a figure to express our indebtedness to God is itself suggestive of a heinousness in sin awful beyond all estimate. Note, the commission of sin blinds us to its guilt: "We know not what we do." We take little note, but God takes much note of our sins of omission and neglect. "Ye gave Me no meat . . . ye took Me not in." All sins we commit against our fellow-men are resented by our God. The total is such that we are utterly, absolutely unable to pay. *Every soul is bankrupt before God.* The King takes account. God is not slack. To be indifferent to our evil would be to encourage us in it. So He calls us to account repeatedly, through convictions of conscience and providential reproofs.

DIVINE JUSTICE,

25, 26, alarms all that feel its scrutiny. David felt that for one of a thousand of his transgressions he had no excuse. Job said, "Now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." However lightly we esteem our sins when seen in ordinary light, when we see them in God's light we are driven to despair.

25. The suggestion of this verse is that the penalties we incur are very grievous. In God there is no rage and no excess of severity, but

26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

every description Jesus gives of judgment suggests something exceptionally awful. The pressure of justice moves'

A VAIN PLEA.

26. **Have patience . . . and I will pay.** This cry of bankruptcy is often heard. But easy to squander, it will be impossible to repay, though he should sell palaces, slaves, estates. We can destroy, but we cannot save ourselves; and self-reliant effort of amendment and endeavour to undo past evil alike end only in despair. We want another to save us: only the God that made us can mend us. *But we do not readily admit this truth.* Cast yourself on God's mercy without promise of repayment. David's cry, "*Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great*" (Ps. 25: 11), is the wise argument to use with God. The king, undecieved by his promise, is moved by his distress, and we next read of

A FREE FORGIVENESS.

27. **Moved with compassion.** How blessed for this man that compassion has its home in the king's heart! With all effort he could not have retrieved the past. How fitly majesty is adorned with mercy! We have the blessedness of serving a Master who is LOVE; whose very severity is a *Surgeon's Knife*, meant to arrest evil in ourselves and others—One *whose nature and property it is to forgive.* And though our sins are infinite, and it is only by the self-sacrifice of Calvary He can forgive us, *He does forgive.* Revere God's greatness; seek God's pardon; copy God's compassion.

ABUSE OF MERCY.

28-30. "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.*" There is not a mercy of God which it is not inclined to abuse; health, wealth, ability, patience, warnings—all, we tend to abuse. Here this man should have gone away, thankful, lowly, feeling bound to live more kindly than ever. But he goes away only

31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me :

33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee ?

34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

feeling fortunate, relieved, at liberty to live less cautiously. Security and pride fill his heart. In this mood he finds one who owes him a trifle ; not millions, but something under a five-pound note. *Pride disdains the idea of his having any duty of love to any one so lowly ; Security makes him forget the criticism of others and its possible results. So he seizes him violently ; demands payment ; neglects precisely the same prayer he had himself offered to the king ; casts him into prison. Remember we all are tempted to abuse the forgiving love of God ; to be careless when forgiven, unwatchful, presumptuous. Many have been hardened by the thought that they were God's elect, and made proud by the thought that they were born again. The hardening of heart by mercy is the greatest hardening we can experience. And if God's mercy does not soften us, it will only make us more selfish than we were before.*

THE REPORTING OF THE WRONG.

31. This man never expected the king to know. *Had he been severe on some great noble of standing who owed him some great sum, he would have been afraid.* But severity against the poor and the obscure—those not known to the king—he thought would pass unnoticed. But there are always some things or some persons to tell the most secret fault, and *No one is so unimportant or even sinful that God will allow us to do him wrong.* Our look, his look, others' looks, tell the story of our wrong. Never forget *God sees us, and the things we think we can do without their telling on our reputation with either man or God are all told to Him.*

PENALTY.

32-34. *We have to give account for all we do.* Here is a specimen of the judge's way of thinking and feeling. **I forgave . . . shouldest not thou also have had compassion ?** That is the sort of question we shall have to answer. **A fellow-servant** is expected to find fellow-feeling. **Wroth.** *Love is always angry where men are wronged.* And because God is Love He is angry at the wrong we do to others. **He delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all.** The

35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

use of torture to extract confessions and to secure the giving up of stolen treasure used to be universal, the assumption being that somewhere or other treasure was concealed, which under torture would be disgorged. *Thus all the king's compassion is forfeited, and greed and anger lose everything.* Many strange questions arise here which are perhaps unanswerable. "Can a Christian act so as to lose grace?" "Is pardon once given ever retracted by God?" "Can men ever pay all that is due?" Perhaps it is better to leave these questions unanswered; content to note that the parable warns us that we are all tempted to abuse mercy, and if we yield to pride and security they will destroy our souls in this fashion. Whether a true Christian might so fall may be uncertain, but it is quite certain that any one who stopped forgiving at the seventh fault would thus fall. Instead of speculating on mysteries of religion, mark how the Saviour closes the parable with

A GREAT WARNING.

35. *Only the forgiving are forgiven.* This is the great lesson. "Without money and without price," God pardons us, but *not without conditions.* For God's pardon might be a curse to some, viz. *to all the impenitent.* It would confirm them in their evil, take away the desire to conquer it, perpetuate their enmities with others and with themselves, and keep them unfit for duty, for bliss, or for heaven. Therefore God only forgives those who repent of their sins. And forgiveness blesses such, helping the purity at which repentance aims. *When you say God forgives only the penitent, you say in other words that God forgives only the forgiving.* For right feeling towards the sins committed against us is the surest of all signs of right feeling concerning the sins committed by us. I do not *rightly feel* my debt of a thousand talents if I have any difficulty in forgiving a debt of a hundred pence. If we do not forgive, it is because we are not repenting. Therefore note particularly these things: (1) *Repentance* is the root of all graces; the condition of salvation; something we have never to leave behind; something that should daily *grow* stronger in our hearts. (2) Never think of salvation as only a thing between us and God; *how we behave to our fellow-men is of the essence of religion.* (3) When least in the mood to bestow pardon, we are most full of the guilt which needs pardon. (4) The daily use of the Lord's Prayer would help us to discover whatever endangers our salvation. (5) Let us penitently seek, find, and keep Christ's pardon of our vast transgressions.

CHAPTER XIX.

1 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judæa beyond Jordan ;

2 And great multitudes followed him ; and he healed them there.

3 ¶ The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause ?

Between the discourse reported at the close of the eighteenth chapter and the events of this chapter an interval of some months (Edersheim thinks six) seems to occur. The record of this interval occupies from the seventh to the eleventh chapter of John, and from the end of the ninth to the end of the eighteenth chapter of St. Luke. He goes to Peræa ; thence to Jerusalem ; thence, apparently, to Peræa again. Whether the conversation now to be recorded took place on the first or second of these occasions there is nothing to decide. The sick follow Him, praying for healing (ver. 2) ; the Pharisees follow Him for the sake of destroying Him (ver. 3). This time they come to Him with

THE QUESTION OF DIVORCE.

3-9. In all times and lands a profoundly difficult and delicate question, especially so then and there. For Peræa was the seat of Herod's government, and the lawfulness of his act in putting away his wife to marry Herodias was as much canvassed there as the matrimonial caprices of Henry VIII. were in England at the time of their occurrence. Besides the chance of making the Saviour take up a position that had proved fatal to John the Baptist, there was the certainty that whatever reply He gave to their question would give offence to many. If He avowed the stricter view held by one Jewish party, He would offend the men in general ; if He avowed the more loose view most popular then, He would offend the women and all besides them who had grave views of the solemnity of family life. So these inquisitors assail Him with their ensnaring questions.

3. Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? One school of Theologians (that of Shammai) said "No" to this question. They understood the word "*uncleanness*" in Deut. 24 : 1, to mean unchastity, and the precept of Moses to recognize unchastity alone as the sufficient ground for a dissolution of marriage. But another school (that of Hillel) held that "*uncleanness*" meant

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

anything distasteful to a husband. They boasted in the liberty of divorce as one of the privileges of an Israelite; held that anything which made a wife distasteful—the spoiling of a dinner, or the sight of some other woman whom he preferred—was a sufficient ground to permit a husband to put away his wife, *provided only that he gave her a "bill of divorcement,"* i.e. a certificate that she had been divorced and was free to contract another marriage (see Lightfoot, "Hor. Heb." *in loco*). This view was largely acted on. It corrupted the man by permitting vicious indulgence to be pursued under respectable forms, and injured the woman by separating her from her children and robbing her of a home, often at the very time of life when these were most essential to her comfort. But few realized—even the disciples hardly did so (ver. 10)—how the interests of husband and wife were identical, and how an undivided home is the supreme social necessity, at once for national well-being, religious prosperity, and individual advantage.

THE GREAT REPLY.

4-6. Christ quotes no rabbi, nor enters into any argument concerning the Law of Moses. He quotes one fact and one word. **THE FACT** is that in creating man, God made one woman for one man; the lesson of such a fact for all ages being that monogamy is to be the rule of man; and any rule which covertly or openly permits to man a plurality of wives, stands condemned by the precedent of the Garden of Eden. **THE WORD** is a word—spoken indeed by Adam, but by Adam as inspired, and therefore a word of God—which registers the truth that in marriage man and wife become one flesh; and, being so joined, may not be put asunder. The universal reason of man feels that these grounds of nature are valid and conclusive, and that the proper view of marriage is that which treats it as a union binding "so long as both shall live."

THE RULE OF DIVORCE.

7. The Pharisees were not willing to have their liberty curtailed; for strictness, of the sort they practised, needed some licence in some

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

other direction to compensate for it. They therefore appeal to the Law of Moses (Deut. 24: 1), and deal with it as if Moses put no barrier on divorce except the requirement that when the union was dissolved, the liberty of the woman should be restored by a "*bill of divorcement*."

8. The Saviour points out the important fact, that much of the Mosaic legislation was simply the best possible in the circumstances; no practical legislation being able, with advantage, to be far in advance of the better feelings of the community; and that therefore we may not, in all cases, identify what the lawgiver permits with what God approves. The Saviour thus allows that a wider rendering of the word "*unclean-ness*" may be given to the precept than the school of Shammai gave, but denies the inference that freedom of divorce is allowable. [Note: This principle explains the tolerance given in both Law and Gospel to slavery.]

9. He adds, from His own authority, the new and blessed law which forbids divorce on any ground save the act which has already broken the marriage covenant, viz. *fornication*. *When one party to the contract has broken it utterly, the other is no longer bound*. But nothing short of immorality practised by one of the parties, and breaking the contract, leaves the other free to enter into another. In the second clause of ver. 9 we have to understand, after the word **away**, that we are meant to supply the words, **except it be for fornication**. For the Church of Rome, in forbidding the remarriage of persons divorcing or divorced by their spouse on sufficient grounds, exceeds its rights. In keeping up the perpetual character of marriage as a sacrament, it unjustly binds the innocent man or woman, who ought not to be held bound by a contract broken by the other party to it. *This rule of the Church of Rome, forbidding liberty of divorce to any, has been almost as fatal to morals as too much facility of divorce could have been*.

On the whole subject note: (1) Facilities of divorce, except on the one ground of adultery, are proofs of a low state of self-respect in any community, and tend to lower it still more.

(2) *They work incalculable mischief*. Such facilities prevent the healing of quarrels, end unions which might have become sources of honourable comfort, and *often promote the sins which are the grounds of separation*.

10 ¶ His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.

11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.

12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb : and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men : and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

(3) *Stringency of marriage laws is the interest of the women and the children everywhere.*

(4) The true secrets for preventing matrimonial misery are : *Greater care in entering marriage engagements ; full mutual knowledge before engagements to marry are made ; unselfishness ; action in the fear of God ; the repression of all Lust ; and, above all things, Love.* These, and not relaxations of marriage laws, are the securities against unhappiness. If, after all care is taken, a marriage is unhappy, it must be borne as poverty or illness would have to be borne. Love and patience in such a case will lessen the necessary misery, and find a great reward.

(5) Note, in the quotation made from Genesis in ver. 5, a somewhat singular feature. The first word in the Bible on marriage does not speak of *the woman leaving her father and mother, and cleaving to the man ;* but of *the man leaving father and mother, and cleaving to his wife.* It looks as if an occasional form of the patriarchal system was early in vogue in the tribes to which Abraham belonged. Usually in the patriarchal system (as it exists in India to-day, for instance), the wife removes from her home to the home of her husband's father, and lives with him there. But in a less usual form of this system, the husband removes from his father's house, and goes to live with his wife in her father's home ; as Jacob did, and as Abraham forbade Isaac to do. If this was the earliest marriage custom of the ancestors of Abraham, it is significant ; for under this custom *the wife had an unusual degree of dignity and power, and the rights of women were protected in an unusual degree.*

APPREHENSIONS.

10-12. Even the twelve are alarmed at this new doctrine ; and conclude, **It is not good to marry,** as the selfish and the timorous are apt to do. The Saviour does not argue the matter ; but indicates that if to marry is to run the risk of a great disappointment, to remain unmarried is impossible to many without moral danger. The sentences which follow seem to mean that abstinence from marriage is safe for those who by nature are, or by special operation have become, incapable of conjugal connection ; or for those so absorbed in a higher calling as

13 ¶ Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray : and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me : for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

to feel no fleshly promptings. Such with advantage can receive the apostles' word, **It is not good to marry.** But for ordinary men and women, marriage is a law of nature, which brings a blessed growth to all the better qualities of heart and soul, and where it is entered on with ordinary care, vastly enlarges the comfort of life. The surest way to a happy marriage is : To deserve a good husband or wife ; only to marry one it is a pleasure to serve ; to marry only in the Lord, and to bear with all patience and meekness anything not according to expectations. If unhappily mated, loving endurance is still both wisdom and the duty. To keep an unbroken home for the children ; to save them from dishonour and hurt ; to practise patience ;—these are things which have great reward.

The section (vers. 13-26) includes great contrasts. Children brought and blessed ; and one, unchildlike, seeking blessing but departing without it. The narrative is full of guidance and full of warning.

CHILDREN BROUGHT TO CHRIST.

13. It is not said their mothers brought them ; but doubtless it was the case. Love is ever wise. Some who do not seek the Saviour for themselves want Him for their children. *Parents trust Him with their richest jewels.* A good man's blessing is the most fruitful of all prayers ; what must a Saviour's be ? Parents should still bring their children in prayer to Him, and He will still bless them. **Disciples rebuked them ;** being insufficiently reverent to childhood ; thinking the mothers intrusive ; fancying the children could wait for their blessing till they were older, and wishing Christ to go on with His sermon. There are still some who think children cannot understand Christ, or be blessed by Him, till they are grown up ; and such slight children still. But

THE REPROVERS ARE REBUKED.

14. **Suffer little children—i.e. let them alone—and forbid them not, to come.** Jesus loved the fresh faces and the artless smile of the children ; rejoiced in their love to Him ; was glad to preoccupy their hearts ; did not believe in letting them go wrong and afterwards setting them right, but in keeping them from going wrong ; and therefore welcomes them. **Of such is the kingdom.** *It includes many children, and the childlike alone enter it (ch. 18 : 3).*

15 And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

16 ¶ And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

15. He laid His hands on them. The usual accompaniment of prayer and benediction. The Saviour still lays His hands on our children when we bring them to Him; still charms their hearts to love Him, and fills with His Spirit the little hearts that look up to Him. Come yourselves and bring the children, and together you may easily find Christ and His blessing.

AN INQUIRER.

16-20. Two great lessons are to be noted at the outset: (1) *The Restlessness of Thoughtful Souls*, and (2) *Their habit of coming to the Saviour*. As to the first, observe: This man had everything which would permit or promote contentment of soul. He had *Wealth*, with its freedom from care; *Good Character*, with its freedom from remorse; *Station*, which satisfies ambition; he had *Refined Tastes*; *Amiable disposition*; *many Friends*; *an Open Mind*. Yet he has *Unrest*; feels that eternity is to be faced, that something remains to be done by him, and therefore asks, *What lack I yet?* *Here we are caged birds, that cannot help looking out and up into the open of eternity.* "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our soul is not at rest until it rests in Thee." This word of St. Augustine's is true; for observe, that while worldlings neglect Christ, and hypocrites hate Him, and the foolish criticize Him, those moved by the unrest of thought all come to Jesus to inquire. All who ponder eternity come at last saying, "*To whom can we go but unto Thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*"

POINTS OF GREAT PROMISE.

In his *Fervour* he "*came running*" (Mark 10: 17); in his *Humility* he "*kneels to Him*" (Mark). He has the *Courage* to be careless of what men say of Him; he has the *Reverence* which names Christ **Good Master**;* he has the *Spirituality* that wants **eternal life**; he has *Strength* which is prepared to face great duties; he has *Pleasantness*,

* In vers. 16 and 17 the Revised Version reads, "*Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And He said unto him, Why askest thou Me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good,*" etc. In adopting this reading, the Revisers follow undoubtedly the best manuscripts of St. Matthew. We have assumed, however, that the actual course of the story is as the Authorized Version suggests; for Mark and Luke agree in so representing it, and there are no variations of reading to speak of in the copies of their Gospels in this section. Apparently transcribers had corrected Matthew's account by changing it into agreement with those of the other evangelists.

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

propriety of life, some moral dignity befitting his station. He almost embodies the ideal of many to-day, uniting wealth, culture, and religion in charming harmony. Nor is his excellence superficial only; for Jesus "LOVED him" (Mark 10: 21). Surely here is a great recruit; another John; one sure to enter and excel in the kingdom of God! Few seem so much in earnest. But, alas! there are

SOME WEAK POINTS.

Good Master is compliment, not adoration. He has *no sense of sin*, which shows his standard was poor and conscience dull. He has *spiritual Pride*, which deems itself equal to the work of winning heaven; and the conceit which asks some special duty to be assigned to him. He thinks eternal life is to be won, not knowing it must be *given and grown in us*. These things show some shallowness of soul. Still, we love the man despite his faults, and fancy that such weaknesses would soon disappear in Christ's fellowship. What answer will the Saviour give to His questioner?

THE STRANGE REPLY.

17-19. Why callest thou Me good? "*By terrible things in righteousness God answers us.*" (1) Here Christ rebukes his compliments. "*Master*" is not acceptable from the lips of one who, He sees, will disobey Him; nor "*Good Master*" from one who will distrust Him. *Much of our religion is compliment; and we think such worship pleases Christ. It offends Him.* Here the Saviour indicates that his phrase is improper unless he believes Him to be Divine. (2) *He prescribes common duties.* The man wanted some sublime task, and Christ says, **Do no murder, etc.**; only in the last precept, **Love thy neighbour as thyself**, naming any duty that seemed hard. *Christ turns him back to the Law as to an unlearned task*, showing thereby that common duties are the hardest and most important of all; that those who ask *what they should do* should be shown their duty, until they learn their sin and need. He says nothing of *Faith*, for the man would have misunderstood it; but contents Himself by prescribing *that Love* which in due time "*believeth all things,*" and which admits the eternal life into the soul.

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

20, 21. When the young man asserts, **All these things have I kept from my youth up**, the Saviour seems reluctant to show him further duty, preferring, apparently, that he should have learnt it more gradually; but at last replies to him with a demand for a *Great Renunciation*. **Sell that thou hast**. It is a solemn thing to invoke the Saviour's light; for He who chose Calvary for Himself is apt to prescribe sacrifice to others. In the reproof of his compliment; in sending him back to common duties; and now in requiring the sacrifice of all, the Saviour gave a strange, a crushing reply. Yet observe: (1) There was such gentleness in Christ's bearing that Mark says, "*He loved him.*" (2) In the Saviour's demand for sacrifice there was some special internal fitness to some besetting sin in the young man. For Christ did not make this demand on all men. And the man evidently feels Christ named his simple duty; for he does not *resent* the demand, as he would have done if excessive, but goes away with the speechless sorrow of conviction. (3) The Saviour helps him to decision by proposing to accept him as a disciple, and promising **Treasure in heaven**. Thus the proper view to be taken of the Saviour's action is that He probed this man's weakness and danger, and put within his reach a great career. He opened the pearly gates and invited him to a glory like that of Peter or Paul—an apostle's usefulness, and heaven! When Christ calls us to give up the friendship, or indulgence, or pursuit which is injurious, see His mercy as well as His severity. Note next—

THE GREAT REFUSAL.

22. The young man . . . went away sorrowful. He knew he ought to obey. He looked into the open heaven, and knew there was treasure there which would reward obedience. *But he goes away*. He is thought to be described by Dante as one of those whom neither hell nor heaven would have, in the lines—

"I looked, and I beheld the shade of him
Who made through cowardice the great refusal."
("Inferno," iii, 60, Longfellow's translation.)

See you do not copy him.

23 ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

27 ¶ Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

THE LESSONS.

23, 24. *Only with difficulty—hardly—can a rich man be saved*; a difficulty so great as to be comparable to a camel going through a needle's eye.

25. The disciples, like ourselves, thought rich men had fewer temptations than others. But the Saviour teaches they have more. Be more afraid of wealth, less afraid of poverty. Be not too keen to "get on" in the world; for wealth tends to pride and indulgence, and to separate us from man, and excuse us from duty. It is apt to delude us with the idea that, having money, we have everything. Be content with a lowly lot.

26. God can work all miracles and impossibilities, and can save men, even although they are rich. *May He save us!*

THE DANGEROUS QUESTION.

27. Amazement at the peril of the rich soon gives way to complacency in their possession of the decision which this rich young man so signally lacked. Peter states, *We have left all*: and asks, *What shall we have therefore?* A better utterance would have been, "*We have found all blessedness in Thee: what shall we render to the Lord for all His benefits?*" It is right to mark the great recompence of reward; but it is perilous to keep looking at sacrifices made for Christ, and inquiring about the payment we shall receive. Love neither urges claims nor asks wages—especially when it owes infinitely more than it has earned. The foolishness of man finds the wisdom of Christ in the reply now given; for He unfolds

THE HAPPY RETRIBUTION.

28, 29. It is distant; they must wait for the regeneration, the new heavens and the new earth, for their chiefest reward; though

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

30 But many that are first shall be last ; and the last shall be first.

“*now in this time*” (Mark 10 : 30) the preliminary rewards mentioned in ver. 29, will be tasted. **Thrones** signify honour and power. There is no arbitrary assignment of either. They who have forsaken all for Christ, have in them the instinct of spiritual honour, to which alone “the full and everlasting and passionless renown,” attaches ; and the same, by their sacrifice, at once show and increase the strength of soul, which is the imperial quality that fits for government. We need not inquire into details of meaning, but the word indicates that such souls will not be idle or unused in heaven, but employed in works for which their kingly strength fits them. *Even now every saint of God is prophet, priest, and king in the truest sense.* Leave thou all and follow Christ—so shall thy soul grow kingly. The present rewards are not slight : **An hundredfold.** *Believers know the truth of this.* Saved from wrecking their life ; cured of discontent ; enriched with hope ; filled with the large delights of love ; finding a power of benediction in their prayers ; blessed with marvellous friendships, with power of help, and the gratitude which the help they render wins ;—there is indeed no sacrifice which has not its **hundredfold** reward even here. Note that St. Mark records the additional words, “*with persecutions.*”

A WARNING,

30, goes with the promise to guard it, indicating that some begin who do not persevere, and some repent who at first refuse ; and therefore humility and care should be cherished in order to keep the “*things which we have wrought.*”

CHAPTER XX.

THE PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

The division of chapters is unfortunate, for the parable is connected directly with the last four verses of the previous chapter. It sets forth in a picture the results of cherishing the spirit that asks, “*What shall we have therefore ?*” (ch. 19 : 27) ; and the commonness of the change in relative position which Christ had noted in the word, “*Many that are first shall be last ; and the last first,*” which stand at

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,

4 And said unto them ; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle ?

7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard ; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

both commencement and close (ch. 19 : 30 ; 20 : 16). Let the disciples take heed of the spirit of Peter's question, or, from being first, they will be last. Let them not despise the rich young ruler : he may repent, and, from being last, may become first.

THE BUSY GOD.

1-6. Like unto . . . an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers. *Man may waste brief time till the eleventh hour surprises him, idle still in the market-place. But God stands not idle. Before sunrise the great Householder is afoot. The steward may be left to pay the labourers ; He will enlist them. No hour of God's day but He is at work. Early in the world's morning His voice and footsteps were heard in "the garden," and ever since He has been coming into the world in the great epochs of its spiritual history, and hiring men into the vineyard. Early in life's morning He comes to many, and keeps coming through all life's day, seeking to enlist them in His work. This hiring of the soul is the blessed mystery of life, in which we wake to the sense that we have a Master and a work, and attempt to do something to please Him, whom we discover to be our Maker and our Saviour. The call is a greater mercy than the wages. Happy they who engage under such a Master—happy especially they who in earliest morning of their life enter the vineyard ; for the parable shows the sins which all should guard against, not sins into which all must fall.*

THE LABOURERS.

2-7. Some disparage the world, and think God has no servants in it, and that there is *no sacred work proceeding in the world. But God has work on hand of all kinds—here represented as a vineyard ; and amidst the multitudes who live blindly He has not a few consciously consecrate to Him. Note : (1) At various hours of life's day men begin*

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

to work for God. Some enter and do a complete day's work (ver. 2); some, through what seems accident, or through their refusal to begin work earlier, have only three-fourths of their life-day to give to God (ver. 3); some only half the day (ver. 5); some only quarter (ver. 5); while some enter the vineyard when the shadows of evening are lengthening—at the eleventh hour, one hour before all work is ended. None can explain the mystery of these differences. Why, of races, one nation finds God and wakes to serve Him earlier than others; why, in individual lives, we wake up to God at such different stages in the developments of life. (2) *God wishes the longest day of service He can get from us.* (3) *He promises ample wages.* The penny was a silver penny coin, larger than our sixpence. Two hundred pence would buy bread enough for five thousand men, and one would buy as much as five or six shillings to-day. There is no stinting in God's rewards. And what He promises is often less than what He gives. (4) Those entering the vineyard later seem less-calculating in their spirit. Those beginning at sunrise bargain for their penny a day; those at the third and sixth and ninth hours go to work without a bargain, content in the expectation that they will get **whatsoever is right.** The child or youth in conversion is looking far away, and scans all the elements of the immortal results; the middle-aged look less far ahead, seeking present peace and the general blessing of their Saviour. (5) There is often a double reason for the lateness of some in entering the vineyard:—one *indolence*, suggested by the Master's question, **Why stand ye . . . idle?** and another *neglect*, by their reply, **No man hath hired us** (ver. 7). Let us try and *do this hiring.* Many are outside the vineyard because none has invited them in; or has done so only in some way so *distant* that their soul has not realized the call. (6) There are more varieties of nature found in the kingdom of God than anywhere else. There are men and women of every age, of all sorts of experience: some driven by sorrow to Christ, some drawn by love; some seeking heaven; some fleeing hell; Ritualists and Salvationists, men of culture and Philippian gaolers; women like Mary of Bethany, and publicans and sinners—all working the work of God, doing right or doing good.

THE GRACIOUS RECKONING.

8, 9. If the inward call is the first great mystery of life, the final reckoning is the second. He speaks to us; we feel we shall one day

9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

speak to Him. At the close of life's day of work comes the reckoning, which, though infinitely solemn, is full of the sweet and merciful justice of God.

9. Every man a penny. Only He who hired men at the eleventh hour would give for one hour the pay of twelve. He is one that thinks of need, not merit; and who delights in showing kindness, not in pressing for His due. The day of reckoning ought to be the hope, as it will at last be the bliss, of the faithful. When that day comes it will bring exceeding great rewards to all right-hearted labourers. It is full of revelations, for the story tells of some who get far more than they had ever hoped, and some who get less than they had presumed to think was due them.

SOME GET MORE THAN THEY EVER HOPED.

They . . . that were hired about the eleventh hour, . . . received every man a penny. Great mysteries are here, for *they started under fearful disadvantage*. Eleven-twelfths of day gone; indolence had disabled them; despair disheartened them; earthly tastes embarrassed them; the precedents of their life were millstones about the neck. All they had ever hoped for was to be let off punishment; when lo! they are "*made equal unto those*" who entered at sunrise. The parable cannot indicate the secret, but it names the fact, that *often those repenting late may overtake those who started long before in goodness and service*. In explanation of this, note: (1) *The forgiveness of Christ is infinite, and they start, though late, yet free.* (2) *Many love much because forgiven much, and a mighty gratitude makes them use the small remainder of life nobly.* (3) *Grace working with penitence can swiftly undo evil growths of longest life.* (4) *The chief thing that determines our acceptance and reward is state of soul—the presence in it of love, lowliness, humility.* So the Saviour spreads the protection of His charity over all young rulers, too worldly to repent; over gross sinners; over all backsliders; and teaches us to believe there is no extremity of evil and of persistent waste of life which may not be repaired. God can "*restore the years that the canker-worm hath eaten.*" The dying thief was the great instance of this, but multitudes that none can number have in age, weakness, and on their dying bed been brought to Christ.

Lament not the wasted past; it may be retrieved.

Pray for the most hopeless; they may yet repent.

10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more ; and they likewise received every man a penny.

11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong : didst not thou agree with me for a penny ?

14 Take that thine is, and go thy way : I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

DISCONTENTED SERVANTS.

10-16. Their discontent is the essential difficulty of the parable ; for such discontent seems incompatible with rendering service and inconceivable in presence of the great reward. *But it is well for us to be warned of what our faults must grow to if they are unchecked ; and it is the fact that many starting early in their discipleship and working well, afterwards fall off and deteriorate, and are only just saved at last. Not all, but many of the first do become last.* And it is the fact that the mood which says, "*We have left all ; what shall we have therefore ?*" is the mood which mars discipleship with discontent. The stages of deterioration and decline are suggested ; and are, alas ! very common.

(1) *We are apt to gather complacency in service.* When the horror of our lost estate begins to recede from vivid memory, we are tempted to dwell on *our sacrifices for God, rather than on God's gifts to us ;* on the amusements we have to forego ; the liberty of action which is curtailed ; the "calls" for gifts or self-denial made on us. In such a mood, the burden and heat of the day become very severe. (2) Then *Disparagement of others* and the grudging spirit develop and help our decline. Severe in our judgments on those who, like the ruler, "*go away,*" we are envious of those just entering *our vineyard,* grudging them their clearer light, or their happier piety, or their richer grace, or their higher honour, or their larger usefulness. (3) *Then discontent rises rapidly in the soul and completes the mischief, for you cannot at the same time look at others' superior mercies and see your own.* And while it ought to be impossible for a Christian heart to be discontented, it is a common case. *A mystery, only less than discontent in heaven would be, is of daily occurrence, viz. discontent at the rewards of service.* Some, for example, are discontented because their honesty seems insufficiently rewarded, though they have as their reward quiet conscience, freedom from remorse, a fearless future, the esteem of friends, independence, the power of helping their families, the approval of God, the blessings of His providence. Some similarly are *discontented* with the rewards of purity, of religion, or of endeavour to bless

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

others. *There are, perhaps, as many murmuring elder brothers as there are repenting prodigals.* And the great lesson of the Saviour is this: That whenever complacency, disparagement, discontent, enter the soul, then it begins to decline; and the first are becoming last, till they fall below the level of those they despise, and the publican and harlot enter the kingdom of heaven "*before,*" *i.e.* in front of them. *The young should mark this to prevent pride rising; the middle-aged, to prevent discontent hardening in the soul.* "*Every man a penny*" (ver. 9) seems at variance with the graduated rewards which, in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19: 17-19), Christ teaches us to expect. But it only seems so. The love of Christ, the seeing Him as He is, Heaven with its bliss and opportunity are the one reward of all. But the degree of delight and reward found in the one common bliss varies with the capacity of enjoying and using it.

15. **Eye evil.** The envious were, and to-day in the East are, said to have an evil eye, a malignant look being thought to carry mischief.

16. **Many be called, but few chosen**—words omitted by some manuscripts and by the Revised Version, though it is doubtful whether they should be omitted. The word **chosen** is not used doctrinally, but in the sense of "*approved.*" There are many Christians, but few saints; many who profess to follow Christ, but few who do so; many converted, but few Christ-like.

In the remainder of the chapter we have a strange record, showing the Saviour's Greatness, Patience, Pity: full of suggestions as to the faults that easily beset us. We note—

THE CROSS FILLS CHRIST'S THOUGHTS.

17-19. For the fourth time within the short space of some weeks the Saviour speaks of His approaching death. *As His duty,* He braces Himself beforehand for its discharge. *As His difficulty and pain,* it is the matter of His prayer. *As the means of saving mankind,* He dwells on it with heroic hope and joy. We should learn God's plan of our life and address ourselves to it. Otherwise we drift without aim, and shirk honourable duties and pains we ought to accept. If the Saviour dwells so much on His death, we should give great heed to it.

17 ¶ And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,

18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,

19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

20 ¶ Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.

21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

17. *Apart.* The great things of Christ are still said to His disciples apart.

18, 19. *Jerusalem*—where He should have been enthroned—is to be the place of His suffering. All sections of mankind have part in the crucifixion. Betrayed by a disciple, He is condemned by Jews, crucified by heathen. Mock . . . scourge . . . crucify. The most horrible of all deaths, augmented by previous torture of the scourge, and by inhuman mockery, had to be endured if man was to be saved. **And the third day He shall rise again.** Note *and*, not "*But.*" *All consecration and service has its necessary reward and result.* The Saviour looks forward to this triumph, and supports the expectation of Calvary thereby. *To all your good work or sacrifice there is a "third day" recompense.*

A STRANGE REQUEST.

20, 21. Salome has heard Him speak of mocking, scourging, dying, yet asks Him for heavenly thrones! How marvellous is the impression the Saviour produces on souls, when, despite predictions of shame, and endurance of the cross, they thus believe in Him! If Salome is His mother's sister (as seems probable from a comparison of John 19: 25 with Mark 15: 40), her reverence is more remarkable still. She and her sons had heard His promise that the disciples should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (ch. 19: 28). She wishes the two highest for her sons. In which note: (1) There was much that was noble in this ambition, but still there was selfishness and pride in it. (2) We have here an instance of the way we grieve and abuse the Saviour's love. When He is in the act of accepting the cross, we ask for comforts and dignities. He is sacrificing heaven, dignity, ease; and we ask for something better than our neighbours. Even on the eve of Gethsemane they dispute who is to be the greatest. How small, cold, petty, the best of men appear when their actions are shown on the background of Christ's self-sacrifice! Heaven and earth still present the same contrasts. Heaven is all solicitude to save, all

22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

mercy; and we, if we pray at all, are praying for raptures, dignities, comforts! *Do not try to use to low advantage your Saviour's greatness.*

THE REPLY.

22. **Ye know not what ye ask.** Often we offer large petitions with small meanings or motives, and would be overwhelmed if they were granted. When they ask for thrones, they ask the path leading thither; the discipline fitting for them, the service which wins such influence. **Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?** [The cup seems to signify the inward, the baptism the outward, sufferings of Christ.] No true honours are lightly won in either earth or heaven. *None are arbitrarily given*; for to give honours for which we are unfit would be no kindness. Besides, *The true crown is a flowering of our nature, not a garland lifted and put on.* Accordingly, the right-hand and left-hand thrones go to those fullest of the Saviour's spirit, and who, of all men, have been most like Him in their work and sacrifice. Note: (1) How gently the Saviour corrects the ambition. (2) That some of our prayers for grace and usefulness are requests which could only be answered by experiences from which we should shrink. (3) The Revised Version omits, in conformity with the best manuscripts, the reference to being "baptized with Christ's baptism" in both the twenty-second and twenty-third verses. Still, the undisputed accuracy of the received reading of St. Mark (ch. 10: 38) shows that Christ used the words. **We are able.** They know not what they promise, as they knew not what they prayed: *for they also forsook Him, and fled* (ch. 26: 56). Yet they had a devotion which they honestly express.

23. **Ye shall drink.** They had the royal spirit of service and of martyrdom; and the Saviour gladdens and honours them with this promise. James was the first of the twelve to die a martyr's death (Acts 12: 2); and John was familiar with all the martyr's sufferings short of death (Rev. 1: 9). So far the Saviour can gratify their great ambition. They shall have His cup and some throne of honour. He adds, however, that the honours of heaven are given only where deserved. **To sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, except to those for whom it is prepared.** So Alford would

24 And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

translate, rightly. He is the Giver, but He gives according to fitness. On the whole incident note: (1) How noble these men are in their very faults; they seek not money, fame, or ease, but the honour that comes from God. (2) How graciously Christ deals with what is faulty in us. (3) How, in answering our prayers, He has to answer, not the great words, but the small meaning, lest we should be overwhelmed. (4) In the other world there will be no unequal distribution of rewards, but each will receive what fits him.

AMBITION JEALOUS OF AMBITION.

24. Already the twelve were instructed on the sin and danger of ambition (ch. 18: 1-4). But the lesson had not yet become an "engrafted" word. It had not grown into the fibre of the life. They are, therefore, inflamed with indignation at the ambition of James and John. Ambition rages against ambition in others; pride is jealous of pride; selfishness of selfishness. *The absence of indignation at wrong is a bad sign, if another suffers from the wrong; the presence of it is a bad sign, if the wrong is committed against yourself. Usually, Indignation is a bad sign.* Here they resent what they think an attempt to steal a march on them. They call forth

STRANGE PEACEMAKING.

25-28. He blames the fault of neither, but lifts all into that higher light which allays ambition, and so imparts peace. There need be no struggling for thrones, for there are no such thrones in God's kingdom as ambition dreams of. In ordinary kingdoms there are rulers who "Lord it" (R.V.) over men, and nobles that exercise dominion. **But it shall not be so among you.** The only rule the Church is ever to have is *the Influence of the lowly-hearted, who slave* (the original has this meaning) to serve men. The only mastery is to be *the sway of Love*, which is glad to be men's servant. *There is to be in the kingdom of God no Authority, except the Influence of goodness and truth and character.* It is a strange but very Divine correction. Fear no one's ambition, for you are free and none may order you; destroy your own ambition, for the only rulership worth having is the influence which grows out of love and service.

28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

29 And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

30 ¶ And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.

28. Even as the Son of man, etc. He commends His own course, seeking no mastery but what grows of service, and choosing the sovereignty of love alone. Here there is a great deal to ponder. (1) "*It shall not be so among you*" is a great word often quoted in the Romanist controversy, and sufficient of itself to show that the sort of government which Rome has introduced into the Church of Christ is opposed to the will of Christ. Not Government, but Goodness with its informal and unconscious influence, is to be the authority in the Church of Christ. (2) Seek usefulness. *To do the lowliest service that others neglect* should be our aspiration. **The Son of man came . . . to give His life a ransom.** No wonder His thoughts and heart are full of it. **Ransom** is the price given to redeem captive or slave from bondage, or criminal from punishment. The chief secret of Christ's death is—*His life is the ransom for our life.* The suggestions of this statement are very grave. (1) Our life is forfeit. (2) Sin is so great an evil that even God cannot, without sacrifice, free us from it. (3) To let us off without penalty or atonement would make us indifferent to doing wrong. (4) In love to man, God punishes sin. (5) And to save thoroughly, Christ shares with us that punishment. Are we thankful for the great redemption? humbled by the cross? saved by it? Be grave with the Saviour's gravity in your thoughts of sin and of salvation.

AN EXAMPLE OF LOWLY SERVICE.

29-34. The sort of service they should aspire to is immediately shown.

29. Departed from Jericho. Luke says the miracle took place "*as they drew nigh unto Jericho.*" Mark agrees with Matthew. It is not surprising that in small details of matters of which Luke was not eye-witness he should be inaccurate. **Jericho** was in the plain of the Jordan, which Moses thought was like the garden of the Lord (Gen. 13: 10). A city of beauty and luxury; tropical in climate from being a thousand feet below sea-level; a royal residence; a favourite residence of priests, some six miles from the Jordan, and sixteen from Jerusalem, to which the road was a continuous climb.

30. Two blind men. Adversity finds some relief in fellowship. Mark says one of them was Bartimæus, and was a beggar. *Ambition*

31 And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.

32 And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?

33 They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.

34 So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

does not cure *beggars*, but seeks crowned heads to heal. They who cannot see, *hear* that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. What a supreme moment! How well is it when men have presence of mind and heart to seize it! Cried out: misery has its prerogative—to *beg*. Jesus, **Thou Son of David**: they are reverent, and give Him a great Messianic name. **Have mercy**: how well necessity teaches us to pray!

31. **Multitude rebuked them.** With no great impatience, only disliking the din of a needless and fruitless noise. There is still a **multitude** forbidding you to pray; the worldly, the unbelieving, your weakness, your fears, your enemy, all bid you cease crying. **They cried the more.** *We owe a great deal to opposition.* In this case the rebuke of the crowd set the hearts of the blind men arguing. "He can heal; why should He not heal us?" So faith grew bold.

32. **Jesus stood still.** He will serve beggars if they need. Prayer is music to Him, and faith is His delight. **What will ye that I shall do unto you?** How calm, strong, rich in mercy! He still invites our prayer with a word like this.

33. Was ever mercy so simply sought? Six words: **That our eyes may be opened.** *Prayer without argument or excuse is best.*

34. **Compassion** even on beggars fills Christ's heart. Where compassion is, there is always some power of blessing. Christ's compassion is creative and saving. "He heals them. It is a good use they make of this new-found sight—to *follow Jesus in the way.*"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ROYAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

There is an interval apparently between the healing of the blind and the triumphal entry. He rests at Bethany over the sabbath, and on the Saturday a feast is made to Him in Simon's house. The entry takes place on the Sunday preceding the crucifixion; that is, *on the*

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

day on which the Paschal lamb was set apart. It became the Saviour to confess His glory, as it becomes us to confess our shame. By making His entry on this day, He simultaneously asserts His sovereignty and accepts His cross. *Then we claim our crown when we consecrate ourselves to service or suffering on behalf of God or man.*

SIMPLE PREPARATION.

1-3. The site of **Bethphage** can only be gathered from the fact that in Mark and Luke it is mentioned as being reached almost simultaneously with Bethany. **The village over against you** is some spot evidently between Bethany and the summit of Olivet, which were divided by a ridge and valley; while another valley, nearly four hundred feet deep, divided between Olivet and Jerusalem.

2. The Saviour took no thought of the morrow, yet lacks nought He needs—neither ass, guest-chamber, royal unction, nor tomb. They who give up all for God, expect and find that God provides all for them. Our clinging to our own gives us much superfluous care. **A colt.** The Saviour will, as befits His dignity, use an ass which others have not used, as He lies in a tomb in which no man had been laid. The ass was, and is, the favourite animal for use in Palestine, having much more endurance than the horse, being often nearly as big, and fetching nearly as high a price (Tristram, "Natural History," p. 39). There was no idea of meanness associated with it, for judges and kings rode on asses. But the use of an ass was significant of Peace, the horse being used almost exclusively for War.

3. Instructions are precise, and preclude embarrassment. He will only take what the owners will gladly give. *There are more disciples than the disciples know.* **The Lord hath need of them.** How august is the name the Saviour assumes—**The Lord!** It would be overmuch to say His Godhead is asserted here. But His Lordship over all men and things is avowed. Since then the world has owned Him for its Master.

4, 5. One of the grandest of ancient prophecies, uttered so abruptly

6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

(Zech. 9 : 9) that probably none who heard it could quite realize its meaning. It proclaimed that Zion had a King; that He would come to save her (*"He is just, having salvation"*); so meek as to come with peaceful advent, yet so mighty that He should found a vast empire. *"He shall speak peace to the heathen : and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth"* (Zech. 9 : 10). Men have strange glimpses afforded them of the Divine, and visions of hope come to eyes that look. *The advent of a saving King* is a vision which many religions have enjoyed, and all mankind shall find fulfilled.

6. The disciples have faith, and therefore obey. Too many want to see the ass, and read a written promise from the owners, before being willing to go on a message in which they fear they may be made to look foolish.

7. *They find all exactly as He had said.* It will not be the Master's fault if any on His business is disappointed. Put on them their clothes. Extemporized saddle and trappings for the lowly King. Mark and Luke more definitely state the clothes were put upon the colt alone (Mark 11 : 5, 7 ; Luke 19 : 35). They set Him. Following better manuscripts, the Revised Version reads, *He sat thereon.*

THE ROYAL WELCOME.

8. **Great multitude.** The influx of vast numbers at the Passover (Josephus speaks of between two and three millions coming to Jerusalem on a Passover) permitted a great gathering. And the report of the raising of Lazarus at Bethany attracted them there. The report of the healing of the blind man would increase the enthusiasm still further. Besides, the human heart yearns for a Saviour, and is glad to welcome One who seems *"mighty to save."* **Spread their garments.** Fine feelings breed fine manners. There is something courtly, beautiful, poetic, in the welcome given here. As Sir Walter Raleigh laid his velvet cloak on the ground for Queen Elizabeth to tread on, so they carpet the pathway for Him with their cloaks; *some of these cloaks, doubtless, rich and beautiful.* Others strew His path with fronds of palms; while now they greet Him with a royal welcome, and now extemporize hymns of praise in honour of His works of mercy (Luke 19 : 37).

9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David : Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord ; Hosanna in the highest.

10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this ?

11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

9. **Hosanna to the Son of David** is the exact Hebrew equivalent for "God save the Son of David!" Observe, they give Him : (1) A royal greeting. (2) A greeting as Messiah—**He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.** (3) They add (Luke), "*Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest,*" the same feeling filling their souls as filled the angels who sang over Bethlehem. True enthusiasm is always beautiful, lifting men out of themselves and showing them at their best. We have too little of it. *Go forth, thou, and welcome thy King to thy heart-throne with gladness and with trust.* Some may say this enthusiasm was of little worth ; for on the Friday following it was silent, and consented to Christ's death. This is not so ; for the Saviour's death was decided in the night, and took the multitudes by surprise. Probably those who sang "*Hosanna!*" on the Friday were those who "*smote on their breasts*" (Luke 23 : 48), and who subsequently at Pentecost cried, "*What must we do ?*" Matthew does not mention

THE LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM

recorded by St. Luke (19 : 41). It was apparently when, reaching the ridge of Olivet, the sight of Jerusalem in all its glory burst on them, that the Saviour wept over the city. Note these tears, for they have much to tell of the Saviour's love, and of the awful fate of the impenitent. They show it was not vanity that moved His entry in triumph ; that He could forget His own agony in thinking of others' approaching sorrow ; that He sought not His glory, but men's salvation ; that man, by impenitence, can thwart God's mercy.

JERUSALEM MOVED.

10, 11. Not Jerusalem only. The world at large is disturbed, and ever since, generation after generation, land after land, has been asking, **Who is this?** Observe it is an embarrassing question ; men finding it hard to classify the Saviour. They understand philosophers, fanatics, agitators, saints, moralists, but none of these names suit Jesus. He is a class by Himself. Ask thou very reverently, "**Who is this?**" The common reply is very striking : **This is the Prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee (R.V.). The Prophet.** They give Him the highest name they know. They will give Him a name higher still afterwards.

12 ¶ And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

12. He went into the temple of God. At once, and also the next day, when what follows took place (comp. Mark 11 : 12-15). He always goes first to the temple, to meet there in mercy with the true worshippers, to visit with reproof those polluting it. The temple was the heart of Israel. The Church of God is the heart of the world; on its well-being the well-being of all depends. Like Jesus, we should regard religion as the central and supreme matter of well-being, for the individual, the nation, the world.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

follows, the next day, on the morning of which He cursed the barren fig tree (Mark 11 : 12-14). He began His public ministry at Jerusalem by a similar act; and now, at its close, He repeats it. There was more need for such protest than can readily be imagined. Everything connected with the temple seems to have been turned into a source of profit, for the benefit of the chief priests, who appear to have been unscrupulous and godless. The doves were the offering of the poor, who could not afford a lamb. Their market value was less than a fourth of their silver penny. But Annas seems to have developed a monopoly, and charged a gold coin, equal to half a sovereign in weight (Geikie, i. 561), but *in purchasing power worth, say, four pounds of our money*. For changing foreign coins into the half-shekels of the sanctuary they charged from seven to fourteen per cent., making on the exchanges of the Passover feast from £8,000 to £9,000 (Edersheim, i. 561)—worth, say, from £60,000 to £70,000 to-day. This grasping injustice wronged the poor exactly in the degree in which they were devout. The protest was needed, therefore. It is a strange thing that One unarmed should have such resistlessness of aspect and glory that a multitude of coarse men, inflamed with avarice and with anger at His interference, dared not resist! Note: The Saviour cleanses all His temples. He cleanses His Church with fires of persecution; He cleanses *the Heart-temple* by the chastisements of His love. The world is a temple; by His judgments He will cleanse it. *We shall not be allowed to keep a single sin*. The Lord who "*suddenly appears in His temple*" is "*like a refiner's fire*" (Mal. 3 : 2).

14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

15 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeas'd,

16 And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

17 ¶ And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

THE TEMPLE CONSECRATE.

14, 15. The blind and the lame came . . . and He healed them. . . . Children crying, Hosanna. Such healing and such praise were the purest service the temple for long had seen. *That Church is purest which has home charms for the afflicted and the children.*

CHILDREN LEFT SINGING.

Some would have prevented them, though they could endure the lowing of cattle and the cooing of doves and the chink of money, because remunerative, but children's hosannas to the Saviour were not in the temple liturgy.

16. They urge the Saviour to forbid them. But the Saviour has no restraint for them. *He approves and invites their praise.* Though the Greek translation of the eighth Psalm which the Saviour quotes, and the English translation which we have, differ from each other, both are right. It is the Praise whose perfectest utterance comes from the children which is the Strength ordained "to still the enemy and the avenger."

Here we have further lessons on the religion of childhood. According to this, their loving gratitude is the perfectest praise the Saviour receives from earth; and *is a mighty thing in the world*—converting, convincing, spiritualizing multitudes. *There will be a great revival of religion when the childhood of England loves and praises its Saviour.*

A QUIET RESTING-PLACE.

17. Bethany. Very near Jerusalem, but very different. In the city Christ found hatred and plots to slay Him, when He wished to save them. In Bethany He found love, gratitude, and peace. Let your heart be a Bethany. As man rests in God, God still rests in man. And in a world which hates Him, a heart that loves Him is still His quiet resting-place. How brave is Love! Some in the position of the family of Bethany would politely have intimated to Jesus that in ordinary circumstances they would have been glad to entertain Him; but, on the ground of the hostility shown by the

18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

20 And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

chief priests, they would beg to be excused. But *perfect love casts out all sorts of fear*. The more there are around you hostile to Christ, the greater is your opportunity of rendering a great service! After all days of excitement and conflict, seek some quiet Bethany where you can rest and pray.

A PARABLE OF JUDGMENT.

18-20. On that Monday morning He starts for Jerusalem, without breaking His fast. It may be that long ere it was day, He had risen and withdrawn Himself to pray; or, rapt in the contemplation of sins He had to censure, and judgments He had to predict, all Mary's importunity was unavailing to make Him eat. This want of food, or want of power to taste it, shows how absorbing and burdensome were the experiences of this week of conflict. In such circumstances it is common with us suddenly to find the appetite for food arise, in any moment of relief of tension. *The walk in early morning gives that relief, and permits hunger to assert itself.* Simultaneously means of relieving it seems provided, for a noble fig tree (Mark says it was seen "*far off*") appears full of leaves. And as in the fig *the leaves come after the fruit* (Tristram, "*Nat. Hist.*," p. 351), and "*the earliest kind, called Dafour, which means 'ripe before the time,' are ready in Gaza about the end of March*" (Geikie's "*Holy Land and Bible*," i. 180), although the fig harvest was not due for two months (Mark 11 : 13),—the Saviour's *human soul* reasons that this is some specially early tree, having not only leaves when others were bare, but fruit also while the others were only budding. For the Divinity which could snite the tree was *not mixed with* the humanity that hungered for food, but seems to have been *joined to it*, in such a way as that, while omniscience could be exercised *by an effort*, it was not in perpetual use; *but its abeyance left the Son of man, as we are left, to the necessity of reasoning and of trusting; to the sorrows of disappointment, and to the pains of patience.* So, not acting a part, but faint with need, He comes to the tree. None can understand these mysteries; but the great consolation of life is found in recognizing the complete and true manhood of Jesus as joined to complete Godhead. If hunger brings Him to the tree, the sight of it makes Him soon forget the hunger;

for at once He sees in it a figure of that pretentious profession conjoined with utter barrenness that marked Jerusalem; and pity moves Him to give a prophecy in action—a parable in fact. From the great lesson added to this history in St. Mark (11 : 24-26), that miracles are wrought only by prayers of faith and love, it is evident that no impatience or anger impairs the solemnity of His judgment and His warning. But in hope that a Judas may take warning, or some Pharisee repent; that Jerusalem, the great barren fig tree, may see and take warning, He solemnly addresses the tree in the words, **Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.** In connection with this observe : (1) *There is apt to be most pretension where there is least performance.* Those who say, like Laodicea, “*We are rich, and have need of nothing,*” are especially those who are “*miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*” (2) *There are many ways of making profession.* Observance of the forms of Christian life is profession; Church membership is profession; statement of our habit and ways is a profession, and generally a loud one, for no one can easily speak about himself without self-laudation, openly or covertly, coming in; criticism, assumptions of being all right, and fault-finding are professions, loud professions, for to censure others’ faults is tantamount to declaring our freedom from them; and self-defence is sometimes a form of profession. So that the foliage of profession is plentiful in and out of the Church of Christ. (3) *The only ground on which men or things are spared by the judgment of God, is that they yield good fruit.* Man would spare some institutions, because picturesque or ancient or dignified. God’s providence only spares the useful. The question whether we shall fall under that judgment is answered by the answer to another: Are we bearing fruit as His disciples?—loving, serving, blessing others. Where Love is, and the likeness to Christ is, there is endurance and reward. Where only profession is, there is judgment. (4) *The stroke of judgment is swift.* Presently (ver. 19; R.V. immediately). So swiftly that by next morning it was “*dried up from the roots*” (Mark 11 : 20). It is strange with what suddenness destruction comes to undue pretensions. Sudden destruction is the theme of many warnings given by the Saviour and the apostles, and the frequency with which it is realized is noted by multitudes. Fearfulness surprises the hypocrites. It is striking by what slow processes reputations are built up, and by what swift judgments they are brought down. (5) *The angerless judgment of Christ is very solemn.*

JUDGMENT AND PRAYER.

21, 22. There seems at first contradiction rather than connection between judgment and prayer. Yet the connection is explicit here,

21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

23 ¶ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

and more explicit still in St. Mark (11: 10-26), and where the conditions of successful prayer are expressed as being great faith, which can believe it receives what it asks; and great love, that can forgive others when it asks for forgiveness. It is noteworthy that judgments of anger are treated as impossible by that word. We may remove mountains—but only when forgiving and believing. *The power of prayer is essentially a saving power.* And the only judgment the disciples will be able to inflict will be a judgment whose root is love.

POWER OF PRAYER.

21. The only mountains faith desires to remove are such as are substantial obstacles in the path of mercy. It is marvellous how many such have been removed. Enormous evils, like the slave-trade of seventy years ago, like slavery in America; degradation and superstition, like those holding the natives of New Guinea; pride and secularity, like that which seemed to make the conversion of the Roman Empire impossible. There is no impossibility to those who can lay hold on God.

22. Believing is explained by St. Mark's phrase, "*Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*" It indicates that trust which leaves with confidence its desires with God, and knows they will be fulfilled. It is only when the heart is very childlike that its desires are pure and wise enough to be left with God, and faith strong enough to leave them. If there seem but few prayers answered, it only proves that there are few prayers offered. For it is only good prayers that can be really prayed. Many that we "say" do not lift our desires to God and lodge them in His heart. Let this word show us how great a thing is prayer, and how great are its issues. The time for the answer is not pledged, and the manner of it may differ from what we expected; but if we really pray we shall be heard.

AUTHORITY.

23. By what authority doest Thou these things? viz. riding in triumph into the city, clearing the temple, and accusing the rulers. Children when rebuked for naughtiness will ask, "What business have

24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?

you to interfere?" Ahab thought Elijah a troubler of Israel. Mary Queen of Scots asked John Knox who he was in the kingdom that he should criticize her acts. Here the chief priests take the course usually taken by those who feel they cannot justify the faults they will not leave. Note, further, that this is a common question put to the true servants of God. There are always some who think none have a right to do God's work unless some human authority has commissioned them; who think unless a man is in so-called "Holy orders," he may not preach or baptize, or do the work of a minister; and who rebuke others for preaching unordained. The fact that the Saviour had to bear the same rebuke may comfort those subjected to such censures. And the reply which the Saviour proceeds to give involves the true principle of all authority; viz. *that God ordains all whom He fits for any work; that where He ordains, man's ordination is not needed; where He does not ordain, man's ordination is presumptuous and unavailing*; and that, therefore, human ordination is only legitimate and right when it is of the nature of a recognition of God's call—a solemn welcome to and acknowledgment of one already ordained of God.

THE QUESTIONERS QUESTIONED.

24, 25. As tow at the touch of fire, so does the plan which they had made for silencing the great Christ perish at His touch. The question, **The baptism of John, whence was it?** was not merely a rejoinder, but really a reply; for it was the great, near, illustrative case on such a question. No college, no priests, no presbytery, had ordained John to go and preach baptism and repentance. Dare they say he had no authority to preach and to baptize? A case so recent might have kept them from assuming that only those have right to utter God's truth who have man's ordaining. The great question of all ordination is, *Is it from heaven, or of men?* If we have been ordained by Unseen hands for any work, we are ordained indeed. If we are not, and our ordination is merely of men, the imposition of human hands imparts neither the right nor the power to do the work we presumptuously attempt.

THE QUESTION OF SHAME.

25-27. Those who asked one question, hoping to destroy Christ's influence with the people, are now asking another as to how they may save their own. They who needlessly find fault with Christ are now

26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

28 ¶ But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.

29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

showing faults of the grossest kind; for instead of giving the true answer as they feel it, they cast about to find what would be the expedient one. And when they are embarrassed by the difficulty of finding any answer which it would be safe to give, they *tell a lie*: **We cannot tell!** It is to be wished that our translations had preserved more clearly the antithesis between their phrase and Christ's. The correct rendering of the original of their reply is, "*We do not know.*" The Saviour's rejoinder is, "*I do not tell.*" The literal rendering brings out the intimation that He can tell, but will not. But while He will not tell explicitly, He will give to those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, their answer in a parable. In this He contrasts again the Pharisee and the publican, and warns the formalist that professions count for nothing with God.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS.

28-32. In this great parable there is one chief lesson conveyed directly, viz. that there is more hope of the wayward than of the formal; of the wicked than of the self-satisfied. But along with this note the great lessons incidentally given: (1) Some have their badness on the outside, and are much better than their speech and action would let you think. They say, **I will not**; but afterwards, soon afterwards, **repent**, and go. (2) Some have their goodness on the outside, and are much worse than their speech and action would lead you to suppose, They politely say, **I go, sir**; but do not go. (3) *All have in God, a Father.* (4) To every soul God gives some work; not excessive, not shameful: **Go work . . . in My vineyard.** Every one is capable of work for God, of helping forward some of God's great schemes. (5) God's precept always runs, **Work to-day**, not "*to-morrow.*" In the degree in which we regard the spirit of this word will our life be serene, useful, and rich in well-doing. (6) It is a painful picture given us of the impatient. Some do in effect, say to God's face, **I will not.** Oh what an awful thing sin is which moves us to defy and disregard the will of God. (7) It is a sadder picture still which is given us of the formal and the self-satisfied. Some use the phrase and adopt the

31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

attitude of perfect submission to God's control, and yet never do His real will. The whole religion of some persons is decorum, and when they have professed discipleship and joined the Church, they hardly think of doing anything more. They made a profession of "going into the vineyard," but the vineyard owes nothing to their work. Most of us are too ready in making promises, too slow in redeeming them.

31. Publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. This is the great lesson. There is more hope of the wicked than of the self-satisfied. *They have no delusions*; they have an uneasy conscience; "*the way of transgressors is hard*;" the deep yearnings of the soul are not soothed with imaginations of their being "*rich, and increased with goods, and needing nothing*." Learn the lessons: (1) If sinful, not to despair; (2) if religiously respectable, not to be therewith satisfied; (3) to despair not of any, however far they seem from the kingdom of God; and (4) not to overlook the gospel for the Pharisees even here. Christ does not say, "**The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom instead of you,**" but "**before you**"—in front of you, the word used suggesting that *all of them can, and some of them will, follow after them into the kingdom.*

32 links the parable to the occasion. **John came . . . in the way of righteousness.** Therefore with authority given him by God. And if they will study John's authority, they will easily learn "*by whose authority*" Christ comes and gives us His commands.

The following section (vers. 33-46) presents us with a great parable, remarkable in itself and its occasion. The scribes and Pharisees impeach the Saviour, only to find themselves in their turn impeached by Him. He will reply to their inquiry as to the authority by which He cleanses the temple, in a parable that sets forth who He is and who sent Him; and will add to the information they seek about Him, some about themselves. [Note: *It is a grave thing to give way to fault-finding; for he who is apt to blame the faults of others will leave his own unknown and uncured.* The critics of Christ and Christianity are not the saints and philanthropists.] The lessons of this section are very widely applicable. The privilege and danger of England are here

33 ¶ Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

described, and the opportunities and duties of all those who have the light and comfort of the Church of Christ. We note first—

A PLACE OF PRIVILEGE.

33. A vineyard. The vine is the noblest of all plants; needing most care, but repaying it most richly. A vineyard, therefore, is the figure representing a noble charge with its opportunity of enriching the owner and the workmen alike. **Planted . . . hedged . . . winepress . . . tower.** These words describe the complete and perfect equipment of the vineyard. The **Hedge** was usually of thorn. The **Winepress** consisted of two rectangular cavities, one above and larger than the other, hewn in the rock. In the upper the grapes were cast and trodden, and from it the juice flowed into the lower. The **Tower** was the necessary erection for guards to dwell in when fruit was ripe, and danger of losing it considerable. The same figure of "a vineyard in a very fruitful hill" had been long before employed by Isaiah to set forth the privileges of Judah (ch. 5). We are set in a vineyard whenever we are well placed for doing or for getting good. The chief priests and scribes were the husbandmen of God's Jewish vineyard. Ministers and Sunday-school teachers are husbandmen in God's Christian vineyard. Every member of the Church of Christ is a husbandman in God's vineyard. A Christian home is a vineyard. Here the whole opportunity enjoyed by Israel—the possession of Scriptures, of Promises, of Temple, of great Examples and Hopes—made them like men placed in a rich vineyard. *Earth is not all wilderness. There are few who have not in the circumstances of their life a splendid opportunity of winning for God and for themselves a rich harvest.* Do not underrate the value of life, or of duty, or of opportunity. **Went into a far country.** As God seems to do, leaving us apparently to ourselves. God does this that our service may be more free—a thing of faith instead of sight.

34. Mark's version of the parable explains this verse. The servants according to that were to receive, not all the fruit, but of the fruit, the rent being paid in kind. There is responsibility attached to all privilege. If we are placed in any vineyard of opportunity, *we have to pay a rent*, God's mercy imposing duties in connection with all advantages. *There is no representation that the rent is excessive, or seasons bad.* God imposes only such services as can be paid without undue labour. Remember to render His dues.

35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

PRIVILEGE CORRUPTS SOME IT SHOULD HELP.

35. Everything that can be used can be abused. Some grow selfish through abusing a mother's love, and some harden in sin through knowing Christ's mercy. And many are made worse by the privileges God designed to make them better—hardened by wealth, coarsened by health, enfeebled by aids, made proud by talents, and selfish by mercies. *Here we see husbandmen thus spoiled.* They are wayward, selfish, unscrupulous; and, sending the first away empty (Mark 12: 3), they slay others who are sent. The secrets of this wickedness may be found in some such causes as these: (1) They entered the vineyard, probably, with too selfish a purpose, thinking only of advantage to get, not of claims they would have to met. (2) Privilege permitted them to be indolent: to make a living seemed a very easy thing in such a vineyard. (3) The vineyard made them proud of their position, till at last they came to imagine the vineyard their own. *The church privileges of the Jews injured them in this way.* There is a tendency for our church privileges to injure us in the same way. Many, alas! join the Church of Christ selfishly—*only to get a great and infinite gift*, not to render a glad service as well. And many are corrupted by their privileges. Helps are so many, grace so free, salvation so open, that they grow more indolent than they would venture to be outside the Church. And these privileges foster their pride. They deem the English race peculiarly acceptable to God, or think God feels honoured by the attention they give Him. So that there is nothing more common than for those in God's vineyard to think the vineyard is made for them, and to overlook the whole of their responsibility and duty. There are many children placed in the sunniest of vineyards, who get angry when vineyard-fruit of obedience to parents and unselfishness is expected from them. And many members of Christ's Church vineyard grow angry if holiness, confession of Christ, usefulness, is demanded of them. *Become not worse by the mercies and privileges you enjoy.* *Beat* means something worse than flogging. *Stoned* means stoned to death. The worst crimes are done by the most highly privileged. "*It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.*"

THE OWNER'S PATIENCE.

36. We are apt to be impatient, with our vivid sense of our own claims; and to be resentful of any refusal of them. But here, how

37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39 And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will

slow is the Lord of the vineyard to conclude the hopeless evil of these husbandmen! We marvel at so many messages being sent, at such indignities being endured. Embassy after embassy is sent—till at last the son is sent to expostulate with and reform them. The meekness and patience are almost inconceivable in a case in which rights were clear and punishment easy. Such is the Saviour's picture of the infinite and inconceivable patience of God. How He endures our profitless lives, our refusals of love, of service, of obedience! How slow to cast us off! *It is part of God's patience and wisdom to exercise the smallest amount of constraint possible to secure our service.* There is less of compulsion, and less of revelation of His presence, in order that our action may have more of the credit of freedom and of faith. Observe that God's action grows more full the more perversely we withstand it. Is Israel wayward? God expends more and more labour, until He sends His well-beloved Son.

37. His Son. Mark's report is, "*Having therefore one son, his well-beloved.*" The contrast between the Saviour and all previous teachers and prophets is marked here. They were God's servants, He God's Son. Note, that to have the Words, Example, Cross, Mercy-seat, of Christ, is to have *the Great Consummation of saving influences* working on us. **Reverence.** Nothing less than adoration is due to Christ.

GROWTH IN EVIL

is illustrated gravely here. Goodness grows from seed to blade, blade to ear, ear to full corn in the ear. And evil has its similar development. In the sin that "*sends away empty*" (Mark) there does not seem much mischief; but it grows into the sin that slays the Son. Often the faults which in their beginning seem harmless, or even almost sprightly and spirited, end in this awful manner. Beware of the beginnings of evil—of taking liberties with duty; of postponing duty; of scorn; of anger; of wilfulness. There seems little harm in the seed of evil, but it grows thirty, sixty, a hundred fold

JUDGMENT,

40, 41, is God's strange work, but still His work. Vineyards are never left in wicked hands. The transference of privileges, mercies,

let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

45 And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

46 But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

duties, from those abusing or neglecting them to those who will accept them in right spirit, is a matter of daily observation. The casters out are cast out! How much is suggested here! Dread this outer darkness. Note: The Pharisees, without knowing it, pass judgment on themselves.

42, 43. The Saviour will leave them in no doubt as to the authority concerning which they ask. **Stone.** A Corner-stone whose very greatness and majesty made the evil craftsmen refuse it. It becomes the Head of the corner, binding walls together. We may have too much as well as too little reverence for builders—for ministers, church courts, and even sometimes for good men. *The light to guide each comes to each*; we must, therefore, not be dependent on others.

43. The kingdom was taken from Jews and given to Gentiles; taken largely from the Eastern Church and given to the Western; from the Western, when it became corrupt, and given to Protestantism. No denomination can retain it except by *service*.

A SOLEMN WARNING.

44. The Saviour seems in this word to exhort men to heal their quarrel with Himself *before it goes too far*. Even here they that fall on the Corner-stone are broken. Hereafter, if they do not repent, the Stone will fall on them and grind them to powder. Take the strokes and reproofs of Christ, and so avoid the more awful rejection.

INFATUATION.

45, 46. They feel His truth, they see His mercies, yet they plot against His life. In a sort of way they feel, "*This is the Heir,*" and what of perception they have of His greatness makes them the more solicitous to slay Him. Some believe and trust; some (devils) believe and tremble; some (wayward) believe and slay Him. How horrible the guilt to which unbelief and mere waywardness can grow!

CHAPTER XXII.

- 1 And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,
 2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

We have another parable (vers. 1-10) setting forth that combination of mercy and justice which is the glory of God. The last parable showed His hearers their neglect of calls to duty, and the judgment overtaking their abuse of such privilege. This parable points out their neglect of calls to mercy, and the judgment that overtakes abuse of these higher privileges still. The great teaching here given is such as only the Saviour has ventured to impart. None but He has dared to represent Divine mercy as so sublime, and none but He has represented human guilt as so wicked. Observe—

THE WEALTH OF GOSPEL MERCY.

2. A meal is worth accepting, meeting need; a feast is more so, satisfying desire and taste; a marriage feast is the richest of all entertainments; a royal marriage feast is the richest of all festivities. To the eye of Christ it seemed as if God put within reach of all mankind a great feast of fat things—everything which the royal hospitality of Heaven could supply. Some think God's gifts are few and poor. The Saviour, who knew and pitied all human miseries, yet deems the mercy of God an *Infinite Feast*. To understand His estimate, remember He includes duties and guidance amongst the mercies. He sees the pity and love of God within reach of all. He sees the forgiveness offered for all sins; God's sufficient grace; His abounding love; His wealth of mercy and help; the consolations of truth; the bliss of hope; the power of usefulness; death abolished; immortal heaven opened to us. Do not believe your despairing heart or your doubting neighbour when they tell you there is no feast anywhere. *There is a feast of inconceivable delights accessible to every soul.* While it is a subordinate element in the parable, yet note that the great joy of Christ, of God the Father and of man, springs from the Saviour's marriage with His Bride, the Church. *The link that binds Christ to Man is the secret of a bliss that floods heaven and earth.*

3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding : and they would not come.

4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner : my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready : come unto the marriage.

5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise :

6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth : and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

THE STRANGE REFUSAL.

3-6. The bidden. It used to be, and is still, the fashion in the East to give a preliminary invitation, somewhat indefinite as to day and hour, and follow it up with definite intimation when the feast was ready. Israel had been bidden, by long prophetic intimations of the approach of salvation. Strivings of the Spirit "*bid*" many to-day. *All men are "bidden."* In all sorts of hearts there is a Divine moving that leads them to expect some feast of Divine mercy. The highest dream of the prophetic soul is fulfilled in Christ, for at last the tidings come that the feast is ready. But **they would not come.** And when a second message is sent, to take off any reluctance they might feel, they make light of it—scoff at the invitation received, and betake themselves, *by way of excuse*, one to his farm, another to his merchandise ; while some, who will avail themselves of no subterfuge, treat his servants spitefully, and slay them. What a strange response to infinite mercy ! There is something very strange in our wasteful neglect of mercies. Many throw away the happiness of home, the joys of well-doing, the bliss of usefulness, because a little trouble is needed to reach them. It is a great mystery, that so many men never ripen in true manhood. And the conscious resistance of God is a greater mystery still. There is much sin in such action ; sin against God's kindness which would enrich them, against the authority which should control them, and against the patience that has borne with them. They sin against the King and the messengers and themselves. As in the last parable, so in this, the tendency of lighter sins to grow into greater is seriously set forth, by the representation of the levity that refuses, at last resenting, the invitation.

JUDGMENT,

7, unexpected, overtakes them. They had not reckoned that, with one so full of genial mercy, there was any anger to be feared. Like many old and young, they did what pleased them, *without thinking of*

8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

11 ¶ And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

consequences. Always ponder results of actions as well as the pleasure you derive from them. Armies. Very literally was this fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. Sometimes the only mercy God can show men is to destroy them, and prevent their doing further evil. Revere very solemnly everything connected with God, and especially everything connected with salvation. It is a great solemnity to be invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb.

MERCY SEEKS OTHER OBJECTS.

8, 9. We easily grow weary in well-doing. One or two cases in which our kindness has been abused is enough to end our kindly efforts. But the royal heart argues, most trustfully and generously, that others must not be assumed to be so evil. And so, persevering in his efforts to find some he can enrich, he bids them go forth into the highways, and as many as they find to bid to the marriage. There are others who will accept the offer of mercy if we do not. What we in our sinful folly throw away, some, perhaps now heathen, will accept when they hear of it.

THE JOY OF GOD,

10, is complete when He finds the wedding furnished with guests. They gather many willing to be gathered; some that up to this time were **Bad**, who in their remorse turn and repent; some that up to this time were **Good**, and whose goodness aspired after delights that were higher still. A great multitude of all classes and sorts will gather at the marriage supper of the Lamb, to increase God's joy and perfect their own. We are all people of the highways, not seeming capable of being fitted for the palace of a king. But He can fit us; let us see we find our portion amidst its great bliss.

THE GRACELESS GUEST.

11-13. As was natural, the king comes in to see his guests, to greet them with welcome, to enhance their enjoyments, to rejoice in their presence. When his eye, glancing round all, rests on one who seemed an intruder there. There was one who had not on a wedding

12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

garment. It was not his poverty that prevented it; for all, being gathered from the highways, were poor. It was not the haste with which he had come, for all had been gathered with the same haste. Apparently the rule had been followed which obtains still in some parts of the East, to supply all the royal guests with some simple robe, which secures the adornment and perhaps the uniformity of all there. [See quotations in Trench's "Parables."] So, as in our royal palaces the gentlemen will wear "Windsor uniform," and as at English weddings it used to be the fashion for every guest to wear a wedding "favour" or rosette; so all here, out of the royal abundance, were supplied with seemly robe as well as proper food. This man wanted to have the feast without owning allegiance to the king, to have the king's good things without doing the king's pleasure. There was a presumptuous wilfulness in him which wanted palace privileges without conforming to palace ways. So his presence jarred with that of the festive company—was an insult and a challenge. With the calmness of justice and of strength the king inquires, **How camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?** He cannot say it was not offered, or that he had not time, or that he did not know. **He was speechless.** And, by the order of the king, he is bound, and taken away from the light and the feast into the darkness outside, gnashing his teeth with rage and disappointment.

In this section of the parable there is much of very solemn import. We all are tempted to seat ourselves at feasts without right. We want wealth, without industry; respect, without worth; forgiveness, without repentance; heaven, without holiness; salvation, without obligation. So we want all salvation blessings without conforming to God's will. Observe more in detail: (1) *We are very apt to act as this man acted.* The Jews claimed a right to sit down at the king's feast without accommodating themselves to the king's requirements. Many, in pride, insist on having a place in the Church of Christ without repentance or obedience. They want salvation without giving to Christ either acknowledgment or service. Such are guests without a wedding garment. We should beware of the sin of *presumption*, which takes, without repentance, the place and title and hopes of the penitent. (2) *The king's eye reads every heart.* Men may not see the difference between the wedding garment and the ordinary robe, especially when

14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

15 ¶ Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.

16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.

17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?

the latter is a little more ornamental than usual. But God's eye is mocked by no pretence. He reads the heart. (3) Next to the fellowship of God, there is nothing better for the converted than membership in the Church of Christ; but for those without a wedding garment it is hardening and perilous. (4) There is an awful disappointment awaiting all unspiritual Church members. Just in the very hour when it is most important to be safe, and when it is too late to change, discovery and rejection come. (5) Most hypocrites begin by deceiving themselves. Let all fellowship with the Church of Christ be a matter of grave solemnity. *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.”*

MANY CALLED, FEW CHOSEN,

14, is again, as in ch. 20: 16, the phrase in which Christ's grief is uttered and His warning given. The **“Many”** here are the cityful of murderers and despisers who refused His offer. We are amongst the **many called**; let us lay our opportunity to heart, and be also amongst the **few approved**.

15-16. We have here recorded a striking conflict between Subtlety and Innocence. Craft is ever one of the arts of the wayward; they who believe in it find it needful to employ it. At first sight it seems as if the children of truth and simplicity must be at the mercy of the unscrupulous. What happens here should reassure us. *If we are true-hearted and transparent no craft will avail against us.*

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE.

16. Their disciples with the Herodians. Usually these two sets of men were at variance, the Pharisees being extreme *“Nationalists,”* if one may so call them; while the Herodians were Sadducees without any high enthusiasm for their nation and their religion, and were wishful only to secure the sovereignty of Herod over the whole country (*he had no jurisdiction in Judæa*) under the sanction of Rome. I suppose they came to the Saviour, as if for the solution of a matter they had been arguing—will Jesus settle their dispute?—**Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar?** as the Herodians have been urging; *“Or is it*

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

not lawful?” as the Pharisees have been trying to prove. The point of the scruple lay in the fact that, according to the ideal of Israel, *God was Israel's King*, and to pay tribute to Rome seemed like admitting another master. [Note generally: that we should *prima facie* suspect all scruples that move us to refuse to give or pay; for Conscience, backed by Self-interest, is apt to be over-sensitive.] The snare seems very dangerous. If He declares against the lawfulness of the tribute, they can accuse Him to Pilate; if He asserts it, the stricter Nationalists can denounce Him as traitor to the hopes of Israel. **Thou art true**, etc. A worthy description of the Saviour, condemning those who uttered it for the designs which it covered. Sometimes craft will cover its designs with flattery. But the Saviour had no vanity through which flattery could work its mischief.

THE UNEXPECTED REPLY.

18. It is a grave thing to oppose the Saviour, as these men discover. Their flattery does not deceive, their question does not disturb Him. It was rather awkward for their credit, that One whose truth and uprightness they so commend should say, **Why tempt ye Me, ye hypocrites?** A word all the more terrific because spoken in calmness, and not in rage! It was more awkward still when He replies to their inquiry.

19. **Shew Me the tribute money:** a silver coin somewhat larger than a sixpence.

20. **Whose . . . image and superscription?** Simon Maccabeus and his successors had issued a Jewish coinage of shekels and half-shekels, with their portraits and names on their coins. When the long fight for independence which they maintained ended in the rule of Rome, the coinage of Rome came in. Like a rupee in India to-day with the portrait of our Queen, this coinage told of a complete subjection. Indeed, it was an accepted principle that he was king whose image was on the coinage of the land. The production of the coin therefore proved the fact that the Emperor of Rome was the monarch of Judæa. But the demand of this silver penny, *one for each individual*—a tax equivalent, say, to five and twenty shillings per family to-day—was irritant both from its amount and from the way in which it brought home to each individual his subjection to Rome. What will the Saviour

21 They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

22 When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

23 ¶ The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,

24 Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother:

26 Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.

27 And last of all the woman died also.

28 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.

say—without time to consider *His reply*—to their artful question, on a matter, one would fancy, remote from His line of thought?

21. Unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's. The Government stamp implies the Government right to tax. Moreover, there is a recognition of the fact that the worst order is better than anarchy, and any rule sufficiently good to be endured by the majority is better than nothing, and is worth its cost. We must not be over-scrupulous in charging ourselves with responsibilities not belonging to us. The tax we pay in England may sometimes be used in an unjust war, or in supporting an unwise policy. We are not, therefore, at liberty to withhold it. Civil order is a thing so priceless in its protection of the weak and its securing of justice to all, that the State, so long as it deals without gross partiality, has a right to claim of each the sacrifice of his life in its defence, and therefore much more the contribution of his property. But while we have to give to Cæsar that which bears his image and superscription, we have to give to God that which bears His image and superscription, viz. *the soul that He has redeemed.*

22. They marvelled. As mankind has ever since marvelled at His words.

THE QUESTION OF THE SCEPTICS.

23-28. Sadducees. In all ages there are unbelievers. The indolent nature cannot believe in the activity of God; the selfish cannot believe in His love; the indulgent, in His self-sacrifice. *There must, therefore, be unbelievers.* They are generally unconscious of the secret of their own unbelief, believing it to be due to knowledge, science, or independence. In the earlier history of Israel the same unbelief led men to the adoption of heathenism, whose popular deities have ever been indifferent or indulgent. Since the days of Ezra, however, unbelief

29 Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

had found a more respectable form of expression in Sadduceism; the Sadducees professing to retain all the important matters of the national religion, viz. its laws, and to reject all the incredible matter in it, viz. its doctrine of immortality. **No resurrection.** The most universal of all beliefs seems to be that in Immortality; and from an early period both in Egypt and in Persia this doctrine was completed by a doctrine of the restoration of the body to the soul. The later Judaism had accepted this great doctrine; the Sadducees alone denying it, as they denied generally God's Providence and His interest in our individual lives, and therefore necessarily denied any form of the doctrine of Immortality. Some of this sect had found or imagined a case which they suppose would render resurrection equally embarrassing to the great Disposer of the dead and to those restored by Him to life. It is founded on the regulation of Moses that the childless widow of a man might claim his brother as a husband, or if there was no brother his nearest of kin. On his refusal, but not till then, she was free to marry whom she would (Deut. 25 : 5-10). The usage exists to-day in Arabia and in the Caucasus, and Captain Burnaby came across it in Central Asia in his ride to Khiva. This regulation supplies their unbelief with *the difficulty*, which unbelief always argues from. They imagine seven brothers (conveniently) unmarried. The first marries—dies, leaving a childless widow; the second, as in duty bound, marries, but shortly dies, leaving her again a childless widow. Seven times she knows the sorrow of childless widowhood. All seven stand equal in their claim to her, none being barred by having any other wife, and none having the special right which might have come if he had been the father of a child born to her. In such circumstances, **In the resurrection whose wife shall she be?** How many forget that all life is a cluster of unanswerable question; that Birth, Thought, and Motion are mysteries unfathomable; and that any one can ask questions that none can answer? These men fancy God one like themselves, who would be turned from His purpose of raising men from the dead by difficulties of this sort.

THE GREAT REPLY,

29-33, comes explicit, prompt, conclusive.

29. They **err**, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. The Bible (Scriptures) and Science (the knowledge of the power of God) conjointly fit the soul for large faith and blessed hope. Those who know neither are the great doubters.

30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying,

32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

33 And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.

30. Their difficulty rises from vulgar assumptions that the conditions of the next world are virtually the same as here. But where there is no death, there is no need for the arrangements necessary here to keep the world peopled. There will, therefore, be love, but not marriage—the perfect affection which knows no jealousy nor exclusive possession of affection. Incidentally by the words, *They are as the angels*, He rebukes the error which believed in “*neither angel nor spirit*” (Acts 23 : 8). [Note : in Scripture phraseology, men “*marry*,” women are “*given in marriage*.”]

32. And having shown that the difficulty imagined exists only in imagination, He proceeds to make a marvellous quotation. Of all phrases on their lips, the name of God, as **The God of Abraham, . . . Isaac, . . . and Jacob**, would be one of the most common. It is, alas ! in all ages the case that often we know least of those things with which we are most familiar. And here the Saviour finds in this phrase employed by God a proof of immortality ; for if Abraham has the eternal God as his Portion, his Friend, and his Saviour, must he not be immortal ? If God becomes *ours*, we must be immortal to possess and to enjoy this immortal wealth. So, four hundred years after Abraham is dead, God says, **I am the God of Abraham. The dead, the merely mortal, cannot possess Him. Only the Living, the immortal, can have and can enjoy the Lord.** Several points here are noteworthy : (1) The Saviour and the Sadducees both feel that immortality implies resurrection. If there is to be a future existence, it will not be a mutilated and imperfect one. (2) Every great estimate of human nature moves us to believe in immortality. (3) *It is a fact that God is the God of those who trust Him in a special sense—covenanting to keep them ; entering their hearts ; dwelling in them ; giving to them the forces of His life. They in whom God is can never die.* (4) Remember your own immortality, and put nothing into your character which it might be an immortal misery to feel or an immortal shame to see. (5) Let God be “*thy God*,” as He desires. To this sort of argument they can make no response. Its majesty and greatness overpowers them. Yet probably while silenced they remained unconvinced. Let us remember God has great and easy answers for all our doubts.

34 ¶ But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law ?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

The trial questions on the duty of the citizen and the hope of the saint having been answered, they attempt a third on the question of religious morals. Matthew and Luke both treat this new question as a *temptation*. But Mark records the word of Christ to the effect that His questioner was "*not far from the kingdom of God.*" There is no difficulty in understanding how both representations are true. The Pharisees would naturally get the best and most guileless man they could to ask the question, he asking in sincerity what they craftily moved him to ask. The new inquiry is on

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT.

34-36. To us it seems an innocent and necessary question. But doubtless meant to elicit what was essential to salvation, it was a question as full of controversy as that of faith and works was at the Reformation, or the question of the Church is in the Catholic theology of to-day. The tendency of a legal religion is always to reduce the commands of God to a dead level ; or, rather, to make much of the smaller matters of religion, and to make little of the larger. It seemed to many mere ordinary piety to obey the commands of God, but extraordinary presumption to neglect the traditions of the elders. Accordingly, the test they would apply would often be one of conventional observance of the small ordinances of man, rather than spiritual regard for the ordinances of God. So while some looked upon circumcision, and some on the sabbath, and some on sacrifices, as the great commandment, others regarded "*the tassels,*" or the blue hem of the garment—which was the Jew's outward avowal of his nationality and religion—as the main element of duty. The Saviour can hardly answer this question without in some way conflicting with the legal spirit which had reduced all religion to Ritualism.

THE SUPREME DUTY.

37. Thou shalt love the Lord. This is one of the marvellous utterances of the Word of God. It assumes so many things : (1) That God can be known ; (2) is full of qualities which should endear Him to us ; (3) that we are capable of a great affection ; (4) that on

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

41 ¶ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.

our being right with God everything else depends. What a gospel there is in this word! What a beautiful ideal of life that heaven and earth should be linked together in love! **With all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.** Heart stands for all the affections; Soul, for all the energies and purposes of our nature; **Mind**, for all the intellect and perception. Feeling, Will, and Reason should blend in one love of God.

39. The Saviour adds a further answer, concerning the second greatest commandment: **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**, which pairs well with the other. **As thyself** means that we should seek the pleasure and the well-being of our neighbour exactly as much as our own. Here also are many things of importance: (1) The affection that is fit to be given to God—**Love**—is not too good for man, *there being something divine in Him*. (2) That in all men something lovable is to be found, it being merely our neighbour, *i.e.* any one living "*nigh*" us, who is thus to be loved. (3) That all of us are capable of love, and may develop the feeling of affection by doing the deeds of kindness. These two precepts are taken from two different portions of the Law—Deut. 6: 5 and Lev. 19: 18.

40. Every utterance of duty, found in either Law or prophets, is but an expansion or amplification of these. These are therefore the essence of religion and of duty. Faith has its special glory that it makes such love possible. All Christians need this lesson; for (1) few have sufficient affection for God and for man, and (2) our affections rarely possess the character suggested by the use of the same word "*Love*," to express the duty in both directions. Our love toward God should be more like our love to man, *i.e.* *more affectionate than it is*; our love toward man should be more like our love to God, *i.e.* *more reverent than it is*.

THE QUESTIONERS QUESTIONED.

41-46. Three answers having been given—covering the philosophy of citizenship, of immortality, and of goodness—no man from that day forth durst ask Him any questions (ver. 46). He has been asked concerning the essence of the Law; He now asks concerning the essence of the gospel.

42. **What think ye of the Christ? (R. V.) whose Son is He?** The Revised Version reads **The Christ** with manifest propriety. The

- 43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,
 44 The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?
 45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?
 46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

Son of David. The ordinary answer, by which many meant, not only a descendant of, but such another as David.

43. The stress of the question now comes. If merely Son of David, and no more, how are all the great Divine energies foretold of Him by the prophets to be fulfilled? How is it David himself calls Him "Lord" in the 110th Psalm, and sees Him seated on God's right hand? Men in great multitudes, and especially in Israel, have kept believing in and hoping for a Saviour, near as a son of David, strong as a Son of God.

45. How is He, then, His Son? *i.e.* merely His Son. All generations have wanted, and we want, "*a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*" We must cleave to the doctrine of the Godhead of the Saviour.

46. They dare not question Him, for that would invite confusion and shame; *but they dare to plot against His life!*

CHAPTER XXIII.

1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

1-22. We have here the great denunciation of hypocrisy, an address which made men feel as if a day of judgment had overtaken them. The vice of hypocrisy is probably not so prevalent in our age as in that; for that age combined the maximum of formalism with the minimum of reality; and every age differs somewhat from every other in its form of evil. But it still exists; for wherever there is sterling coin there will be its counterfeit. And many with no intention of falsity, will yet maintain habits and ways after the feelings which originated them have died away, and so become hypocrites. The pretentious words in which we describe our good deeds, foster this fault. So that every one of us partakes in some degree of it. Penitently, therefore, let us consider these words.

THE LEADERS DETHRONED.

1-3. It is not a duty to be lightly undertaken to deprive men of

2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat :

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do ; but do not ye after their works : for they say, and do not.

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders ; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men : they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

their leaders ; and indeed it is only right and safe when the leaders lead wholly astray, as here.

2. Scribes stood highest in repute for understanding and teaching the law and truth of God ; Pharisees for observing it. It is not with professional expositors and professed saints that either the best wisdom or goodness is to be found.

3. Whatsoever they bid you . . . that . . . do. Observe how solicitous the Saviour is that emancipation from the lawyers shall not issue in license to neglect the Law. Though what they bid be a "heavy burden" (ver. 4), the Saviour charges them to do it. It is safer and wiser to obey too much than too little ; to keep the Law plus all the traditions of the elders, than to neglect the Law altogether. It is an awful condemnation of preacher or teacher if the Saviour has to bid men regard his lessons, but beware of his example. The verses which follow give the reasons why the Saviour denounces hypocrisy as so great a sin.

HYPOCRISY IS A HARD TASKMASTER.

4. In ch. 7 : 1-5 the Saviour warned against censoriousness, on the ground that the censorious are always hypocrites, *i.e.* they pretend to more character than they have. Here the converse is stated, that hypocrites are always hard taskmasters. Their religion is servile and without feeling. They therefore multiply duties, restrictions, and penances, for the sake of making souls feel their mastery—sometimes for the price paid them for their absolutions. Most of us are hypocrites in this, that we exact more from others than from ourselves. We blame others' faults heavily and our own gently. **Shoulders—Fingers.** You can carry, say, a hundredweight on your shoulder, a pound on your finger. So the hypocrite gives you a hundredweight of duty to carry, while refusing to burden himself by carrying a pound. *This is not exaggeration ;* for the hypocrite interdicts to himself neither pride, anger, nor selfishness ; nor even impurity, provided it is secret.

HYPOCRISY LIVES ONLY FOR PRAISE OF MAN.

5-7. The true man says, "*My record is on high*" (Job 16 : 19), careless of what man may say or judge concerning him ; but the only eye

6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,
 - 7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

the hypocrite regards is that of man. **Phylacteries.** The word means a protection, *i.e.* a charm. The thing was a little square leather box, containing four strips of parchment, each with a portion of Scripture (Exod. 13: 1-10, 12-16; Deut. 6: 4-9; 11: 13-21). Four] times God urges that His Law should be a "*a token upon the hand,*" and a "*frontlet between the eyes,*" *i.e.* that the Law should preside over our judgment and our desires (the eyes), and over our action (the hand). The Jews in later ages took these words literally, as meaning that the precepts immediately associated with this phrase in each place where it occurs should be thus tied near the hand and near the eyes! They accordingly made, and still make, these leathern boxes, and wore them whenever they went into the synagogue to pray. They had innumerable rules as to their position and fastening. That on the head was to be fixed "where the pulse of an infant's brain is" (Lightfoot, ii. 232), on the theory that its influence would enter the brain; that for the hand was to be fixed with seven thongs on the left arm above the elbow, whence its influence could reach the heart! It was considered a good protection against evil spirits to wear them at night. The wearing of a cross by Catholics is a somewhat similar usage. Some trust to the charm who do not cling to the Saviour; and some wear who do not bear the cross. **The borders of their garments.** The robe had a *fringe*, and immediately above the fringe one or two threads of blue were wrought into the web. This blue cord and the fringe were ordained of Moses as a distinctive mark of the Jew; and all wore them. The Pharisees enlarged the blue cord, and made it a stripe. *Too much profession is not good.*

6. Uppermost are best rooms.

7, 8, 9. Rabbi—Master—Father are the three terms by one or other of which the scribes were generally addressed, and are names common to many religions. "Abbot," "Padre," "Pope," all mean "Father." The true leader says ever, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (John 3: 30), and sends men to Christ to learn, helping them to reach Him; binding their conscience to obey Him alone; assuming no mastery, but overshadowed by the Lord He proclaims. The false leader asserts prerogative and requires submission.

8. All . . . brethren. The prohibition of all priestliness is here. *It is well to remember that the name priest is never in the whole Bible applied to a Christian minister.* Ministers and teachers are only such as have

9 And call no man your father upon the earth : for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

10 Neither be ye called masters : for one is your Master, even Christ.

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased ; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

13 ¶ But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer : therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

and use gifts by which the Church can be enriched. They have no *authority*.

11. Usefulness is the only greatness in Christ's kingdom ; lowliness the secret of all honour.

THE MISCHIEF OF HYPOCRISY

is shown in the remainder of the chapter, which is addressed directly to the Pharisees.

13. *They prevented men entering the kingdom.* Nothing is so injurious to religion as unspiritual leaders. If we enter the kingdom, we thereby help others to enter. If we remain outside, we keep others outside also. What a solemn word for ministers, parents, and teachers. Enter the kingdom, follow holy paths of mercy and of faithfulness, and others will go with you. Stand outside, and you will keep others outside !

14 is omitted rightly by the Revised Version following the best manuscripts. It seems to have been copied in from Mark 12 : 40.

15. *Their very zeal to convert men cursed them.* Judaism made multitudes of converts, and blessed the world by doing so. The earliest converts to the gospel were from this class, e.g. the centurion of Capernaum, Cornelius, Lydia, and others. Generally the Jew was satisfied when men became "*Proselytes of the Gate*," as they were termed. [*"Devout," "One that feared God,"* are also technical terms applied to this class.] Such merely accepted the Jewish creed, observed the moral law and "*the precepts of Noah*," as they were termed (Acts 15 : 29), and attended the synagogue services. But the Pharisee's pride was when he could induce a Gentile to become a "*proselyte of righteousness*," i.e. one who accepted circumcision and became in all points a Jew, accepting every precept of the Law. The argument chiefly used was the sufficiency of outward observances to secure

16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

salvation; and the constraint moving them to accept these observances was the natural remorse following after crime and sin. Hence their converts were generally the worst of men, who took refuge, not in the Lord God of Israel, but in rites and observances which they thought would save them. *To the vices of a heathen they added the presumptuousness of a Jew. And Jewish and heathen literature alike abounds in testimonies to their depravity.*

16-22. They still further injured men by their casuistry. To understand perfectly the allusions here is, perhaps, hardly possible. But we shall be helped by remembering that apparently falsehood was so common, that people did not expect to be told the truth; that in order to be believed, they had to utter imprecations on themselves, calling God to witness, and asking all sorts of judgments "if" what they said was false, or what they promised was left undone; that their duplicity directed itself to discovering oaths that sounded awful, but were safe to make and break. Thus from Martial (xi. 94, quoted by Alford) we learn that they were always ready to swear to any falsehood by Jupiter, not believing that he could do them either good or ill. The scribes increased this habit of false swearing by speculating on what oaths were most binding. It is not easy to understand why the gold of the temple should have more binding power than the temple, or the gift on the altar than the altar. Perhaps the *fresh gifts* were thought to have more of the presence of God, than buildings or altars long erected. Whatever the reason may be, the Saviour here lays down the great rule that *Every oath calls God to witness*, whether it names Him or not; and the falsehood that profanes it will be visited by Him.

On the whole subject of hypocrisy observe: (1) We should beware of all secretiveness. There are few faults so likely to debase the nature and produce gravest faults.

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

(2) We should earnestly endeavour to speak and live the truth. *It is very difficult to do so; but hardly anything carries a greater blessing.*

(3) We should beware of too much profession. In the Church we profess only pollution (in Baptism), and hunger (in the Lord's Supper). *Confess Christ; do not profess thyself.*

(4) The great cure of all tendency to hypocrisy is to live beneath the eye of God, with its infinite comfort and constraint.

The Saviour continues His rebuke of hypocrisy, dealing with its folly, deceit, and fate. *As this is a vice specially besetting all who inherit a religious creed and life, which they are unwilling to let go, but have not devotion enough to keep up—a sin, therefore, easily besetting those who have Christian homes and Christian training,—we should give special heed to the Saviour's lessons on it. Christ gives four great characteristics of hypocrisy, and closes with an expression of infinite pity over those whose waywardness and arrogance prevented His saving them. He first teaches us—*

HYPOCRISY CONCERNS ITSELF WITH THE SMALL THINGS OF RELIGION.

23, 24. Its ideas of what men should do go in such directions as tithing **Mint**; and its ideas of what men should avoid go in such directions as avoiding the drinking of unstrained wine or milk, lest they should incur ceremonial pollution by touching the dead body of a gnat. The little things in religion and in duty are the great things to the hypocrite. If tithes of all agricultural produce are required, he will gather every tenth stalk of **Mint** in his garden, and of **Anise** ("dill") and **Rue**, the seasonings for kitchen use; and all the more readily perhaps because extreme punctiliousness will not cost more than a few pence. But while punctilious on **Mint** and **Anise**, he will neglect **Judgment**, *i.e.* justice and fair dealing, **Mercy**, **Faith** in God and in man; in a vain imagination that he is already proficient in these things. And while carefully **Straining out** (not "at") the gnats, whose power of pollution is infinitesimal, he will gulp down evils large as camels in their power to defile. Observe the Saviour's lesson. He does not forbid the care for any little things felt to be duties. **These ought ye to have done**, He says of the greater matters; and concerning

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

the lesser duties, forbids our leaving the other undone. Hypocrisy always concerns itself with the small things of religion—Doctrines instead of Life; Customs instead of Character; Proprieties instead of Love. Remember to slight no scruple of conscience, but above all things put Equity, Mercy, Faith, as the chief things in religion, and give supremest attention to these.

HYPOCRISY DEALS WITH EXTERNALS CHIEFLY.

25-28. The outside of the cup and of the platter occupies the thoughts of hypocrites; but they have no objection to fill the platter by means of extortion and of fraud; or to take the cup so often to their lips that they are drunken with excess. In ver. 26 the Saviour counsels them to make the inside clean with kindly equity and moderation, and it will be of little matter what the state of the outside is. Neglecting these greater things, they are like tombs beautiful without, but full of uncleanness within. Hypocrisy is always great on *Externals*. It would not permit men to be healed on the sabbath day, but it did not refrain from plotting on the sabbath to slay Christ. It shrank from the defilement incurred by entering Pilate's judgment hall, but cried "*Crucify Him!*" without any scruple. Pharisees and inquisitors alike are ready to slay men for neglecting the traditions of men, while themselves regardless of the promptings of God. *Ritualism is ever intolerant. Devotion is always kindly.* Look to the heart of religion, to what links us to God and to the likeness of God. It is a symptom of hypocrisy when the outward takes precedence of the inward.

HYPOCRISY REVERES ONLY WHAT IS DEAD.

29-32. God is a living God, and speaks with living voices to living souls. And he who has ears to hear will always find some living message leading him to duty and to God. But hypocrites resent the living prophets; and the only ones they own and revere are the dead.

30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

34 ¶ Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes : and some of them ye shall kill and crucify ; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city :

35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

Outward respect and distant reverence for the dead is so much cheaper than obedience to the good who are living, and adoption of their ways, that the hypocrite is apt to be always a great builder of sepulchres. He likes to cover himself with the dignity of association with the names of the great and good. *It is a bad sign of any when they acknowledge none good but dead saints, and none sound but dead theologians.*

30. It is always easy to say what we would or would not have done in other circumstances, and take credit to ourselves for it. But they who resist living goodness would have done the same to the goodness they now reverence had they lived with it.

31. From a similar passage in St. Luke (11 : 48) we see the force of our Lord's reproach : "*They indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.*" *They murdered, you bury.* There are a score of things we can do to departed prophets. We can study them, learn the meaning of their message, obey it, follow them to God, seek some of the same anointing, purge ourselves of the sins which they denounce. The last and poorest thing to do with them is to garnish the tombs. They who can do nothing better than that would have slain them, as their fathers did. Take no credit to yourself for your reverence to departed and distant goodness. The test of men is how they deal with the goodness beside them—whether they revere and copy, or resist and persecute it.

HYPOCRISY FINDS A FEARFUL JUDGMENT.

32-36. We might expect so. It so pollutes God's temple and brings disgrace on His Name, is so presumptuous and injurious, that of all judgments, that of the hypocrite is the greatest. The hypocrisy of that generation was punished by : (1) *Being left to itself.* Fill ye up . . . the measure. They would continue and increase in all that was evil. Still slaying prophets, killing, crucifying, persecuting (ver. 34).

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

Things falling move with an ever-accelerating speed, whether they are matter or souls. This tendency to go on, and go on more wickedly, in evil is the chiefest part of its retribution. (2) By outward penalty added to their abandonment. The suspended judgment of Judah at last will fall, the heavier for being postponed. And the revelation of God's wrath against all *resisters of good*, from Cain down to those who slew the last great martyr, will take place. We inherit blessings from the good who preceded us when we follow them, and we inherit woes from the wicked who preceded us when we follow them. (3) There is an individual penalty for each—the **Damnation of hell**. [Note, the Zacharias here mentioned is either the Zacharias whose martyrdom is mentioned in 2 Chron. 24 : 20-22, or some later martyr of whom we are ignorant.]

On the whole of this denunciation observe: (1) How easily we may drift into hypocrisy. The small and the outward things in religion are those always most readily taken to by those who want to have its advantages at smallest cost. Formalism tends to hypocrisy.

(2) *Few hypocrites know they are such.*

THE UNEXPECTED LAMENT.

37-39. How strange that the sweetest word of Divine pity should be spoken over the greatest manifestation of evil the world has seen! We may call down on us the Saviour's judgments, but we cannot destroy His love. To the last God pities us, and mourns over the fate which our sin necessitates. Tenderness like that with which a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, is such as would make us marvel if shown by God to the holiest and best. But here the Saviour is found lamenting that they will not let Him show such love to them in the midst of all their wickedness and hypocrisy. There is always love for us in one heart at least—the heart of Christ; and always help for us, if we seek it there. Ye would not. The free-will of man is an awful gift. We may, if we will, frustrate the Saviour's endeavour to save us.

38. *Left . . . desolate.* When Christ forsakes any land, city, temple, or heart, it is desolate. Henceforth this was the state of the temple, their holy and beautiful house—God-forsaken. *This is His farewell of the temple*, as the commencement of next chapter shows. It is a fearful moment in the history of any soul when it is "*left desolate.*"

39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

39. This verse sets forth two, perhaps three, things : (1) That the sequel of His abandonment of Israel will be one of anguish. There will be experiences which will make them regret their brighter days and their loss of better privileges. (2) Some who reject the Saviour will be brought to wish they had some renewal of His offers of mercy. And perhaps a third : (3) That some who are thus more graciously affected will "see *Him again*," and give the welcome they once refused. Happy the man in whom God's judgments at last work the great repentance !

CHAPTER XXIV.

1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple : and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

A great and solemn chapter, which combines the grave prophecy of a coming of Christ in providence to destroy Jerusalem, with a graver prophecy still of His coming in glory to judge the world. The former part has been fulfilled in every detail of awful horror ; the latter still awaits fulfilment. Human history is not a drift without plan, issue, or finish. Christ will come again, and in judgment complete and round off His work of salvation. The recognition of the world's relation to a living God, who guides, aids, and will at length judge man, is the corrective at once of evil and despair. This is the most difficult chapter in the Gospels to expound. One reason seems to be that what the Saviour said of the final judgment of Jerusalem and what He said of the final judgment of the world at large are not sufficiently separated in the report. Some (like Stier) have treated vers. 1-29 as exclusively occupied with the judgment on Jerusalem, and vers. 30-51 with the judgment on mankind. But such treatment requires straining. We must leave the difficulties unsolved, believing that, in a fuller report, all would have been clear ; meanwhile being thankful for what is clear.

1-35. "*Your house is left unto you desolate*," said the Saviour in ver. 38 of the previous chapter, and forthwith **Jesus went out, and departed from the temple** (ver. 1)—that departing producing this desolation. The disciples, apparently reluctant to admit the despair suggested by Christ's words, seek to engage Him in admiration of the

2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

3 ¶ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

marvellous building; point out its "stones"—perhaps the huge foundation stones, some of which were seventy feet long; perhaps the marble cloisters, or the marble pavements of the courts, that rose one above the other, leading up to the Holy Place, on which was reared the temple proper. His response is an intimation of the coming fate of Jerusalem, in which every stone would be thrown down. Thereupon the great question which curiosity ever puts, "*When shall these things be?*" elicits this chapter of predictions of judgment. In this chapter the dark side of judgment is described; in the next, the bright side. The bright is very bright; the dark is very dark and solemn. The first great subject brought before us is—

THE INCREASE OF SIN AND SORROW FOLLOWING THE REJECTION OF CHRIST (vers. 1-14).

2. Not one stone left on another. After taking Jerusalem Titus ordered the temple to be cast down; and the site of Jerusalem was ploughed over.

3, 4. When—Take heed. The curiosity which wants the dates of God's secrets exposes itself to the possibility of great deception. Be solicitous rather to know to-day's duties than to-morrow's experiences. **When shall these things be? and what . . . the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world.** They—and the writer of the Gospel with them—seem to think these two events will be simultaneous, that the judgment on Jerusalem will usher in the final judgment on mankind. The Saviour does not gratify the curiosity which asks **when**, but proceeds to display the raging force of evil of all kinds which those rejecting Him will feel.

5. Misery will find itself mocked by false comforters and false Christs, who trade on what they pretend to cure, and increase what they promise to end.

6. In the great war which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem every city was divided into hostile parties, and wars abounded everywhere.

7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Generally, peoples that reject the Prince of Peace are prone to wars and strife.

7. Stier enumerates seven earthquakes, each affecting large districts, occurring in the generation immediately preceding the destruction of Jerusalem.

8. **The beginning.** If these are only slender beginning, what will the full measure be?

9. Wickedness will rage in all hearts and communities rejecting Christ. We cannot be negative characters. Resist Christ, and your resistance becomes resentment and hatred, and increases all wildness and all waywardness. It was an awful opening of the heart to all hellish influences when Israel crucified her Saviour. **Hated**:—The Master's lot, the disciples' lot. Christians come in for little hatred now; partly because the world is so much more Christian, but partly because Christians are more worldly than they ought to be.

10. To be hated is to be in danger. And many disciples will fall before this danger—will be **offended**, *i.e.* will "*fall*." Be very watchful and prayerful if disliked for righteousness' sake; for you will be greatly tempted either to murmur against God for exposing you to hatred, or to despise and dislike man for returning evil for your good. **Be offended, and betray**; the apostate is the Church's hardest enemy. *Fall, and you will hate those that remain firm.*

12. **Love. . . wax cold.** It is hard in sinful times to walk close with God. There are such excuses for evil and such provocation, that the spirit is worn with its uphill fight.

13. **Endure.** A great word. Enduring is the secret of all progress, achievement, and victory. It is one of the most essential qualities, for when the novelty of religion wears off, when saintliness is hard, when grace seems insufficient, and doing good only attracts hatred,—there is a sore temptation to faint and turn aside. **Mark**: *It is possible for the feeblest to endure to the end, even in worst circumstances. It is necessary as well as possible. It is crowned with the reward of everlasting salvation.*

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

16 Then let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains:

17 Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house:

18 Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.

19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

20 But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:

14. Preached in all the world. This is the one bright feature of the darkest times. Israel may reject Christ—others will welcome. One candlestick will not be removed before another is raised and lifts the light on high. If Zion is to be overthrown, another Zion will be found. Then shall the end come. When mankind knows its Saviour the ripeness of its good and of its evil will come on apace.

WITH EVERY TEMPTATION COMES A WAY OF ESCAPE.

It was so in the great siege of Jerusalem. "Before John of Giscala had shut the gates of Jerusalem, and Simon of Gerasa had begun to murder the fugitives," it was possible to escape from the doomed city (Farrar, "Life of Christ," ii. 262). *And the Christians did so, remembering the warning here recorded (and more clearly in St. Luke 21:20), and fled (as Eusebius, the Church historian, relates) to the little town of Pella in Peræa.* There is always some way of escape and some help even in direst temptation, for God reigns. These verses predict such a season in Jerusalem's calamities, and such like seasons in all times of sore trial.

15. Abomination of desolation. Luke's equivalent phrase is "*Jerusalem compassed about with armies*" (ch. 21:20).

16. Mountains. Either the wilderness of Judæa or the mountains of Gilead and Moab across the Jordan, to which the Christians actually did flee.

17, 18. When we are trying to save either life of body or life of soul, we must sacrifice everything else to secure our safety. **Housetop:**—From this an outer stair would generally lead into courtyard or street.

19, 20. A word of pity for those least able to avail themselves of this opportunity. **Winter** made travelling difficult, by reason of rain spoiling roads and swelling torrents; **the Sabbath day**, by reason of restrictions on sale of food, and indication at once that the fugitives were Christians, not bound by Jewish scruples.

21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved : but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there ; believe it not.

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders ; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

25 Behold, I have told you before.

26 Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert ; go not forth : behold, he is in the secret chambers ; believe it not.

21, 22. *The numbers of those killed is reckoned by Josephus at over one million three hundred and fifty thousand. One hundred thousand prisoners were spared to be sold—or slain in gladiatorial shows. "Jerusalem has probably witnessed a greater portion of human misery than any other spot upon the earth" (Milman, "History of the Jews," p. 414, Routledge's edition).*

22. God's elect should ever remember that, however great may be their trials, they will be less than their strength, and that *days of trouble are always shortened* to let the elect survive them.

UNBELIEF ALWAYS FALLS A PREY TO SUPERSTITION.

23, 24. It is ever the penalty of wrong that when it rejects the true it has to accept the false. He who will not have Jesus the Son of God, accepts some Judas of Galilee, or Theudas (Acts 5 : 36, 37), or Simon Magus (Acts 8 : 9-24), or Barcochab (Milman, pp. 439-443). Superstition always fills the place from which religion is kept out. They who do not believe in God will believe in luck, or in fate, or in spirits, or in omens. Link your life in child-like confidence to your Saviour, and you are secured from every other fear and from every refuge of lies. From such superstitions even we may learn how true it is that the heart is made for Christ, and must, especially in time of trouble, have some such refuge as He affords.

26, 27. These verses express the constant tendency which makes all false Christs and false leaders shun the common life, the public place, the ordinary crowd. Give them secrecy and specially selected followers, and they can maintain great professions. The Saviour whom we need is a Saviour that suits all sorts of men in all sorts of circumstances. Several classes of errors are condemned here : The error of monks and hermits in fleeing from the world they should help to save ; errors like those of the Mormonites, who believe in a special kingdom of God in some special locality ; and the error of those who elaborate millenarian doctrines and tell exactly when and where the Christ will appear.

27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

28 For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

29 ¶ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken :

30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven : and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree ; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh :

33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

27. In answer to all such the Saviour indicates that *there will be no chance of mistaking His presence, or of missing it when He comes to judgment.* Like the lightning flash, it is certain to be seen. With a glory visible to all, He will come to judge all.

A FINAL JUDGMENT WILL TAKE PLACE.

28. No sinner will elude it. As the *Vultures* (not *Eagles*) settle on the carcase, so judgment comes to sin.

29-31. The teaching of these verses seems to be that an overthrow, terrible as that which overtook Jerusalem, awaits the world at large. The interpretation of the darkness of sun and moon and the falling of the stars must await the event. The awful thing is that even at the end of human history there will be some so impenitent, that the advent of Christ, which ought to give them joy, will make them mourn; and instead of all the world being God's elect, God's elect will have to be "*gathered out of it.*"

32 seems to teach that there will be warning, but *not long warning.* The fig leaf is one of the last to appear, and as it tells that summer is *immediately impending*, so these things tell of Christ being "*at hand.*"

34. This generation shall not pass, etc., means either that that generation strictly so-called would not all have died before Jerusalem would be destroyed; or that *this sort of unbelieving men* will last while the world lasts. Either meaning would suit the word; the first seems the more satisfactory.

35. A very solemn asseveration. Christ's word has indeed been

36 ¶ But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away ; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

kept with regard to Jerusalem's fall. Neither its promises nor its threats will fail concerning mankind at large.

The remainder of the chapter contains the application of the great prediction. It divides itself in two. First (vers. 36-44), the application to persons in general ; and second (44-51), the application to those in spiritual office in particular. It is not a wresting, but a simple enlargement of the application, to remark that, without waiting longer, the end of our life is, to each of us, the end of the world. The point to be observed, therefore, is, that a solemn Divine completion will be put to all our lives, rewarding everything good, punishing what is evil, giving each his proper place for the commencement of his immortality.

THE TIMES UNTOLD.

36-39. Of that day and hour knoweth no man. In mercy we are left without knowledge which we could not use. Faith for the future is better than Foresight, and Hope than Knowledge. Even the Son of man, in His earthly lowliness, was content to be without this knowledge of the day of final judgment. No day is named, that every day may be hallowed by the sense of the possibility of its being the day of His Advent. It helps to hallow each day of life, to realize that before its close we may be in the presence of Christ's glory. There is something strange in the reference to the unconsciousness of Noah's generation of the fate impending over it. The ordinary engagements of life are all pursued, and the eve of judgment spent exactly as any other unmomentous eve might be. *Crises are rarely labelled so.* A casual temptation may give a wrong direction to the whole of life, when the only thought was an hour's amusement. Our highest opportunities come on us unexpected. Casual meetings lead to lifelong fellowships. The hour when God brings mercy, salvation, opportunity, judgment nigh is not known. We should, therefore, seek such a state of soul as is ready for any duty, for any temptation, for either world. Be not deceived by the even flow of the ordinary and the commonplace ; it may be any moment transformed into the eternal. The reference to the Flood suggests, further, that judgment, *while meant*

40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

42 ¶ Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

to be mercy and reward, will be to many a calamity as well as a surprise.

THE GREAT SEPARATION.

40, 41. Here we are mixed together, but judgment separates those whom the intercourse of life keeps mixing. It is strange how everything about the Saviour produces separation. His mercy comes, and, finding men one class, leaves them two—the accepters and despisers of mercy. And, like His mercy, His judgment sorts those who are mixed together. The word Taken means Taken with, and describes, therefore, the blessedness of those taken away by Christ with Himself to glory. One loses his companion in field-labour, another her companion in household tasks. There is a way from the lowliest place of work to glory. And some of our friends will leave our side for sublimest experiences above. *Use all your familiarity with the saints to learn the way to glory.*

WATCHING.

42-44. The conclusion is drawn for us: Watch therefore. Which means, “*Be awake therefore.*” It is *Preparation* for the advent of Christ, not *Expectation*, that is required; the *Wakefulness* that is about its proper work, not the *Curiosity* that neglects it. It is not straining the eye in the effort to catch the first glimpse of His coming that Christ requires, but the alacrity and diligence that is found living and working aright. It is strange that, when it is obvious that any day Christ may come and take us away, we should remain unready. *But many are not ready.* Many have not the faith in Christ which, alone, finds entrance into heaven, nor the love which would be at home there. It is a great opportunity which is put within our reach of being with Him in His glory. Let us not lose it through any lethargy of soul. Note on the whole, two lessons; one lesson of less, and one of greater importance. (1) All schemes of prophecy which fix definite dates for the coming of the Saviour, or the end of the world, are beforehand condemned by the words, *Of that day . . . knoweth no man*, and are to be avoided as partaking more of the character of common curiosity

45 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season ?

46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

47 Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

than of devout religion. And (2) for the world's future and for your own, cherish the great hope of the Saviour's advent, of a finish which will reward and crown with glory all that is worthy.

THE EXHORTATION FOR THE WORKER.

45-51. There are many warnings for the workers. Here and everywhere the Saviour seems to remember that gifts bring temptations, and duties, dangers. Here is the warning for apostles, ministers, Sunday-school teachers, and all who have any charge in the Church of God.

45. If a description of a true spiritual guide is needed, it is given here. He should be a **Faithful and wise Servant**. A **Servant**—one who with all his heart will work for the great Master ; a **Faithful servant**, carrying out the Master's wish, doing in His absence exactly what he would do beneath His eye ; trusting the Master, and with the joy of a trustful heart persevering in his work. A **wise** as well as faithful servant ; skilled to deal with each in the fittest way—encouraging the timid, exhorting the sluggish, reproofing the froward. And the description of his work is given here. He is to be a **ruler over his household**, and one to **give them meat**. *It is a great thing to rule aright* ; for a good ruler unites and inspires men, and leads them in every right way. It is no small work to discharge. Only he who is himself a servant, subject to the Saviour, will find others subject to Him. *Serve, and you always find some power to rule*. But it is only as we obey that we get the true spirit to command. And the next part of the leader's work is to **give them meat in due season**—to feed their souls with truth, sympathy, example.

46. Blessed is that servant . . . so doing. He does not always think so ; the time seems long, the work hard, the Master far away. But he who keeps **so doing** till the Master comes is indeed blessed.

47. For he will have work given him in the skies ; a preferment in heaven to higher duties and immortal dignities.

THE WARNING OF THE UNFAITHFUL.

48-51. There is a temptation and a tendency to be faithless. The force of novelty wears off the nobler course ; the attraction of poorer courses assert themselves. The flesh, with its love of ease and its worldly prudences, rises to gainsay the wisdom of God. Answers do not come to prayer as swiftly as we would like. Our course lies against

48 But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming ;

49 And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken ;

50 The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,

51 And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

the stream. So there is a continual tendency to decline in fervour, in consecration, in faith.

48. My lord delayeth his coming. This is the beginning of every decline. When we think Christ slow in coming to help, slow in coming to approve, then is a great inroad made on our spiritual force. And when to this is added a feeling that He is far away, and will never come to judge us ; that neither goodness will have reward, nor evil retribution ; there is nothing left to prevent the absolute breakdown.

49. Note particularly the connection of this with the previous verse. Whenever we think God has abandoned man, we begin to despise and to abuse him. Note, also, the vices of those in authority are arrogance and self-indulgence. Arrogance **smites** ; indulgence **eats and drinks with the drunken**. To think others made for ourselves, and to think we may live for ourselves, are the heresies of church rulers. It has often, alas ! happened that those occupying the office of the Christian ministry have fallen into these two sins.

50, 51. There is always a judgment, sudden and swift, for such. It comes without warning, "with feet of wool." Men are slow to realize it. God patiently pursues the effort to move to repentance. But at last, with a great surprise and complete overthrow, He casts out those who hold office without discharging the duties of it. Let teachers earnestly lay this charge to heart.

THE HYPOCRISY OF THE INDOLENT.

There is a strange word here worth emphasizing. The indolent and indulgent servant is to have **his portion with the hypocrites**. It is not put in without a meaning. The commonest and one of the worst forms of hypocrisy is that which is found in souls where goodness has subsided. They keep office, go through external functions, they utter and think they hold the old truth, when they and their words are really only shells, hollow and empty. Many have their portion with the hypocrites who began sincere with the right-hearted. Give way to indolence, and hypocrisy is not far away. What the fate of the hypocrite is we know not in detail, but the words in which it is threatened express the utmost degree of shame.

CHAPTER XXV.

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

THE TEN VIRGINS.

1-13. Another parable of judgment, following close on the intimations of the previous chapter, and describing the impressions and results of the Saviour's advent. The image is supplied by the marriage usages of Eastern lands, which require the bridegroom to go in procession to the house of the bride and fetch her back to his own. As he returns, at various points on the route friends of bride and bridegroom join the procession, and "go in" to the marriage feast. Ward saw in India and described a marriage occasion in which all the features of this parable were exhibited. Observe first—

THE HAPPY ENDING,

1, which God plans for the finish of the world's history and the history of the individual life. **Meeting the bridegroom.** Judgment may be the calamity; God intended it to be the bliss of man. We are pilgrims to a great feast. "*Christ hath abolished death,*" and, if life is what it should be, it will change into fuller life and higher delight and joy. Realize that there need be no issue of life such as we should lament. The finish of our life should be "*The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.*" **Ten virgins took . . . went forth to meet Him.** All desire to have a share in this bliss. Many take some trouble to secure it. Whenever Christ comes, whether in providence, or in forgiving grace, or in judgment, we should go forth to welcome Him with lamp of gladness. And many look forward to His coming as that which will end all earthly miseries, and give them the perfect rest and joy. *This hope is the mark of the Church of Christ. Jesus alone makes death a hope.* Outsiders know little of the feast, have not accepted invitations to it, are not prepared for it. This figure of ten virgins sets forth the Church of Christ, pure from common sins, looking upward and forward, and expecting a blessed immortality.

INNER DIFFERENCES.

2-5. **Five wise, five foolish.** Many are the same in outward habit

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them :

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him.

of life—the same in virgin garb, the same in lamp of hope—who yet differ deeply. Who are wise? Those who know what to expect; who take the proper steps to meet it; who know the right thing to do, and have force of resolve to do it. The foolish are those who act without inward reasons; who copy others without knowing the grounds of their action; and who, like all imitators, leave out the essential part of what they set themselves to copy. There are many in the membership of the Church of Christ who abstain from vulgar sins, hold the Christian creed, try and live respectable lives, and believe themselves to be Christians. Like the foolish virgins, they see a lamp is needed, and get one, and light it, and profess to belong to Christ's festal party. But while the wise not only have that which permits a beginning, but supplies reserves and resources, by which they can keep on, the foolish have *no reserves*, no resources, or, as another parable puts the same quality, "*no root*." This division of *Wise* and *Unwise* cuts very deep. The welcome and acceptance of light, the "*Unction by which we know all things*," alone gives true wisdom; and, until we admit Christ our Light within us, we are not wise. Refuse to admit Him, and, though you may seem to do all that the wise do, there will always be some essential difference in both motive and action. Note, further, *the Good are the wise; the Evil are the foolish*. It may often seem that the true Christian sacrifices prudence to piety; that self-denial, generosity, labour for God, are things good, but not wise. But in the great account of God it will at last be found that everything good was supremely wise. And the great unwisdom of man is the waywardness which disobeys the Lord.

5. While the bridegroom tarried. If Christ came for us shortly after our conversion, He would find us more on the alert to receive Him. But He tarries. He enlists us for work on earth, not for rest in heaven. *This period of delay tries our faith*. And some of the quickness of expectation goes off. Slumbered means *nodded*. But any dulness in true-hearted men soon works off. *There is the root there*.

THE GREAT WARNING.

6. Brief is the interval between the cry and the coming; but it is long enough for the wise to prepare themselves. In God's mercy, the great occasions of life come at unexpected times, but still a very brief

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil ; for our lamps are gone out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you : but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage : and the door was shut.

space of notice permits us to face the crisis and summon whatever powers we have to meet it.

INNER DIFFERENCES SHOW THEMSELVES.

7-9. With the wise there is no difficulty. It is the work of a few moments to raise the wick, remove its charred part, add fresh oil. This done, their lamp of welcome is bright as ever. *They are ready.* With the foolish it is different. Their lamps are going out (R.V.). They had no *supply of oil* to fall back on. Only those with lighted lamps might join the festal company. They wildly ask their companions for a share of their supply, only to find that in this matter enough for one cannot be made to do for two. So the two classes separate. The wise are the ready ; the unwise are the unready. It is at the last as it had been often before. When Christ came with offers of grace, the wise welcomed Him, admitted help and pardon to the soul. The foolish were unready then, and the opportunity passed. When Christ came with call to duty, the wise waked to His appeal, obeyed, and went in with Him. The foolish felt they ought to do so, but somehow they had not motive, force, decision ; and while they were trying to get sufficient force, the opportunity passed, and they were left outside. Now again, when entry to the everlasting feast depends on repentance and on faith, they go to buy ; but the unwisdom which led them to lose all previous opportunities, makes them lose this last. They go to the wrong place, or have not vessels to carry it, or else lack the price to pay for it. There are, alas ! many who are always baulked of their opportunity—unready for their duty ; not prepared to enter heaven when it opens to them. Readiness is the test and proof of wisdom. **Them that sell** represents God, who “ sells ” grace to those who will buy it by surrender. Note : There is a strict limit to our power of helping others. We have an immeasurable power of helping them to help themselves. We have no power to do anything instead of them. The oil of the wise is **not enough** for them and the foolish.

THE GREAT CONCLUSION.

10-12. **They that were ready went in.** How easy, how blessed ! They welcomed the bridegroom, and went in with him to the marriage

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

feast. The door was shut. This opportunity was like previous ones, over and ended.

11, 12. When the other virgins come, they find themselves treated as outsiders. That unreadiness they regretted as a misfortune is resented as a *slight* and as a *fault*. They receive rebuke, not pity, and in the great word, **I know you not**, are disowned. The parable is so transparent that interpretation is not necessary. There are some wise unto salvation, who make heart-work of what they do; who take sufficient steps to save an immortal soul, committing their sin to Christ to forgive it, their powers to Christ to inspire and direct them, their life to Christ to be led as He may deem most wise. There are some who want salvation, but are foolish, making of it only an external thing, a matter of forms, professions, small actions, *none of which commit the soul to Christ*, and none of which could be deemed sufficient for salvation by any one who thought of its conditions. Here, in the Church of Christ, all professors are mixed, there are the foolish as well as the wise. The present time is the time of the Lord's "tarrying" and absence. "He stands aloof to give us room to grow," to try us, to leave us to walk by faith. There is a time approaching when He will come again to receive us to Himself, and, if we love His appearing, we shall go in with Him to the everlasting bliss of heaven. But the unfit who have no inward grace, no penitence that values Him, no faith that clings to Him, cannot stand before Him at His coming, and remain without, because unfit to enter the Paradise of God. The lesson of all is to cherish

THE READINESS OF WISDOM.

13. For watching is waking, and waking is wisdom. Be ready to die to-day, and you will be grandly fit to live. Settle accounts daily with God. Keep renewing the great surrender, and the great "laying hold of Christ." Watch against decline, indulgence, unbelief, neglect. Then to you, "*to live will be Christ, and to die will be gain.*"

THE TALENTS.

14-30. Another parable of promises and of warning. Hardly anything in Scripture is more full of comfort, hardly anything more full of warning. It is a great exposition of the meaning of life, and holds up to every man the mirror in which he may see himself. The

14 ¶ For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

solemnity of life, the possibility of a result of it which will permit us to rejoice for evermore, are both portrayed.

THE UNSEEN MASTER.

14. The verse begins elliptically, the words in italics, "*the kingdom of heaven is,*" not being in the original. It would have been better, probably, to supply the words **He is** before **as a man**, and read it as referring to "*the Son of man*" mentioned in the previous verse. Christ is Master as well as Saviour. He could not save if He did not rule us. The employment He assigns develops the grace He gives. He is an unseen Master. Seen by us, He would receive eye-service. And selfishness would compete with faithfulness in show of zeal. But, distant and unseen, the service He receives is such as faith and honour prompt. We are ennobled by being compelled to look up to heaven to find our Master, and to immortality for our wages. Because there is such education and enlargement in our being required to serve an unseen Lord, He is like one travelling into a far country. [Note: All servants were then slaves, to whose service the Master felt he had a right.]

SERVANTS EQUIPPED FOR WORK.

15. Five talents . . . two talents . . . one. The talent was equivalent to about £340, but its purchasing power was, probably, eight or ten times that. So that even he who had one talent was very amply furnished for trading. *We are all wonderfully endowed.* How marvellously are we fitted for the common life, with brain, nerve, perception, will, memory, feeling! Not less sufficiently are we endowed for the spiritual life with gifts of conscience, the idea of God, aspirations after immortality, the knowledge of the Saviour's life and words, the examples around us, helps of grace ever offering themselves! The least endowed is marvellously gifted. We are variously gifted. **According to his several ability**, says Christ. Gifts of grace have some relation to nature, one being suited to the other. Each gets what he can use. Some, like Luther or Wesley, have five talents; some less; ordinary men one. But each for his position and work has all he needs. [The Revised Version places **straightway** at beginning of next verse.] **Took his journey.** These words describe very accurately the ascension of the Saviour, and suggest the strange position in which the disciples felt with their talents and their task.

16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

Christ comes near us to enrich us with His gifts, and, having done so, seems to leave us.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE TALENTS.

16. Straightway (R. V.) he that received . . . went and traded. There is great force in the word *straightway*. There are multitudes of noble things which can be done if done *straightway*, which can never be done at all if left. "*What thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*" **Traded.** It is strange to what a degree all our life is barter. We give diligence to get wealth; study to get understanding; self-denial brings self-control; service wins affection; obedience to grace gets increase of grace; trust gains knowledge of God. Everywhere we have to trade with our graces, powers, opportunities. If we know Christ, we have to tell of Him; if we have Him, we have to share Him with others. If there is a mercy-seat, we have to use it; if we have light, we have to follow it. **Made them other five.** Not in a week or month. It would take a long while to reach a far country, to tarry there, and to return. But at last, perhaps after years of trading, this sum is reached. While he with two talents (ver. 17) in the same time doubles his original capital. Some think there is but little growth in grace; while the fact is *nothing is more common*. How often do we see lives ripen and strengthen—the will deriving great increase of resolution, and the heart great increase of feeling! Light increases manifold. Power of helping, power of daring, power of enduring, power of hope, power of prayer, all grow. Nothing has such power of growth in it as grace. The third cannot be said to employ his talent at all. **Buried:** he is afraid of losing his labour, so will not "trade." He is afraid of losing his talent, and so buries it for protection. There is something very pathetic in the fear men have of losing what they will not use. Many dread losing the gospel, and the strivings of God's Spirit, and their better qualities or powers, though all the while they are refusing to employ them. "*Neglect not to stir up the gift that is in thee.*"

THE GREAT RECKONING.

19-23. After a long time. The reckonings of God are very awful

20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

things, as Adam found when the voice came, "*Where art thou?*" and as Cain felt when God said, "*Where is Abel thy brother?*" Every day some lesser reckoning solemnizes our life. These reckonings are blessed as well as awful things. The frequent reckonings we have with God in life help us to end much that is evil, and set us forward with much that is good. There is to be a great reckoning, in which we have to give account of all advantages, of opportunities, of powers. Here the style of the great judgment is prefigured. To "*those that love His appearing,*" His judgment is a great hope for its exceeding great rewards. Here both the blessedness and the awfulness of judgment are illustrated.

20, 21. The first brings his five talents, and their gains. *The slothful servant had the idea that the master would never be satisfied with what he considers a small improvement.* But lo! the master is easily pleased, and the faithful servant receives great praise and great reward. Note very carefully: (1) The vast joy God takes in our attempts at service. (2) The rich approval He gives. Even on earth He often whispers, *Well done.* (3) That approval would itself have been sufficient reward; but there is more. *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord—Ruler over many things.* (4) We are capable of the Saviour's joy, of the pure delights of heaven, the joy of helping others, the joy of great success, the joy of gratitude, the joy of God's approval. (5) There will be no idleness in heaven. The servant is preferred to higher service, and will find usefulness and work not ended, but enlarged, in that bright world. (6) The fine quality in man is, not genius, nor strength, nor knowledge, but *faithfulness.* *Be true to Christ.*

22, 23. The one with two talents had a humbler equipment, and cannot show to man the same success. But the master sees in the work which doubles his lesser capital the same qualities and diligence shown by his fellow-servant, and he gives him the same encomium and reward. There will be no work unappreciated by the Lord, and none unrewarded.

24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed :

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine.

26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed :

27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance : but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE UNPROFITABLE.

24-30. This is very solemn. For there is in all our minds an idea that there is no great harm in the neglect of the good, but only in the commission of the evil. This part of the parable should correct this error. The portrait of the man is drawn by himself, and by his lord. **I knew thee that thou art an hard man . . . I was afraid** :—So he says of himself. **Wicked . . . Slothful** :—So the Master calls him. Now, in these touches, the man stands out before us in all the completeness of his character. Because **Wicked**, he is *suspicious*, and thinks the master hard ; because **Slothful**, he is *afraid of failure*. The language of his heart is given : it is that of many hearts to-day. **Gathering where thou hast not strawed**, means gathering the grain from the threshing-floor without either having brought the corn to thresh or having the toil of threshing it. Note here : (1) The impiety of suspicious thoughts. (2) *Fear* is one of the supreme evils and weaknesses of life, to which we ought never to yield. Multitudes go without a crown by fearing they cannot win it. (3) Uselessness is a great treason, and has great guilt.

26. He is silenced and condemned. If so much was known to be expected, why was nothing done ? Why not at least lay it out at interest, as those do who, unable to play a first part, yet heartily attach themselves as helpers to those who do. *The darkness of his thoughts is unenlightened.*

28. *He loses the talent he had kept so carefully* ; for man can keep nothing he does not use. But he that has ten keeps all of them, as a new stock-in-trade, and gets this one added.

29 expresses a great law of life. The gainer keeps increasing his gain ; the non-gainer keeps losing his store. Every day we see those using their talents enriched with further opportunity and responsibility, and those neglecting to use them stripped of power.

30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

31 ¶ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

30. Cast . . . the unprofitable . . . into outer darkness. Let us avoid, above all things, living *useless lives*; for the God of mankind expects us to serve them.

The light on the future becomes more clear as the chapter proceeds, the parable at each step fading more and more into clear prediction. The scope of the lesson also enlarges. The Parable of the Virgins describes the judgment of those whose religion is ecstatic and absorbing; that of the Servants, the larger number, whose religion is a long occupation with duty. This section, the judgment of all men. It is almost incredible in its consolation; it is awful in its terrors.

THE GREAT ASSIZE.

31-33. All heaven attends the Son of man; all earth stands to be judged before Him. Lives are so connected with one another that a general judgment of all is fitting. That gathering of all men, small and great, before the throne, is itself a judgment; for every higher life will show as a radiant centre of a group around it that it has blessed and brightened, while every vile life will be recognizable by the presence around it of those it has harmed and debased. **All nations.** Not the Church only, as some have thought; and not the heathen only, as others have urged; but *Mankind*. You and I, and all we have hurt or helped, will be gathered there. *Judgment is a mercy.* It is hard to know our very selves. God's approval will confirm all good; God's stamp on evil will at least keep it from spreading. **He shall separate.** This sorting is the great work of judgment; and is what Christ chiefly thinks of when He speaks of judgment. **He:**—how fit that He should be the Judge, knowing us so well, and loving us so deeply; so tempted, so pitiful! If to be judged at all, all would elect to be judged by Him. The familiar custom of keeping the sheep and goats separate, in the pasture, at the well, in the folds, supplies the simple, solemn image of the great separation. *There are, still, only two classes, and into one or other of them all men go.* The **Right hand** is that of honour; the **Left** is that of shame. Concerning this last judgment, note: (1) *All mankind seem to expect it.* The Greek philosophers, the old Egyptian religion, have marvellous

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world :

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in :

36 Naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

teaching on it. The Buddhist doctrine of "Karma," viz. that every act of good or ill is perpetuated in some lasting effect on our character and destiny, is also marvellous. Conscience is a whisper to each soul of its coming and a record for its scrutiny. *Expect, therefore, judgment.* (2) It ought to invest life with great solemnity, to know that one day all will be displayed which we would like to remain unknown. There are no secrets save for a moment. (3) He is foolish who thinks chiefly of the approval of the world. Do that which will win the approval of the great Judge.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

34-41. The King. The first and only time in which the Saviour assumes this title is here. How marvellous that *three days before Calvary* He should speak of Himself as *the King of all men*, whose judgment should decide the everlasting destinies of men ! **Come, ye blessed of My Father.** What rapture of delight is in the Judge's tone ! How appreciative He is of all lowly goodness ! What a recompense of reward ! **Inherit the kingdom prepared.** All the bliss which was in the gracious purpose of God, when He made man.

35. All are surprised at this word—expecting some other line of approbation ; some encomium on their *Faith*, or holiness, or zeal, or patience. And to many the Saviour's word seems mysteriously un-theological. Why does He seem to take no notice of *Religion*, and fix all his attention on *Goodness* ? If we are saved by Faith, why is it not mentioned ? To assist the understanding of this difficulty, consider : (1) *Faith gets salvation, but Love is salvation.* Faith admits Christ to the heart, and, when Christ lives in us, the life is love. Faith accepts grace, and, by its help, loves ; accepts pardon, and from gratitude, loves. Discipleship is denying, dethroning self, that Love may reign. Salvation from the power of sin is something greater than salvation from its guilt ; and in the degree in which we are saved from the power of sin, we love. Christ has only one commandment : "*Love, as I have loved you.*" So that *Love* is the test of faith exercised ; of grace admitted ; of obedience rendered ; of likeness to Christ attained. A

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

worthy, kindly, reverent view of man is the surest sign of a gracious heart. (2) The presence and force of love is the *universally applicable test*. It fits heathen and Christian, young and old, rich and poor. To ask for trust in a Christ they have not heard of, would not be worthy of God. But to ask men for *trust in Christ speaking within them*, "*the Light that lighteneth every man*," that moves us toward the love of God and of man, is to demand the sort of faith which it is possible for every one to render. Faith in Christ is only saving faith when it entrusts the life to His guidance and control. And the test of Love brings every particle of this saving faith to view. (3) While what makes or mars us is our feeling and action towards God, these are not so easily known by ourselves or others, as the feelings and action toward man, which grow directly out of them. *Therefore love is demanded*. How blessed, yet how awful, is such a fact! For many possess religion, creed, experience, self-discipline, who cannot show Love. Remember, the true life is love, and we have only so much religion as we have affection. There is something fitting in hearts of love going to a heaven of love. It is their "*own place*." Thank God, amongst "*all nations*" there are many who will receive the Saviour's praise for love. A far larger proportion amongst Christian lands; for we love Him because He has loved us. But even in heathen lands there are some obedient to the still, small voice of Christ within them, bidding them love. *Be wise and deny self, and live in love.*

THE HUMILITY OF THE SAVED.

37, 38. It is a solemn thing to remark that neither saved nor lost know themselves. Both equally think the Judge must be mistaken! The righteous never knew they were so good, or had done so much; the wicked never knew they had been so evil! *Build nothing on your estimate of yourself*. Another may know you; you cannot easily know yourself. So these approved, welcomed, crowned, cannot remember any services worthy of such praise. Not till the King tells them that all that was done to the "*least of His brethren*" was done to Him, do they begin to see that in the modest good they tried to do there is a richer glory than they ever knew. Mark this humility. High attainments make low self-estimates. Moses "*wist not*" that his face was shining. Before the everlasting honour goeth the sweet humility.

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels :

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink :

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in : naked, and ye clothed me not : sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

THE HUMILITY OF THE KING,

40, comes out in the answer He gives to the lowly question they put. For how marvellous is this word, **My brethren!** Where would you have looked for the brethren of the great King whom hosts of angels attend as servants? The beggar, the leper, the blind, the ignorant, the aged, the wayward,—*these the King calls His brethren.* In this word are many lessons : (1) Greatness is always lowly ; here you have the lowliness of the Lord God Almighty. (2) Be careful how you treat any brother of thy Saviour, *i.e. any man* ; for, dishonouring the unworthiest fellow-man, you dishonour Christ. (3) The cause of man is the cause of Christ. (4) The only service Christ cares for is the service which helps Him in His work of saving and blessing men. (5) Christ's bankers are the poor and needy. Turn not away from Lazarus at thy gate. It is Christ standing at the door and knocking.

THE AWFUL DOOM.

41. **Depart from Me** : Nearness to Christ is heaven ; distance from Him, hell. **Ye cursed** : The word used seems to suggest those whom their fellows cursed. **Fire, prepared for the devil and his angels** : Of "*The kingdom*" Christ said it was "*prepared for you.*" But no everlasting fire was prepared for *man*, but for the devil and his angels. The awful greatness of the penalty is as mysterious as the blessed greatness of the reward. We do not know the great goodness of the right, or the great evil of the wrong, we do. Fear sin as the only great calamity.

THE IMPEACHMENT,

42, 43, seems slight. There is no crime alleged against them. For aught that appears, multitudes of them could have taken the ten commandments and said, "*All these have I kept.*" *Only neglect is ascribed to them.* They had not fed the hungry, nor clothed the naked. They had not loved. *They used to think that, so long as you did no harm, it was no matter that you left the good undone.* But uselessness is perdition. And not to love, is to be lost. *Beware of negative*

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

lives. In a world of grief positive love is wanted, and Christ will hold us guilty if we show it not.

THE SELF-IGNORANCE OF THE LOST.

44, 45. One would have thought this word of the Judge would have waked repentance. But as the righteous knew not their good, the wicked know not their evil. They remember some neglect and harshness, but it was only of a Lazarus at their gate. Had they seen the King there, their best had been His. They discover with horror that all their sins against their brethren are reckoned by the Master as against Himself. How fearful should we be of cherishing scorn or indulging in hardness of heart!

THE FINAL SEPARATION.

46. Here there are mysteries unfathomable and inconceivable. Such differences of destiny, issuing from such seemingly slight divergence of ways, who can fathom it? What pathos in that word, **These shall go away**, expressing the acquiescence of despair! The heart of the Church of Christ reels under what seems to be the teaching of this word, and cannot reconcile it with much else in the gospel. It is better to leave than to dogmatize on such subjects. We only urge: There is punishment for sin. While the word **eternal** is in multitudes of cases used for what is enduring though not endless, it yet must import something infinitely grave. Note particularly that *this forty-sixth verse is the last word of the Saviour's public ministry* (ch. 26 : 1).

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Saviour's public ministry finished on either the Tuesday or Wednesday evening preceding His crucifixion. What remains of life He spends in communion with God and in fellowship with His disciples. Probably Bethany (ch. 21 : 17, Luke 21 : 37) was His resting-place till, on the afternoon of Thursday, He came into

1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,

2 Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.

3 Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas,

4 And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him.

5 But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.

Jerusalem to eat the passover. The anointing (vers. 6-13) of course preceded, the discourses just delivered having taken place on the Sabbath (Saturday) previous (John 12 : 1).

1, 2. Before they hear the rumour of priests plotting, the Saviour foretells explicitly His death as fixed for this very Passover. Christ is taken with no surprise, and would protect His disciples. It will fit them for seeing in His death rather a voluntary sacrifice by an Infinite Love than the wild victory of evil.

2. **Betrayed—Crucified.** Observe : The agony of betrayal was far greater than that of crucifixion.

UNPRIESTLY ACTION.

3. What a strange way of keeping the memory of salvation—putting to death a Saviour ! At such a feast men's hearts should have been at their best. Who would have expected the worst of all deeds to have taken place on the holiest of all days ? But what should help us, being abused, harms us. And the worst of all human deeds have been done on holy days, in sacred places, under guise of religion. It was, however, a fitting time. The day of one great deliverance fitly became the day of a greater. The New Year's Day of Israel became indeed the New Year's Day of mankind.

4. High office does not secure high honour. How awful to think that the most sacred office then existing was filled by the very worst of men ! **Subtilty.** A weakness of which all should beware. Whatever needs secrecy has something evil in it. There are few more important lessons that we need to learn than to leave undone whatever we should like to remain unknown. No life is safe from dishonour which has anything concealed. Live in the daylight.

5. Note the mean prudence. Was uproar among the people the only thing to dread ? Wisdom would have said, "*Not on any day, lest God be angry.*" Look always higher than the judgment of men.

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY.

6-13. In Jerusalem there is the tumult of conspiracy ; in Bethany there is peace. The sabbath before His crucifixion is to be a sabbath

6 ¶ Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,

7 There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.

of rest to His soul. God seems to say, "Come ye into the village, and rest awhile." The story of that rest honours Christ and honours human nature, and honours the father-care of God. It is a poem in action, and shows us the true spirit in which all our service should be rendered.

6. Bethany. A village on the further side of the Mount of Olives, where Lazarus, Martha, and Mary lived. **Simon the leper.** One of the many whose experiences of mercy have not been told. Had he been still a leper he could not have entertained a company at a feast. Probably Christ had cured him. It has been suggested that he was perhaps Martha's father or husband. But when he owed to Jesus the cure of his leprosy, and Martha and Mary owed to Him the raising of their brother, their common gratitude and common faith would be a sufficient explanation of their co-operating together here. **In the house.** John (ch. 12 : 2) supplements this statement by saying, "*They made Him a supper.*" Note this feast.

THE PEACE OF CHRIST.

This story shows how the fury of the greatest of all storms had a centre of peace. Priests were plotting, Pharisees and Sadducees combining to slay Jesus. They were consulting also (John 12 : 10, 11) to "*put Lazarus also to death ; because that by reason of him many . . . believed.*" You might have expected the Saviour to flee, and Lazarus to be in hiding. *But they keep a feast of peace.* Fear no storm that may rage about your cause, your character, your faith. Christ is perturbed by no tumult. He says, "*My peace I give unto you.*" Let us seek it.

7. A woman. John tells us she was Mary, the sister of Lazarus (John 12 : 2, 3), concerning whose devotion see Luke 10 : 38-42, and concerning whose faith, love, sorrow, and answered prayer see John 11. Observe *the sort of people that are about the Saviour.* The enemies of Christ are such as Caiaphas, whose epithet was, "The Oppressor," and the luxurious, crafty, bloodthirsty priests around him (see Geikie, ii. 501-504, for their character), the worldly, the sordid, the envious. But the company round Christ are the devout, the loving, the true-hearted. It is particularly significant that all the *Maries* have ever been with Christ, and all the *Caiaphases* against Him. There is no possibility of that cause failing which in every age gathers about it the holiest and the best.

8 But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste ?

A DEED OF HONOUR.

Alabaster box. A vase easily made, then and now, by turning the soft alabaster on a lathe. **Precious ointment.** Oil in warm countries has generally been in demand as a preservative from the feverish effects of heat and dust ; and perfumes were equally in demand for their refreshment. The Roman gentleman anointed himself in connection with his daily bath (Becker's "Gallus," p. 328), and some anointing was one of the duties of hospitality. But **very precious ointment** was the luxury of only the wealthiest : *and Nero was blamed for permitting his feet to be anointed with spikenard.* John calls the ointment used by Mary by this name, and thus designates an ointment of choicest perfume, the best of which then came from India, answering somewhat to the modern attar of roses. John mentions that it was "*a pound of spikenard ;*" and Pliny says it fetched four hundred denarii per pound in Rome. The "*three hundred pence*" which Judas said it would have sold for (John 12 : 5) would represent in purchasing power, say, £60 to-day. **Poured it on His head.** So Mark ; John says "*feet.*" Probably she poured the plenteous fragrance on both. Her act is one of marvellous beauty. The *honour* of a grateful heart moves her to render some homage to the Saviour for His mercy. *Love* will avow its allegiance to Him, though all the world turns its back upon Him. *Courage* will confess Him, even at the moment when they are plotting both His death and that of Lazarus. She will not serve Christ with what costs her nothing. And so the costliest treasure is expended to give Him honour. Note here : (1) How rich a service the Saviour has rendered to the world in calling forth all that has been loveliest in affection, in honour, in unselfishness, and all that has been noblest in courage and consecration. Without Him we should find the world coarse indeed. (2) There is a want of this ardent, self-effacing spirit. How rare even among the Christians the question, "*What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits ?*" How common the grudging spirit which keeps its ointment for itself, and gives only that to Christ with which for salvation's sake it is obliged to part. (3) *We all have something which we could make into precious ointment.*

UTILITARIAN CRITICS.

8, 9. **His disciples.** Mark says "*some ;*" John says "*Judas*" Iscariot. *One grumbler sets others grumbling ;* when Judas leads,

9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.

10 When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.

others give their meaner feelings voice. In this action there is much that is instructive: (1) The critics are not always superior to, but generally are worse than, those they criticize. Here Judas condemns Mary of Bethany! (2) It is rarely that criticism has a good motive. Here it was disappointed greed and bitter envy. *Generally envy has a large space in all criticism; suspicion, dislike, and pride uniting with it.* (3) Each has freedom to serve God as God shall prompt him, and we may not blame another for moving on different lines from ourselves. The better must not upbraid the good. (4) Judas, "*the son of perdition*" (*waste, literally*), blames Mary for *waste*. He squandered his privileges, opportunities, better powers, and his soul and body, and blames Mary for wasting three hundred pence! *The faults we see, or think we see, are the faults we have.* (5) There is in every heart a Judas which, whenever a better impulse moves us, cries out, **To what purpose?**—questioning whether confession of Christ, self-denial, unworldliness, are ever worth their cost. Beware of the Judas in your heart. **Given to the poor.** None ever give the poor less for giving to Christ. It is not the Judases, but the Maries, that are the best friends of the poor.

OUR DEFENDER,

10-13, does not leave Mary unprotected. In the confusion of surprise she probably almost fears that her good intent had led her astray. But her Defender is mighty. In His reply to Judas there are five great testimonies deserving our deepest thought. First—

CRITICISM OF OTHERS IS FORBIDDEN.

10. **Why trouble, etc.** Mark and John have in addition, "*Let her alone.*" Criticism should begin at home. There is none who is fond of giving it who does not need all he has for himself. "*Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?*" "*Judge not.*" He who sees the mote, has the beam. Reprove obvious evil, but leave all free to do whatever they do with good intent. Bring precious ointment, but not criticism, which weakens Zeal, distracts Mercy, sows Discord, and spoils Religion. Second:

THE SELF-SACRIFICE OF DEVOTION TO THE SAVIOUR IS APPROVED.

She hath wrought a good work. Utilitarianism has a narrow range of vision. It deems the constancy of Martyrs, the service of

11 For ye have the poor always with you ; but me ye have not always.

12 For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.

13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

Patriots, the generosity of Philanthropists, the self-sacrifice of Missionaries, the scruples of Men of Honour, all so much waste of ointment. But here Mary's ointment perfumed the cross and sweetened death itself to the soul of Christ ! *To win such love, He felt, was worth dying.* It was one of the helps to die by which His heart was strengthened, and something which has been an inspiration of finer feeling ever since. And the self-sacrifice of a noble heart, in either Love or Mercy or Duty, has always a quickening influence on other lives. Third :

PROPER CLAIMS DO NOT CONFLICT.

11. The poor will not suffer from the competition of the Saviour. Permanent necessities may be without disadvantage neglected for pressing and extraordinary claims. The more we give to Christ, the more we give to the poor ; for giving to Christ we catch Christ's Spirit and learn to pity them. Fourth :

OUR GOOD DEEDS HAVE MORE GOODNESS THAN WE KNOW.

12. There was a finer fitness in her service than she knew. In making the gift, she thought chiefly of a living brother. But her gift suited her dying Lord. It is not sinners only who "*know not what they do.*" A noble deed is always found to have some niche for which Providence wanted it, and has issues and results that reach far away beyond the doer's thought. And lastly :

LOVE HAS IMMORTAL RENOWN.

13. Innumerable heroes have passed into the absolute oblivion of the forgotten dead. Beauty, genius, and art are held in fugitive memory by mankind. But Mary's deed—now eighteen centuries after it—is in the fresh memory and appreciative honour of one-third of mankind. The purest and richest renown is ever that which comes to those who live on the impulses of sacred honour and of love to Christ.

Let these testimonies weigh with us, and move us to bring our Saviour some precious gift like Mary's.

14 ¶ Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests,
15 And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?
And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

16 And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

17 ¶ Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

THE CURSE OF EVIL.

14. Then . . . Judas Iscariot . . . went. It is the great curse of evil that the sight of others' goodness inflames and increases it. He chafes under the loss of the three hundred pence, from which he could have stolen; under the rebuke which humiliates him; under the noble deed whose beauty accuses him. How awful that another's goodness should crown and develop our evil!

15. The critic soon shows his true colours. What a transaction for the chief priests and Judas to engage in! It is the great example of Bribery, whose loathsomeness ought to have ended such action for ever! Thirty pieces of silver was the price of a slave (Zech. 11: 12), and was less than half the price Mary would pay for the ointment! How we should be on our guard against the lust of gold corrupting us!

16. Sought opportunity to betray. One would fancy such a work would have been too bad for devils; yet a backslider does it. Let us "*strengthen the things which remain.*"

It is impossible to gather all the lessons of the next section (vers. 17-30)—on Christ, on redemption, on apostasy, on the rite of commemoration. Muse, and lessons will multiply.

17. First day of . . . unleavened bread: Properly from Thursday, 6 p.m., to Friday at 6 p.m., in Passover week; but applied to the whole of Thursday, as leaven was cleared out of the houses some time before the holding of the feast. There is a difficulty in reconciling the respective accounts given by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, on the one hand, and that of John on the other, as to the exact day of the week on which the Saviour died. For, from the first three Gospels, it is quite clear the Saviour had eaten His Passover before He stood before Pilate, whereas the priests (John 18: 28) had not eaten theirs, although the Passover was to be eaten by all the same night. But John agrees with Matthew and Mark that the Saviour died on the day we call Friday; all three identifying "The Preparation," that is *Friday*, as the day of the week on which Christ died. Probably, almost certainly, the priests must have been the very last of all the

18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand ; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them ; and they made ready the passover.

20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

two millions usually assembled to eat the Passover, as their services might be needed. *Any time of the night would meet the requirements of the Law.* If, therefore, they are found, at 3 or 4 a.m., having not yet partaken of it, we must remember that they had till sunrise to eat of it, and would probably do so. Anyhow, John endorses the account given by the others, that the Saviour died on "The Preparation" (Friday), and not on Thursday, as some have thought from the priests not having as yet observed the rite.

ARRANGEMENTS.

18. How calm is Christ ; arranging all about the feast Himself—as if His interest in it were a visitor's only ! ; **The Master saith :** There are disciples even in Jerusalem ; pure souls that all the falseness and worldliness of Jerusalem cannot corrupt. There are seven thousand true-hearted in Israel when Elijah thinks he is left alone. [Note : Every house in Jerusalem was open at such times, free of charge ; save that, the skin of the lamb, and the earthenware jar used at the Passover, remained with the host.] So Peter and John go, find the servant carrying the waterpot, and his master glad to welcome the Lord. **My time :** The great hour in the great life : *The noon of history :* **I will keep.** He speaks as a King.

19. The disciples did, etc. They bought the lamb, and bitter herbs, and unleavened bread, and "charoseth"—a kind of preserve. They took the lamb to the temple, had it inspected, and approved as clean ; slew it, or had it slain by the priests, in the temple court ; trussed it on two long transverse sticks ; roasted it whole in an earthenware oven. Thus they prepared to keep the feast of the great redemption of Israel from bondage.

THE LAST FEAST.

20. He sat down with the twelve. "*With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*" (Luke 22 : 15). His heart of love values our fellowship everywhere, in the feast and in the garden ; and prompts the prayer that we may be with Him where He is, to behold His glory (John 17 : 24). He wants to eat the Passover with us still, and is grieved when we will not meet Him at His table. For our love is His joy, as His love is ours.

21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

THE STRANGE INTIMATION.

21. A comparison of the four Gospels has led most commentators to connect this intimation with "*The Strife*" (Luke 22 : 24) which arose amongst them as to "*who should be greatest*;" and to assume that the Lord's Supper was not instituted until Judas had left. On this most reasonable assumption there is special and abundant reason for this intimation. **One of you shall betray Me.** The worldly ambition that strives for priority receives a threefold reproof : (1) The Saviour's taking the lowliest part, and washing, like a slave, their feet (John 13 : 1-12); (2) the exhortation as to the kind of superiority they should seek ; (3) this intimation that one of them should betray Him. When they are quarrelling as to who should have the first place amongst men, Christ tells them one of them shall have the last and lowest. *Ambition is a road leading down, not up ; beware of it.* [Do not overlook a lesson in the evident faultiness of the twelve. To sit down worthily at the Lord's table we must be sincere, but *it is not required that we be faultless.*] There is a great solemnity and many lessons in the fact that one of His disciples betrays Him. (1) The worst evil is only to be found where goodness has been guiltily resisted or abused. Boys grow selfish on their mothers' love—taking it all greedily in without returning it. Grace resisted means evil enthroned. No one but a disciple who had lived in the light of Christ's love could become so bad as Judas. Let not advantages corrupt you. (2) *Half-conversions are full of danger.* Judas began as such. He saw Christ's greatness, goodness, power : wanted to get all His blessings. But he wanted to get Christ's blessings without losing what the world could give him. He was wrecked by seeking to make the best of both worlds. *Make thou the best of one ; and with whole heart serve Christ.* (3) What anguish came to the heart of Christ. Wounded, as a mother slain by the children she loves and yearns over. (4) What a range of growth is possible to man ! One, yielding to good influences, may become a John ; or, *resisting the same influences*, may become a Judas. The thought of *how good or how bad we may grow* should give us pause.

A WHOLESOME QUESTION.

22. Much lowlier than "*Who is greatest?*" This brings them to their best selves again, when they are lowly and watchful. *We do not*

23 And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

26 ¶ And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

commit the sins we fear. It is the sins we think ourselves incapable of that we fall into.

23. A comparison of the four Gospels assists the understanding of each. The answer given was given to the private question of John (John 13: 24), and probably was inaudible to the rest; while in its turn the answer of the Saviour to Judas, who seems to have reclined next Christ on His left hand, was inaudible to almost all the rest (John 13: 28). *Dippeth . . . with Me in the dish.* Probably means, "the man sitting next Me." By giving the answer only to John, He seems to leave lowly self-questioning to work in the rest unstopped by premature discoveries.

THE TRAITOR,

24, Described, identified. There is something awful in the word here used:—**Good for that man if he had not been born.** It is the rare instance of evil, not the common lot of man, which is thus described; the awful spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. Yet he was once a merry child, and probably a grave and serious youth!

25. When all the rest are asking, Judas feels he must ask the same question, lest he should look singular, and trusts that the secrecy of his plots and thoughts has prevented detection. But the Saviour, who had just given him a morsel from His dish (John 13: 26), answers with awful explicitness. *Thou hast said, i.e. thou hast named him.* How dreadful! Yet it was meant to arrest him. But in actual result it only hardened him in his evil purpose. "*He . . . went immediately out: and it was night*" (John 13: 30).

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

26-28. The Saviour is relieved by his departure (see John 13: 31), and proceeds at once to enrich the disciples and the whole Church of God, by instituting the rite of commemoration and of fellowship. The observance of the Passover was finished, when, from observing the memorial of one, He passes to institute the memorial of another and

27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it ;

28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

greater deliverance ; a simpler rite, more suited for universal use, and recording a still more Divine love. The circumstances assist the understanding of both His motive in ordaining the rite, and the meaning of it. To the twelve He will in this rite make several things clear : (1) That His dying is His own free act. The terms of *Offer* and *Gift* employed in the rite show that death is not the necessity of weakness, but the choice of love. (2) That His death on the morrow is not calamity, but Salvation. (3) That all His glory is most radiant in His cross. For He suggests that *when it is remembered, nothing is forgotten*. (4) That His death is to bind them closer to Him, and to one another. Thus, the rite interpreted Calvary. *In that first observance there was obviously no room for the mischievous misunderstandings* which in later ages have made men miss spiritual blessing, and expect some magical influence in its observance. They would not misinterpret the statements **This is My body, This is My blood**. For : (1) The poetic Aramaic language which Christ used *had no word meaning "to signify."* They habitually said "*This is*" where we should say "*This signifies.*" (2) The body of Christ stood before them unbroken, and His blood unshed ; and no transmutation of elements could suggest itself. (3) Christ still called the wine after consecration and participation "*This fruit of the vine.*" (4) The superstition which in later ages suggested and led to the acceptance of the doctrine of transubstantiation, *viz. That the flesh and blood of Christ, being eaten by us, preserves our flesh and blood from putrefaction to the Resurrection*, had not yet crossed the brain of deluded man. This rite simply prepared them to adore instead of lamenting their dying Lord ; and to cleave to Him the more for dying, instead of forsaking Him, and to believe in Him when He rose. The rite has had a similar blessing for all the ages since. It has kept high and clear in view of sinners the fact that a dying Jesus is the world's Salvation—bread to sustain, and wine to refresh, our souls ; that we must come to him as prodigals "*perishing with hunger* ;" that He offers Himself to all (ver. 27), a free gift ; that our part is simply to accept with lowly gratitude the great salvation ; that He welcomes us as guests and friends ; that He desires us to confess Him as our Saviour, and hold Him up to the view of others as the atoning Saviour ; that He wishes us to view Him as such ; that He wishes all who cleave to Him as Saviour to unite with one another as His family. To remember the whole of Christ, we need only to remember His

29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

30 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

dying. *In that, all the treasures of His infinite being and mercy are revealed in their glory.* Note very particularly the sin of neglecting to confess Christ at His table. *None is allowed to come unworthily;* for whoso comes must come honestly, meaning what he does, feeling the hunger he owns, and desiring the true life he professes to expect in a crucified Saviour. *But none is allowed to stay away.* **Drink ye** all of it. Why do so many refuse to be the guests of Jesus?

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE.

29, 30. Two strange verses, with nothing of death, betrayal, sorrow, in them. But they are what we would expect. There comes to Jesus Light to see the higher feast, the larger table; a heaven crowded with the multitude that none can number (ver. 29). And (ver. 30) there comes to Him the power to go singing to His cross. We may fear too much the hour of sacrifice or death; they may prove to us those of Light and of Song. The Hymn sung was probably Ps. 116, 117, and 118; Ps. 113, 114, and 115 having been previously sung together. It is a pleasant thing to remember Christ went to Gethsemane and Calvary singing, amongst others, these words: "*Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*" "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*" "*I will pay my vows unto the Lord.*" "*This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*" "*God is the Lord, which hath showed us Light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.*" "*O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever.*" How strange that David could write what it strengthened Christ to sing! Disciples as well as the Master have their light and song at eventide.

"*They feared as they entered into the cloud,*" on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9: 34). How must Peter, James, and John have feared as they entered with Christ into the darkness! Gethsemane is the mystery and the consolation of man. That our woe was so shared, we are grateful; how it could be, we cannot understand. His woe begins with the necessity of administering

WARNINGS,

31, even to the twelve. Turning earthward after the great prayer

32 But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

35 Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

(John 17), and the great hymn with which the Passover was closed, He sees weakness, desertion, denial, crucifixion; and from each the Saviour derives a keen enlargement of His woe. It softens the severity, but increases the solemnity of His intimation, to quote words of Scripture in which their weakness is foretold. In Zechariah there are strange gleams of radiance from individual verses that rise so abrupt and luminous from their context, that you feel the prophet himself could hardly have fathomed all their meaning. It is this prophet who speaks of Israel's Shepherd being valued at "*thirty pieces of silver*" (Zech. 11: 12, 13); of Israel "*looking upon Him whom they have pierced*" (12: 10); of the King "*coming to Zion . . . on an ass*" (9: 9), "*having salvation*;" and now of a shepherd—God's "*Fellow*"—smitten of God, yet saving the scattered sheep (13: 7).

32. He accompanies the warning that they will be scattered, by a promise, *I will go before you into Galilee*; their leaving Him being evidently a reason in His mind for their receiving special cherishing rather than rejection. How faithful are these wounds of a friend! Gently warning, and giving beforehand the intimations of comfort they will need. From what sin, shame, and weakness would the twelve have been saved if they had heeded them! Offended means "tripped," "thrown down;" and implies that surprise and disappointment would unhinge their faith.

PRIDE PROFITS NOT,

33, by the intimation. More lowliness would have served Peter better than his high spirit. Dr. Parker points out that *Peter fell here*, before denying Christ, in the very fact of boasting—in neglecting warning, in contradicting Christ. *Though all men . . . I never.* Peter was quite honest; but man cannot easily know himself. This over-confidence elicits a prediction concerning Peter. All will be scattered; but Peter will deny his Lord. *Before the cock crow, or "crow twice,"* as Mark has it (14: 30), *thou shalt deny Me thrice.* The first cock-crowing was reckoned to be at midnight, but was not noticed; the second, which was *the* cock-crowing, an hour or so before sunrise. Lowliness, that took the warning and prayed, would have escaped the reproof and been saved from the sin. But Peter,

36 ¶ Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

full of love and ardour, knows not the danger of temptation; so says, **Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee.** All the other disciples unite in the same protest. From which we gather: (1) The strongest are not secure against falling. (2) Breathe your better purposes in prayer to God, not in declarations to man. (3) The eleven—those best able to judge—deem Him worthy of the greatest sacrifice that could be demanded of them.

GETHSEMANE.

36. His silence is His solemn reply to this boast. And meanwhile they proceed on their way to Gethsemane; a "Garden" (John 18:1), and, from its name, evidently an olive vineyard. "*He was wont*" to go thither (Luke 22:39). It was His place of prayer; and where He met with God, He elects to meet His fate. Have a closet where you meet with God before the great troubles of life touch you. This garden is Eden's counterpart. There, amidst all aids to obedience, heaven was lost; here, in darkness and woe, it was won. Observe, He wants

FELLOWSHIP IN HIS SUFFERINGS.

36, 37. The greater any one is the more help He can find in the fellowship of others. The Saviour wants us "*in His temptations,*" to augment His strength; in His glory, to swell His joy. What honour is put on these three disciples! Had they kept awake, the angel might not have been needed. As it was, the sight of the first-fruits of His work and the influence of their love supported Him. Note: *These poor souls about to be scattered had yet this power of service in them! Sit ye here, . . . I go and pray yonder.* How natural! He wants the presence, but not the distracting presence, of His friends. **Began to be sorrowful.** How deep that sorrow must have been which thus began, when the Saviour was throughout His life a "*Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*"! **Watch with Me:** wake, sympathize, pray.

THE SAVIOUR'S SORROW.

38. It seems to profane the agony to attempt to expound it. But love and gratitude both ask to know its elements; and if we abstain from being wise above what is written, we may profit by meditation.

39 And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, *i.e.* all but killed with sorrow. An hour before He had prayed as only the Son of God could pray: "*Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me:*"—now, as only a Son of man can, He prays with a heart broken with sorrow. In ordinary deaths a glory of immortal hope will express itself amidst sighs of anguish. A more marvellous blending of strength and weakness still meets us here. What moved such sorrow? Philosophers, and even felons, have faced death with calm; how is it that the strong Son of God shrinks? Consider: (1) The Saviour was unprotected by any coarseness of feeling. If you can despise or hate men, their hatred will not grieve you; but if you love them, their hatred wounds. In all other directions also the perfectness of Christ's nature increased His sensibility. (2) The vision of sin assailing Him gave Him a horror of thick darkness to His soul. He saw sin in all its forms. In the disciples it was weakness; in the multitude, perversity and indifference to salvation; in the priests, a hellish hatred of what was good; in the rulers, an indifference to all justice; in Judas, a malignant selfishness and apostasy. When the evil of men presses itself upon our hearts, it will even in our dull hearts produce a little Gethsemane. What anguish would it inflict on Christ when all the wildest sins of man turned on Him to make Him their Victim! He bore our sins by bearing the brunt of their assaults on His soul. (3) Then the great law of all saving help is, that woes can only be cured by being shared. And, to end the curses sin has brought on us, Christ must share them. Every thorn and briar of The Curse must flesh itself in His tender heart. If sinners are to be saved, all the penalties of sin which a sinless soul could bear must be borne by the Saviour. (4) Add to these the terrific assault of temptation to doubt God and to shirk the cross ("*The prince of this world cometh,*" John 14: 30), and the fact that temptation pains us in proportion to our purity, and it will easily be seen that there has been "*no sorrow like unto Christ's sorrow.*" Love and bless Him for it. Note further—

THE VICTORY OF CHRIST IN HIS SORROW.

39. Not to feel is not victory; but to feel, accept, and endure woe is victory. Like His sorrow, His prayer passes our understanding. But we note in it the trust that calls God **My Father**; the childlike

40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

simplicity which utters the feelings and wishes of the soul; the victorious faith that subordinates these wishes to God's will. *It is marvellous what multitudes have been able to pray this prayer since Jesus uttered it!* Note in this victory: (1) It was not painless or without struggle: *no victory is.* (2) Not achieved in one act. Thrice He prays, using the same words (vers. 42, 44). (3) His power to endure the cross is won by *prayer*. In all your sorrow offer this prayer; conquer thus.

STRANGE DISCIPLESHIP.

40-45. He . . . findeth them asleep (ver. 40). He . . . found them asleep again (ver. 43). How strange this apathy! How common! How unmovedly the Church sleeps, whatever Christ's fortunes, whether those of Tabor or those of Gethsemane! We all share this apathy. Had they waked they would have seen more than they missed on the Mount of Transfiguration. They were accustomed to keep awake at nights to fish; but to keep awake to pray, especially after the strain of such a day as had preceded, was beyond them. "Sleeping" is one of the Church's greatest sins, weaknesses, and dangers. **Could ye not watch?** How gentle the reproof!

41. They who, helping Christ, would have protected themselves, forgetting Him, endanger themselves. Had they prayed, "*Glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may glorify Thee,*" asking for Him, they would have been answered for themselves. Note: A new reason for prayer arises in their own exposure to temptation. When the Master is assailed the disciples are in peril. **The spirit . . . is willing,** etc., *i.e.* the disciple's spirit. How like Christ to find excuses for them!

42. All repetition is not vain repetition. Shallow feeling repeats its phrases because it has no fresh thoughts; deep feeling because it cannot get away from its absorbing grief. Even Jesus has to "*wait*" upon the Lord.

43. **Asleep again.** If it were not for One who watches over us and prays for us, where should we be? Luke (ch. 22: 45) says they were "*sleeping for sorrow*"—a not uncommon effect of benumbing grief.

44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

47 ¶ And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

44. The third time. Thus "*instant in prayer*" is Christ.

THE VICTORY,

45, 46, of prayer is shown in the way in which He rises, strong and kingly, to meet His enemies, and amaze and subdue them with His calm (John 18: 6). The conflict is over. An angel (Luke 22: 43) has strengthened His body; God has strengthened His soul. So far as He is concerned He does not now need the twelve, and can say, **Sleep on now**; though for their own sakes He wakes them with an intimation of the approach of Judas, and the call, **Rise, let us be going**. *There is always an end to, and a victory over the Gethsemane griefs which we bring to God!*

47-57. Rudely the world breaks in upon our prayers. But never were devotions so roughly interrupted as when the suppliant Christ was sought by Judas. It is well for us that, before seeing the face of the enemy, we should see the face of God.

WILD WAYS.

47. **A great multitude.** The tumultuous character of the gathering betrays its unhallowed motive. "*He that believeth shall not make haste.*" Excitement and turbulence always tell that God is not guiding. The crowd consisted of soldiers ("*a band,*" John 18: 3), "*officers of the temple,*" "*chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders*" (Luke 22: 52), and others of the Pharisees and scribes, and some hangers-on. The word "*band*" meant literally a company of five hundred soldiers, and suggests a considerable number at least. The employment of the plural word "*multitudes*" in ver. 55, points to a huge gathering. Even in its hatred and unbelief the world betrays its instinctive sense of the greatness of Christ. If Christ is mere man, this multitude is ridiculously over large; if Divine, this multitude is not enough. If the gospel be untrue, much less labour than the world takes to confute it will suffice; if it be true, all that labour is not enough. To understand the course of events we must add to the story told by the three first Gospels the special feature given by St. John of

48 Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he : hold him fast.

49 And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master ; and kissed him.

50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come ? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

the self-announcement of the Saviour, and note the spell of awe which led the multitude to fall down before Him. The traitor seems to have stipulated that he should have no active hand in the capture, but should only point out Christ. He meant probably to come, as if alone, to join Jesus and the rest at Gethsemane, to salute Him, and then leave others to take Him. The Saviour will save His own dignity and His disciples' lives, by declaring Himself, and therefore goes forth to meet the crowd ; finds Judas with them ; and, full of the majestic calm of heaven, shames, humbles, and overpowers them. This startling exhibition of majesty in the Saviour, and of reverence in the crowd, alarms Judas, who feels as if his plot was doomed to fail. He had only meant to practise hypocrisy, but the crisis brings into view

THE HARDIHOOD OF EVIL.

48, 49. *But for him this crowd might have gone back, as a previous force had once done (John 7 : 32, 45, 46), empty handed, and saying, "Never man spake like this Man."* But the awful impenitence of Judas arrests the spreading compunction, and when he ventures to insult Christ, the evil returns to their hearts with a rebound, and they venture to seize Him. Note : (1) The malignant influence of an evil leader. (2) The awful change in Judas. He might have been the leader of the twelve, of the holy company of disciples ; and sinks to be the leader of this vile crew. (3) The hardihood of evil in kissing Christ : such resolute effrontery, such presumptuous invasion of that *Face* before which earth and heaven shall flee away ! (4) The infinite meekness of Christ. He requires us to endure the blow of an enemy. He endures the loathsome kiss. (5) As their number betrayed their sense of Christ's greatness, so this kiss proclaims Him worthy of allegiance and of love. (6) The worst opponents of Christ are still those who betray with a kiss—such as those who oppose His claims while affecting to revere His character, and deny His Saviourship while acknowledging the excellence of His doctrine. (7) The depravity of human nature. For these men are our brothers. There is no sermon on the need of repentance can be so convicting as this narrative of what human nature has actually done.

THE AWFUL QUESTION.

50. Friend, wherefore art thou come ? Add, "*Judas, betrayest*

51 And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.

52 Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

thou the Son of man with a kiss?" (Luke 22: 48). He meant to seem a disciple and to glide away into the dark. But the Saviour stops him, names him, brands him, with words awful as the verdict from the great white throne. There is nothing secret in any of us but it is brought into the light. Then . . . they laid hands on Him. The then is significant. Do wrong, and you will harden others; do right, and you will lead them right. They . . . took Him. Often it seems as if the whole cause of Christ was at the mercy of those who hate Him. *It only seems so; it is not so.*

UNHOLY ZEAL.

51. One. *Peter*, as we learn from John (ch. 18: 10). It was like the ardent man. He aims at the head, and hits hard. In his action there is much to ponder: (1) *It was very natural.* If ever indignation had sufficient reason, it had so here. (2) *It was brave. One against a thousand.* This man has no meanness nor littleness in his make. But (3) *it was mistaken.* When Christ consented to be taken (John 18: 8), it was not for Peter to oppose His plan. The Saviour's method is to conquer Force by Submission, Violence by Meekness, Sin by the Cross. Yet many make this mistake, and defend a spiritual cause by carnal weapons. On a large scale, the Crusades were an example of a continent ready to fight the devil in others, with swords, without being ready to fight the devil in themselves with self-denial. All violence used in religion by inquisitors or by men impatient to enthrone the right, is an example of Peter's mistake. All *hatred* of those doing wrong, all vituperation of them is a Peter's sword. What Christ wants is some that can bear a cross with Him, not such as will draw a sword for Him.

[Note: Luke recounts an exquisite incident (ch. 22: 51). The Saviour asks them to free His hands ("Suffer ye thus far") for a moment; and with His free hand He touches and heals the smitten ear. *Christ's last miracle!* How gracious is His heart!]

THE GREAT INSTRUCTION.

52. Put up . . . thy sword into his place. Here many things deserve our thought: (1) The only proper place for a sword is its sheath. (2) The Saviour disavows it, and with it *Force, Policy, Anger*, and all rude methods of opposing wrong. The only way of

53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

54 But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

55 In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.

56 But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

57 ¶ And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.

stopping enemies allowed to us is converting them. (3) *The law of failure: They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.* Take means, of course, "choose" as their means of securing the right. It is a great law, largely illustrated in the history of nations, churches, and men. Choose violent ways, and you fail; choose Christ's way of meekness, truth, love, and then there is no failure.

THE UNUSED PREROGATIVE.

53, 54. He could have twelve legions of angels, if He asked them. But He will not. Notice the fact that the Saviour refrains from praying for much He might have had, and which flesh and blood would have liked. Do not ask for all that you feel free to ask for. *You might have an angel, for the asking, who would heal a disease from which you suffer; but yet might be acting with neither wisdom nor faith in asking for him.* For the reason which weighed with Christ ought to weigh with us. Ver. 54, put in another form, means, "I wish God's plan of my life to be carried out, not my preference." Pray not for "the angel," but for the fulfilling of God's plan. Our wisest prayer is "*Thy will be done.*"

55. Here He gives a reproof at once pitiful and upbraiding, and then there comes one of the strangest records in history:—

THE GREAT DISPERSION.

56. Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled. Even Peter and John—though they shortly after turned and followed. *How lonely our Saviour was! Bear thy loneliness patiently.*—The Church sometimes seems extinct, but is not. To be scattered is not to be lost. The momentary forsaking is not the life-long abandonment. All back-sliding can be forgiven and be healed. If we have in any night of darkness forsaken Him, let us not despair, but only turn and more faithfully follow Him.

57-75. Another section, recording great marvels—the judgment of

58 But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.

59 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death.

60 But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses.

61 And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

Christ; the fall of Peter; the beginning of his repentance. A sudden meeting of the Sanhedrim had been called, and Jesus conducted first to Annas, then to the palace of Caiaphas. *There many tragedies are played out.* The worst sit in judgment on the best. The strong fall before the weak. The King of glory and merciful Saviour finds insults and scorn. Earth never looked so like hell as on that night.

DANGER.

58. Peter followed . . . afar off. This is not *our* Peter, who usually was at Christ's side, or even in front. Disappointed at Christ's submission to His captors, annoyed at his zeal being reprov'd and his fighting forbidden, he is disconcerted, confused, depressed. *When uncertain what to do, pray.* Christ moving on lines Peter could not understand, Peter had better not have followed Him, but have gone and prayed. Or if He follows, let it be *nearer*, where by glance exchanged he can get the guidance needed. *Follow far off, and you will not follow long.* How much of discipleship to-day is of this distant and half-hearted kind! **To see the end.** Love is curious; and we must not overlook the fact that though Peter, in his confusion, thought all was over, and the careers of Master and disciples alike a bright but mistaken dream, yet love had much to do with carrying him into danger. **Sat with the servants**, *i.e.* the armed temple servants, who had taken Christ prisoner. Mark adds, "*and warmed himself at the fire.*" He would have been safe there, if he had been *instructing them* and telling of his Master's goodness. But "*warming himself*" is an occupation that did not bring forth his powers of soul. Note the *Danger of a Passive Attitude.* You can enter the fiercest temptations and come out unscathed, if duty, love, conscience, carry you into them. But, *passive*, you fall before the slightest.

EVIL JUDGES.

59-62. It is shocking when the Throne of judgment is defiled. **Sought false witness.** The only kind of evidence that has ever been given against Christ. Many seek eminence who, when they attain it, disgrace it. It is a strange world which finds Annas, a Sadducee, and

62 And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?

63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Caiaphas, a puppet in his hands, sit in judgment upon Christ. *The strange thing is, that the lower men are in nature, the readier they are to sit in judgment on Him they should adore.* Unjust rulers are cursed by always finding willing tools; so here, after some hours lost in hearing evidence self-contradictory, they get some approach to sufficient proof of His dangerous claims in the words, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" This seemed to claim miraculous powers, and indicate a design against the holy house. But they have hard work who will accuse the Son of man.

THE SILENT CHRIST.

62. Answerest Thou nothing? . . . Jesus held His peace. Apparently for some hours this grave, great silence awed and oppressed even the hardened wretches that sat in judgment on Him. In this supreme moment the Saviour's speech was to God; it was not for Him to strive, or cry, or cause His voice to be heard. *The Saviour still allows men to blaspheme and to resist and to injure Him, and "holds His peace."* Be silent beside Him. *Fuss, not faith, moves men to disprove assaults made against the Saviour.* The Christ, secure and calm, ignores, save to pity, those assailing Him. After all, the world is not so much out of joint as it seems; *for, despite of seats and robes, the judges are the prisoners and the silent Christ stands Judge.*

THE APPEAL.

63-66. They despaired of any sufficient evidence, unless they can extract it from Himself; so an oath is laid on Him. Silence, when false and futile evidence was tendered, was dignity; speech, when He Himself was appealed to, was duty. It is strange how even ensaring questions betray the impression made on men by Christ's majesty. Caiaphas ought to have asked whether Christ had *called Himself the Christ*, the Son of God. But somehow evil gives unintended reverence to Christ; for Caiaphas asks, **Tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God?** Do not overlook the witness to the greatness of Christ which lies in the fears, the hate, the misgivings, of sinners. To this appeal the Saviour answers, by affirming that He is the Christ, the

65 Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.

66 What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

67 Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,

68 Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?

Son of God; Thou hast said, meaning, "Thou namest Me truly." In the great sense in which Caiaphas meant these names, and in which it would have been blasphemy for mere man to claim them, *the Saviour adopts them*. Let this be enough to make us worship Him as "*very God of very God*." Christ adds a prediction of His glory. Nevertheless—so He rebukes Caiaphas' unbelieving tone—*Shall ye see*—very soon, in a few days, if the eye of faith is opened; at longest in a few years, when the eye of sense is closed.

CONCLUSIONS.

65, 66. His words might have been received with more deference; for His pretensions were not beyond His performances. One who could raise the dead might have right to judge them. But candour dwells not with such judges. Delight that He has delivered Himself into their power is veiled beneath the decent show of moral indignation. The rending of the garments was doubtless carefully done, according to *the rules which were prescribed*; a harmless four-inch tear from the neck downward of all except the outermost and innermost garments—enough to give the excited bosom freedom to swell! He hath spoken blasphemy, is the judge's summing-up; He is worthy (R.V.) of death, their verdict. They may not inflict death, but they can solemnly aver to Pilate that "*by their law He ought to die*." So briefly do they judge the Saviour. Let those be of good cheer who suffer from any injustice of man.

THE ABUSE.

67, 68. It cannot be decided certainly who are the *They* who are described in ver. 67; whether they are only "*the men who held Jesus*," as Luke reports, or whether they are members of the Sanhedrim whose example these follow. The latter seems more likely, from the flow of the narrative, and also because such outrage by servants would hardly, without the example of their masters, be conceivable. How low man can sink! How low high office sinks men who do not rise to its responsibilities! To spit upon another was an insult, punished with great severity, carrying a fine of four hundred drachmas = £12 of our money in quantity, or say £80 in purchasing power. When in Athens

69 ¶ Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

70 But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

72 And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

73 And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.

they wished thus to insult Aristides, they had great difficulty in getting any one sufficiently abandoned to do it. *But we spat on the face of Christ!* Some buffeted Him. To buffet is to deal blows with the fist—blows to hurt. Others, jesting, blindfolded Him, and slapped His face (blows of contempt), saying, **Prophecy . . . Who is he that smote Thee?** These abusers of Jesus were our brethren, whose waywardness had developed flippancy, coarseness, scorn. Let us take heed. *How great and strong is Christ's meekness!* Some are ashamed of Jesus. Surely we should gladly bear reproach for Him who bore such shame for us. Yet there was

A HARDER TRIAL.

69-75. *Peter denies Him.* He sat without in the palace, *i.e.* the square courtyard on to which the rooms opened. In one of these the council sat with Jesus in their midst. He was in no condition to bear temptation; his thoughts were full of what seemed to him to be "*The End*" (ver. 58) of Christ and of all things worth living for; quarrelling with Christ's ways, and lost in bewilderment. Yet was there noble manhood in him. The enemy has to use all his craft to overcome him. If only the men had tackled him first and the women last, Peter would probably have stood it, for then he would have been put at once on his mettle. But the subtlety of our enemy is great. The temptation begins with, *not a soldier's taunt*, but a maid's off-hand teasing question; one also which seemed to deal only with his bodily whereabouts, not with his spiritual allegiance. It was a great temptation, by an off-hand lie, to parry an off-hand question, and so preserve his privacy. But a lie, which seems the easiest of all ways of escape, always becomes the hardest of all embarrassments. Though not a denial of Christ, it is next thing to it—a refusal to avow Him. The breach made is soon entered. He gets away from the fire, restless, tortured. **Another maid**, in the presence of the men, asserts he was a follower. This time, *calling God to witness*, he denies he knows the Saviour. Lastly, the men challenge him. His northern dialect betrays him; one who saw him in the garden (John 18: 26) affirms his discipleship. Then, broken down by first falsehoods, there is no manhood

74 Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

left in him ; so he calls God to curse him if he is a disciple, or has aught to do with Him. Oh, what a wound for the heart of Christ ! How oft repeated ! How many take Peter's first downward step, *refusing to avow their Lord !* Learn many lessons : (1) Beware of presumptuousness, which neglects warnings and enters temptations. (2) Men break down in the quality in which they are strongest. (3) Silence and secrecy are denials of the Lord. (4) Pray for power to confess Him.

THE REPENTANCE.

74, 75. **The cock crew.** “*The Lord turned and looked upon Peter*” (Luke 22 : 61). The one waked, the other softened him. For the look said, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” That love of Christ melts, moves him—wakes the old Peter. **He went out, and wept bitterly.** It was only eclipse, not extinction of faith. He falls into sin—he does not love it. Blessed is the heart whose repentance comes so swift and strong ! Christ's first word of resurrection will be for Peter's comfort ; and repentance and remission will unite to make the man more lowly, more strong, more loving, more tender, through his very fall.

CHAPTER XXVII.

In Matthew's narrative of the last day of Christ's earthly life, many things are omitted which the other evangelists supply. To John especially, who seems to have been an eye-witness of all he narrates, we are indebted for the fact that Pilate was extremely reluctant to undertake the judgment of Christ (John 18 : 31), and for the fact that the scourging of Christ was one of the attempts of Pilate to save Jesus from the cross by a partial surrender to the demands of His enemies and an appeal to their pity (John 19 : 1-5). He also reports the Saviour's testimony to Pilate concerning the nature of His kingdom (John 18 : 36-38). While St. Luke has his special contribution in the account of Christ being sent to Herod (Luke 23 : 6-12). The whole

1 When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death :

2 And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

3 ¶ Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

4 Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.

story is a painful record of weakness and guilt. We note at the outset—

THE PAGAN CORRUPTED BY THE JEW.

1, 2. It is an awful fact that the representatives of truth should be seducers of those they should have taught. They corrupt Judas, urge Pilate to injustice, bribe the soldiers to falsehood! The Church of God has suffered gravely from the worldly arts of its leaders. **Pilate.** The sixth Roman governor of Palestine. A man tyrannical and contemptuous, whose administration was marked by continual conflicts with the people. *One who, having already been guilty of injustice, dared not now be just.*

THE CONFESSION OF JUDAS,

3, 4, takes place earlier than one would have expected. He does not wait for Pilate's action. But when he saw that He was condemned by the Council, then he came to the priests. Probably six hours had elapsed since he kissed the Master in the garden, and four and twenty since he counted the thirty pieces of silver in the temple. He comes to the temple and casts down the money into (R.V.) the holy place. Amongst other lessons note these: (1) The brief pleasure which success in sin can give. To-day, delight; to-morrow, despair. Of all fates none is so pitiable as to *succeed in wrong.* (2) A sinner has only one alternative—Repentance or Remorse: the godly sorrow that worketh life, or "the sorrow of the world" which worketh death. (3) It would prevent many bad actions if we would try to think how they will look in the retrospect. (4) Here you have Remorse; Regret without resolve of bitterness; *shame without tears*; self-contempt without consolation; the sense of guilt without the power to pray. The word here translated Repented is not the word which is used for contrition. There is a wide gulf between Remorse and Repentance. Repentance turns to the light; Remorse from it. Love, grief, prayer are all in Repentance, are all absent from Remorse. "*If only,*" says Ambrose, "*Judas had said, 'I have sinned,*

5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

6 And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.

7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.

8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.

to Jesus, instead of to the priests, he might have been saved." But Remorse does not arise to go to the Father. *It prevents the rise of Repentance, and despairs where it should pray.* (5) The love of money is the root of every kind of evil. Thirty silver coins, a little larger than half-crowns, worth as much then as perhaps £50 would be in England to-day,—how strange that the desire for such a sum should have wrought such mischief! We should be on our guard against growing fond of money. The gracious giving of money is as necessary for our own safety as it is for the relief of others. (6) His powerlessness to prevent the mischief of the sin. Judas came saying, **I have sinned**; probably with some dim hope of stopping the high priests in their action. He is impotent to arrest them for a moment. (7) And finds himself despised by those whose tool he was. Had they no word of comfort for him? Could they not at least be silent in respectful shame? But, **What is that to us?** see thou to that, is the unkindest cut of all. *The accomplice will always at last hate the criminal.* Here these men think that so long as they pay the covenanted price for treachery, the traitor has no right to complain. (8) Remorse moves to *self-murder*. This is the finality of despair. Henceforth for him, there seems, no friend, no peace, no self-respect. And so he hangs himself. When all the land is glad with its songs and memories of salvation, he is his own destroying angel. Some (Dr. Parker, for instance) have approved of the suicide of Judas, as a rude infliction of a righteous sentence against himself. It is better, perhaps, to hold to the old doctrine laid down by Socrates, and approved by most moralists since, that God has placed us here, as at some military post, and until He recalls us it is our business to hold it. Did the devil drive him with such haste to hell, for fear he would live to see the risen Christ and ask forgiveness? Remember, whatever our sin, our duty is faith; and all despair is sin.

THE POLLUTED GAINS.

6-10. Judas sought them, and then, as if the coins were hot with hell-fire, flung them from him. The priests, unscrupulous as they were, would neither take them for themselves nor for the temple. *It could have more honestly gone back to the treasury than it came out of it.* But

9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value :

10 And gave them for the potters field, as the Lord appointed me.

11 And Jesus stood before the governor : and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews ? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.

12 And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

13 Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee ?

14 And he answered him to never a word ; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.

15 Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.

16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.

those who unscrupulously take it out cannot decently put it in. *Many lament the money they get.* It is a happy thought of these men, to invest unclean money in the purchase of a graveyard for unclean heathen. But they were probably disappointed when by its name—**The Field of Blood**—it gave perpetual memory to their own disgrace. [The quotation given is from Zechariah (ch. 11 : 12, 13), and not from Jeremiah. Possibly the mistake is that of some early copyist.]

CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.

11-14. Already pity for the Saviour changes into other feelings. You pity Judas and the chief priests ; you can hardly pity Christ. You pity Pilate and Herod ; you cannot pity Him, for in His calm and spotless soul He had essential peace. In His bearing we notice two things : (1) His "*good confession*" : the question Pilate puts the Saviour answers ; and (2) *His silence* before Pilate and Herod, as previously in the Council. The testimony the high priests bear against Him He disregards. We know from the other Gospels what their testimony was : "*He was a malefactor* ;" "*He said He was the Son of God* ;" "*He made Himself a King* ;" "*He stirreth up the people.*" It is a good rule to answer honest questions, and neglect all lying accusations.

14. The governor marvelled greatly. How noteworthy the spell the Saviour has upon all minds ! The Saviour was not the sort of prisoner Pilate had been accustomed to.

THE MAKESHIFTS OF WEAKNESS.

15-25. A civil governor is bound in duty and honour to be either the executor or the martyr of justice ; bound to protect the innocent as well as to punish the guilty. It is a great calamity when one placed

17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?

18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

19 ¶ When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

to do judgment, cannot or will not. Here Pilate, afraid of offending the people, whom he had already in his administration outraged to a dangerous degree, endeavours to secure by policy what he ought to have achieved by justice. He ought to have dismissed Christ as innocent, but dared not. So he tries successively five different plans—

(1) To decline to try Christ for what seemed a religious offence (John 18 : 31).

(2) To send Him to Herod, as “*of his jurisdiction*” (Luke 23 : 7).

(3) To offer Christ as one of the prisoners whom the people might have released (ver. 15).

(4) To scourge Him after declaring His innocence, and thus satisfy their passion and move their pity (Luke 23 : 22 ; John 19 : 5).

(5) To protest against His death by “*washing hands*” (ver. 24).

But no cleverness will do the work of courage. The more Pilate tries by side ways to get out of the difficulty of his position, the more they fasten it upon him. “*Do your duty, and fear not,*” is the only safe maxim for positions of difficulty. Matthew here records one of these makeshifts. He knows of the Saviour’s popularity with the people ; of the royal welcome He received a few days before, and thinks that an appeal to the multitude will be responded to by a demand for His release ; for He sees the motive of envy in the action of the chief priests (ver. 18). He has also the feeling that the priests, in professing to oppose sedition in Jesus, will not stultify themselves by approving it in Barabbas. Alas ! Cunning will not do the work of Right ; and the Saviour is sacrificed to a bad man’s diplomacy.

THE STRANGE DREAM.

19. One of the many signs of warning sent in vain. A common dream, one knows to be common ; a Divine dream is felt to be Divine. The mind of Pilate’s wife is full of the great business ; her dream is a light from Heaven upon it. Tradition gives her name—Claudia Procula, and the Greek Church has made her a saint. The chief lesson of the story seems to be that God has always some ways and means of conveying intimations of His will direct, even to men like Pilate.

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.

23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

24 ¶ When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.

25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

26 ¶ Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

THE PREFERENCE FOR BARABBAS.

20, 21. Barabbas means "Son of a Father," or "Son of a Rabbi." Possibly the man was a wild son of a learned father. When Pilate asks which they will have, moved by the priests and unabashed, they cry, **Barabbas**. Note: (1) The sinfulness of human nature in general is illustrated and proved by this one fact of the world's preference of Barabbas to Christ; and (2) Rejection by the world is Honour.

FEEBLENESS OF WRONGDOERS.

22-26. Vainly he argues with the crowd. Had he done his part of justice, he could with more authority have appealed to them to do theirs. Neglecting his duty, he vainly urges theirs.

24. He took water, and washed his hands. Such a proceeding increases the guilt of the multitude; but it does not relieve Pilate. There is only one way of getting rid of responsibility—that is, doing duty. Pilate does not excuse, but condemn himself, when in this act he pronounces Jesus guiltless, and forthwith adjudges Him to death. Remember that merely to protest against evil you are able to prevent is guilty weakness.

25. His blood be on us. What an awful prayer! It was answered partly in the judgment which destroyed Jerusalem. But it was also answered in a different sense from that in which it was offered—by the mercy, which sprinkled the saving blood of Christ on that nation and on mankind.

26. When he had scourged Jesus. This was the next punishment in severity to death, the scourging being done with a whip with leaded thongs. He delivered Him to be crucified. How lightly men can commit iniquity.

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

29 ¶ And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

30 And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

31 And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,

THE THIRD MOCKING.

27. First, the priests mocked Him (ch. 26 : 67); then Herod and his courtiers (Luke 23 : 11); and now the Roman soldiers. **The whole band.** The two hundred soldiers on duty all gather, each anxious to share the sport! *The world, if only we knew it aright, is something to be shunned; its pleasures are cruel, and its thoughts wicked.*

28. **Scarlet robe.** Some cast-off garment of an officer.

29. **Crown of thorns.** Probably the *Nabk*, which could be gathered freely on the sides of the temple mount, whose spikes are strong and long. It is mockery and brutality, but there is a testimony in it to the Saviour's kingship. We never are really kings until on the brow of patience we have worn some crown of thorns.

30. How marvellous the meekness of Jesus! How marvellous the long-suffering of God which permitted such acts. Be less resentful of what you are called on to endure.

31. Each step of suffering at last ends. But while we mourn over and marvel at the wicked brutality of these, let us remember that these sinners were our brother-men, and we share their faults.

A CONVERT STRANGELY MADE.

32. **Simon.** A visitor at Jerusalem, from Cyrene in North Africa. Probably horrified at being impressed for such service; but, stopping to gaze, he is moved to adore. Afterwards his sons share his faith (Mark 15 : 21). The firstfruits of Africa to Christ; why is the harvest so slowly gathered?

There is at last an end to this anguish—worse than death. They come at last to

CALVARY.

33. Probably not the traditional spot, over which the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been erected; but a knoll to the north-west of

34 ¶ They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

36 And sitting down they watched him there;

the city—which suits the conditions of the narrative—and is in shape like a skull. It is not the place, but the transaction on it, that has to hold our thoughts. Whatever be the site, it has made Jerusalem the centre of the universe of God—the spot to which all hearts in heaven and earth are moved to turn.

34. A stupefying potion. The vinegar (Mark calls it “Wine”) is the poor sour, claret-like wine drunk by the soldiers. Gall is properly wormwood—a very bitter but stupefying drug; but the name is applied to anything bitter, and so would cover Mark’s “myrrh.” The Saviour, when by tasting He knew its nature, would not drink. There was in Him the devotion which shirked no pain, and the wisdom which wished to retain His clearness of mind in dying.

THE DEATH.

35. They crucified Him. How marvellous that three words tell this story of infinite wonder! Such a death the Romans inflicted only on slaves, rebels, and highway robbers. It survives, so far as I know, only in Turkey and in China. It is the most horrible form which the punishment of death has ever assumed. Anguish excruciating rose from suspension by hands and feet; but sometimes days elapsed before the fever and exhaustion set up by pain ended in death. Note: (1) *The unspeakable sinfulness of slaying Him.* His life was love, service, blessing, purity, a sympathy of infinite majesty; yet they crucify Him. What hellish hardihood! What unfeeling hate! What wicked suppression of all good within them! *These men are our brothers*, and we share the levity and waywardness which slew the Saviour. The carnal mind to-day is enmity against God, and only feels less hate because Christ seems further away. *Repent of sin, and be afraid of waywardness and worldliness.* (2) *What marvellous meekness in Christ’s submission to their hate!* It is the Almighty Meekness of God. Let us be ashamed of the smallness and feebleness of our nature, which prevents our bearing wrong without resentment or revenge. The Saviour conquers by meekness. **Parted His garments, casting lots.** What apathy! How unconscious are men of the meanings of what they see! Alas, there are many who to-day treat the events of Calvary in the same airy and neglectful spirit, not considering either their sin that raised the cross, or Christ’s love that bore it!

37 And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

39 ¶ And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

THE TITLE ON THE CROSS.

37. The witness of Christ's enemies is a great evidence of Christianity. Judas said, "*I have betrayed innocent blood.*" Pilate said, "*I find no fault in Him;*" "*I am innocent of the blood of this just Person.*" The chief priests said, "*He saved others; Himself He cannot save;*" "*He trusted in God.*" And now the title put above His cross, which was meant to declare His crime, pronounces Him **King of the Jews**. He was that and more—King of the human heart; Lord of all. There is something significant in its being written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. *This title was a little gospel written in the three great languages of earth.* The fuller story has been told in every tongue, and read adoringly by every people.

THE TWO THIEVES,

38, are crucified with Him, to augment His shame. So His enemies intended. But instead, one of them at least comforts Christ by giving Him a soul to save; reads and declares His heavenly kingliness; elicits the Divine glory which Christ shows in bestowing on him heaven. There is no shame which Worth cannot turn to Honour. Care for character, and you may be careless of reputation.

"BULLS OF BASHAN,"

39-44, beset Him round (Ps. 22 : 12). Did any ever die amidst such treatment? We get fondest nursing and gentlest touch in our last moments; and even the guiltiest, dying by public justice, find a respectful silence in their woe. But the Christ finds not reverence, but reviling. *Some, from levity and thoughtlessness, mock Him* (ver. 39). One would have thought none could have **Passed by** that cross, which, ever since it was raised, has filled the eye of earth and heaven and hell. Indeed, multitudes, looking on it were fixed to the spot, and could not cease "*beholding*" until death had come (Luke 23 : 48). But some could glance and jest and **pass by** to see the other sights of the city or attend to common cares. Are you a "*passer-by*?"

40. Their jest is shallow as it is sinister. *Just because He was the Son of God, infinite in love, He remained on the cross and came not down.*

41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

42 He saved others ; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

43 He trusted in God ; let him deliver him now, if he will have him : for he said, I am the Son of God.

44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani ? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?

47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.

48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

49 The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

41-43. Some, *from an evil conscience*, mock the Saviour. Surely the priests were due in the temple on this, one of the great days of the feast. Why are they here ? Can they not rest content when they know He has been nailed, hands and feet, to the cross, and the cross raised with Him on it ? But *the evil conscience* betrays its instinctive knowledge of its Lord, by the intensity of its unrest and hatred. *They cannot stay away*. If they deemed Him guilty, they should have exhorted Him to repent, not taunted Him with crimes. They are compelled to stand and look and blaspheme, by the turmoil of fear and guilt within them.

44. He had to bear as well the wild mockery of despair, from the thieves—as Matthew says, perhaps speaking generally. Possibly only one actually upbraided Christ (Luke 23 : 39) ; but perchance at first both joined in the taunt, half derision, half prayer, “*Save Thyself and us.*” Just as some to-day, because the gospel does not end their bodily miseries, curse Christ still. Did ever any human heart find such woe ? “*We die alone,*” says Pascal. But was ever loneliness like this ? Earth could give no room for His birth, nor any reverence for His death. How hopeless that day must the cause of Christ have seemed !

DARKNESS.

46-49. This was inward and outward. Perchance outward because inward. For the smile leaves the face of nature and of the world when the light is clouded above the cause of Christ. It is the beginning of that witness of Nature to her Lord, of which the earthquake and the rending of the veil are parts. When Christ languishes none shall smile. This outward darkness checked and ended the jests and pleasures of wicked men. What fears arise ! Is this the darkening

50 ¶ Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent:

52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

of the sun which precedes "*the great and the terrible day of the Lord*" (Joel 2: 31, 32)? *The rejoicing of the wicked is short.* Though creation groans with Christ, and nature watches three hours with Him, there is still long darkness within. It is shaken off, to speak to His mother; to John; to the dying thief; to pray for the forgiveness of the guilty race, which knew not what they were doing. But it endures. *Love is capacity for bliss and for woe*; and here it is filled. At last it reaches at once its height of anguish and its relief in the cry of unutterable sorrow, **My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?** Do not put *more meaning* into this word of inconceivable woe than is there. There was no wrath of God resting on Him; but only the *withdrawal of His comfort and His smile—the great penalty of sin.* But this is to Jesus a sorrow that breaketh the heart. How heavily Jesus suffers for what we so lightly commit! "*He treads the winepress alone.*" Some think He calls Elias. One runs and dips a sponge in wine, to relieve His thirst. The rest forbid him, wanting to see whether Elias would come (at which they would not have been astonished). So, darkness lingers on heaven, on earth, in the thoughts of men; on human prospects, *in the heart of Christ.* "*The night also is God's*" (Ps. 74: 16). And there are dark nights in human history and in the lives of God's saints, in which all hope seems to die down, but which are followed by dewy and radiant resurrection mornings.

THE GREAT DEATH.

50-52. *Rest comes at length*, after inexpressible agony of body and soul. **With a loud voice**, He cries, "*It is finished:*" in gratitude, triumph, trust; and then *reumes the darkened universe* with the great cry of unclouded trust, "*Father, into Thy hands I commend [I place] My spirit;*" and with that word—*dies.* His life was *the life*, His death *the death.*

51. He seems to burst the grave in entering it. There has ever since seemed to be *a way out*, and the opening of graves and visitations of the glorified (ver. 52) were only firstfruits, slight intimations of what is to be, a snowdrop peering above the wintry ground. That death is the great epoch of history, earthly and heavenly. Then old things passed away, and all things became new. Then all lower deities were dethroned, their seats overturned and overshadowed by the cross-throne of this God of tender mercy. Then the darkness

53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

which enveloped God, the darkness of guilt, of fear, was ended. And above the dead Saviour smiled a new heaven of hope and peace. We cannot name all aspects of His death. But note some. (1) *It is a great revelation of God.* The God above Him is revealed and honoured by Christ's dying faith *as never in eternal history He had been.* The God within Him gleams forth all lowly and all pitiful. If you would know God, come and see Him here. (2) It is the great light on death. Had He not shared our death, how we should have dreaded it! "*Abide with us, for it is toward evening,*" would have been our cry, in a deeper sense than these words have ever carried. But we can venture to die, *after Him*—to follow the High Priest through the Jordan (Josh. 3: 14). (3) His victory has given victories to multitudes. The words He used have become the prayer of the dying. Stephen, Polycarp, St. Bernard, John Huss, Luther, Melancthon, and innumerable lesser souls, have followed Him and died with His prayer on their lips, "*Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.*" (4) *It is the great atonement, the sacrifice, the finished work,* on the ground of which we are saved. (5) It has been the death of innumerable evils. Paul speaks as if Christ's cross had carried a succession of victims. "*I glory in the cross,*" he says, "*ON WHICH the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.*" It is a Haman's gallows, and ever since sin, pride, evil, have hung bleeding, slowly dying, dishonoured, on the cross they reared for Christ.

54-66. The chapter ends with the story of a grave. Love and death have always something about them worth the heeding. We never get far away from a grave. The story of the great grave, so strangely filled, so strangely emptied, ought to help us. Before noting, however, the burial of Christ, observe

THE UNEXPECTED CONFESSOR.

54. When the disciples are silent, the stones cry out. Even the women have all their faith borne down with woe. But lo! a heathen—a soldier—one who apparently had not restrained his men in their cruel mockings, rises up to witness for Him. And when the disciples are kept by fear from attempting to get permission to bury Christ, Joseph rises and does so. In the words, **Truly this was the Son of**

55 And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him :

56 Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

57 When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathæa, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple :

God, the centurion—helped, perchance, by the taunts of the chief priests (ver. 40)—described Him, as more than mere man, one worthy to be worshipped and obeyed. Truly the cross *lifts Christ up*, and He begins to “*draw all men unto Him!*”

THE BEWILDERED FRIENDS.

55, 56. Love usually is light, and walks in a world with some light shining on all mysteries. But even Love has its great darknesses, in which its best acts seem mistakes, its best faith a dream, its richest comfort a delusion. If you are bewildered, confused in faith, and reft of comfort, remember others have been so before you. But while what to believe of Christ they cannot tell, there is happily nothing in Him that they have not still to love. So, living, they ministered unto Him; and, dying, they stand beholding afar off. Note here, how woman finds work, consecration, and glory in ministering to Jesus Christ. To the ministry woman thus renders, she owes her gradual rise, from the subjection in which the gospel found her, to the dignity of her position in Christian lands to-day. What a service the Saviour has rendered by eliciting the purest, richest, loving service of human hearts! The names of some of the women are here; the names of others are Joanna, wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna (Luke 8 : 3); and the names of others are in the Book of Life, though they have here no fame. Men have their work in the Church, women theirs. Let both do the work allotted them.

AN UNKNOWN DISCIPLE.

57. There are more good men in the world than any know of; and while some men are secret disciples because the heart is selfish, others are secret disciples only because the mind is confused. Joseph has an exquisite description given of him. Though a “*Counsellor*,” *i.e.* one of the Sanhedrim, he is “*an honourable counsellor*,” one who “*waited for the kingdom of God*” (Mark 15 : 43); a “*good man*” and “*just*,” who, though a “*disciple . . . secretly for fear of the Jews*” (John 19 : 38), was not moved by fear to be untrue, but had pleaded in the counsel the cause of Christ, Luke telling us (ch. 23 : 51) he “*had not consented to the counsel and deed*” of his brethren. False hearts cower; but true hearts gather courage in the hour of danger. That death of

58 He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.

59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

Christ, which His enemies thought would destroy all His attractions, revealed His glory; and Joseph and Nicodemus found the solution of their doubts and the impulse to a brave confession in the shame, the death, and the apparent weakness to the Son of man. Formerly the benefits of discipleship were chief matters in their view, but now Honour finds a voice and bids them own Him.

58. He went to Pilate. Mark adds "*boldly*," for indeed it was an act not without danger to himself. But in this world for one danger which a bold man runs, a timid man runs ten. Pilate seems pleased rather than otherwise, and when he has assured himself that Christ is dead (Mark 15 : 44), He commanded the body to be delivered. Truly the last are first when this late confessor is entrusted with such a charge, which angels would be glad to bear in their hands. Reverently he took the body down from the cross (ver. 59), and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth; or, as John tells us (ch. 19 : 40) with more detail, "*wound it in linen clothes with the spices*," of which Nicodemus had brought "*about an hundred pound weight*" (John 19 : 39)—a quantity enough for a monarch's embalmment. Thus with honourable tendance they prepare the body for the sepulchre and then place it in

THE GRAVE.

60, 61. Jerusalem was surrounded by graves cut out of the limestone rock. Yet it seems strange that in the spot recently identified by Conder and Sir William Dawson as Calvary, you may still find a garden, and in the garden a sepulchre, and the sepulchre closed with a huge circular stone, like a colossal grindstone, which, rolling in a grove cut for it, would cover or expose the opening into the tomb as you might move it. Perhaps it was to spite Joseph that they had the Saviour crucified in this spot near his garden. If so, the spite served Joseph well. None other had lain in this grave. It was sacred to Him. Christ died, *what one may call, a borrowed death; He is laid in a borrowed tomb.* Only the death was the most shameful of all deaths; while the grave is rich and noble. There is much about this grave-dwelling of the Saviour worthy of earnest thought: (1) *A grave seems an item in the experience of all things good.* Nothing great or good seems to go straight to its throne, but always *through a grave.* Good causes seem always lost before they are won, the dark hour of weakness

61 And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

being used of God to draw forth the allegiance that gives them victory. The testimony of prophets seemed generally to find only a *grave*, and "*Who hath believed our report*" has been its constant epitaph. Religion, truth, and goodness go not through the world in bright apparel, but persecuted, dying, and finding graves. Judge not success by seeming, power by popularity. The great Christ found a grave. (2) It was meet Christ should enter our graves, for all the world is but a grave—a vast cemetery where we transact a little business and indulge a little pleasure before lying down beside the dead. There is no household without its grave. The dust on which we tread has been man. Life is only a procession to our own funeral. So Christ would not have thoroughly come to the world if He had not come to our *grave*. But He said, "*Where thou goest, I will go; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.*" (3) The Saviour hallows the grave by occupying it. He removes its reproach, dispels its terrors. When He enters it, He shows it is one of "the places of God's dominion," a region where life is not extinct, and God's mercy not vanished away. We may lie down in our grave more hopefully "with Christ for bedfellow." Since that *new tomb* was occupied, all graves have become new, and thoughts of rest, sleep, refreshment, waking, are now associated with them. When Death fixed its sting in Christ, it lost it for all who follow Christ.

"Why should we tremble to convey
Their bodies to the tomb?
Here the dear flesh of Jesus lay,
And left a long perfume."

(4) We now can feel "those who sleep in Jesus" are safe. Where God permitted His Son to lie, we may safely place our dear dead.

GRACIOUS MINISTRIES.

61. The two Mariés keep watch: sitting over against the sepulchre. They watch, and after watching return "to prepare *spices and ointments*," with which still further to honour the poor remains of Him who loved them, and who had so mysteriously died. There is something very touching in the honour men render to the dead. (1) It is a great testimony to the value of even ordinary lives. How ungrudgingly in all lands men expend their wealth in honouring the dead! The living may starve, but they will honour the dead. How tender the memories that retain their words and deeds! If cynical and disposed to scorn your fellow-men, listen to the voice of

62 ¶ Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,

63 Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

the mourners, read the epitaphs upon the tombs. The formal statements may not be reliable for purposes of comparing the departed with his fellows; but they are most reliable as evidence that there are few lives which have not some bright preciousness in them. (2) Such ministry *enriches those who render it*. Some would have dissuaded Mary Magdalene from the costly outlay involved in her preparation. Mary of Bethany had already anointed Him with lavish reverence, "for His burial." Nicodemus had spent doubtless a huge sum on these precious drugs which in such exceeding abundance he had provided. "To what purpose should there be further waste of ointment?" That question to these women would have seemed a word spoken *by one who did not understand*. The ministries to the dead are outside of commercial reckonings; but though they be so, there are none so richly repaid to those who render them. Livingstone's servants embalmed his body and carried it with months of labour and danger to the coast, whence it was sent to England, when an hour's labour could have given it simple burial. Was their labour wasted? How rich these men grew in self-respect! in the respect they won from others! in the reward which came from the commendation of the cause of Africa and of Missions, given in the fact of such gratitude, such faithfulness, and such appreciation finding place in their hearts! In a fire which occurred in Glasgow about five and twenty years ago in a tenemented house, the residents after the first alarm found they could save some of their possessions. They came out carrying their choicest treasures. One woman brought; only—a *little coffin that held her dead child*. Was she unwise to leave her goods to perish and bring only that? No! whatever honour we pay to the dead is a link connecting us to them; which permits the soul to enrich itself with the resultant wisdom of their lives; which hallows the heart with influences from another world, makes us less worldly, steadies our pursuit and hope of the Eternal and the Enduring. Keep fresh the flowers on every grave, and rehearse the memories of the departed; for in this fever of common life, the dead will quiet and strengthen our hearts with a great peace, when we remember them.

THE MISGIVINGS OF THE WICKED.

62-64. For such sabbath-breaking as was involved in healing the blind, the chief priests would have slain Christ. There is a beam in

64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead : so the last error shall be worse than the first.

65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch : go your way, make it as sure as ye can.

66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

their eye which helped them to see a mote in His. Here these defenders of the sabbath break it by entering Pilate's house on such a week-day work as *securing a tomb*. Their solicitude seems strange. Is Death not a sufficient watchman? What would the disciples gain by further deceiving themselves and others? They were buying spices to anoint Him. Why should rulers be afraid? They had a misgiving that they had not seen the last of Him they slew. "*John is risen from the dead,*" said Herod's guilty conscience. "*Jesus may rise,*" said the guilty conscience of the priests. They remembered that He had raised Lazarus, and might therefore rise Himself; that He had said strange words about being "*three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,*" and was understood to have predicted to His disciples that He would arise from the dead. They are afraid of this Jesus, though He be dead. They pretend, therefore, to be afraid lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead. *What an extraordinary solicitude, to prevent something happening which had never happened in human history!* "*There is no rest, saith my God, to the wicked.*" Whenever we pursue a course of evil it involves us in misgiving and alarm.

PILATE'S ANSWER.

65. He knew that for envy they had delivered Him, though they pretended zeal for cause of God. Did he see now that they ask from motives of fear what they pretend to desire from solicitude for the orthodoxy of the people? *Make it as sure as ye can*, is a word intentionally or unconsciously full of satire. If Christ wanted to rise it was not much they could do to prevent Him. But pleased with his permission, they go to the sepulchre and make themselves a little more secure.

THE PRECAUTIONS AGAINST CHRIST,

66, are elaborately taken. They made the sepulchre sure—against any disciples who might seek to get the body, or against Christ Himself if He should wish to leave the tomb. The enemies of Christ often think His cause is dead and its grave is sealed. But it takes more authority than they carry to prevent the Saviour rising. So they set

their watch—probably four or six men—and seal the stone. No weapon formed against Christ shall prosper. Nor can any demonstration disprove His glory. Our graves are sealed, but it is only with an earthly seal. Meanwhile the women “*rest the sabbath day, according to commandment.*”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“*The end*” for which Peter waited was not such an end as He expected. It was an end of the Saviour's pain and shame, of the world's despair. But not an end of Christ's earthly history or of the Saviour's cause. It was not possible that He could be holden by death. His continuance in the grave would have been a dark miracle more incredible than His leaving it. Every sentiment of reverence for God and respect for man has moved men, even apart from Scripture, to expect immortality, and sometimes—as the followers of Zoroaster did in Persia—even resurrection. And reverence for the Son of God instinctively constrains us to expect He will be the Firstfruits of them that sleep. Every tear of bereavement needing comfort, every prayer seeking solace, aids our faith in the resurrection of the Lord. The simple sublimity of the story; the faith pervading at once the whole company of the believers; the Church of God, gathered by faith in His resurrection—the stamp of a risen Saviour on all providence, and especially on all the saintly lives,—make the resurrection of Jesus the surest, as it is the brightest, fact in history. All modern history is inexplicable without this fact, and all sorrow inconsolable without it.

THE SILENT SABBATH

He spends in the grave is not without significance. As from the work of Creation, so from the work of Redemption, He rests on the sabbath day. It is a sweet association, the sabbath and the grave; sweetest and most sacred of all rests, with what seems the most hopeless of all ruins. It is the sabbath to all the saintly dead, however long the tomb may seem to hold them. Perhaps it was a sabbath of work as well as rest. The Saviour can be nowhere without working blessing. At once Matthew's words (ch. 27 : 52), and Peter's reference to His preaching to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3 : 19), suggests that His sabbath rest amongst the dead was a season of blessedness for them. This sabbath wears away, its hours lengthened by the impatience of those who love Him to complete their sacred ministry to His “remains.”

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

At last it is over. In the brief hour following sundown they buy "*sweet spices*" to anoint Him; and before the light on the following morning they are on their way to the grave.

THE RESURRECTION MORNING.

1. In the end of the sabbath means "after the sabbath," during which, "*according to commandment*," they rested (Luke 23: 56). But there was little rest that night! The disciples may sleep for sorrow; the women wake with it, and before dawn are moving. What brought them so early to the grave? Was it only love wanting to complete funereal honours? or had the rising Christ *waked, quickened, drawn them?* Both, doubtless. *When loving instincts move us, we have higher guidance than we know.* **Mary Magdalene:** not Mary of Bethany, nor the "*woman who was a sinner*"; but one delivered from a great affliction (Luke 8: 2), and filled with a mighty gratitude. Sometimes even madness (which probably was her trial) may work for good, and leave the soul more clear and calm than untroubled reason ever could be. **The other Mary.** The mother of James and Alphæus. *Salome* was also with them at some part of the morning (Mark 16: 1), and "*others*." Probably they lodged in different quarters from the men; and possibly Mary, swift of foot (John 20: 2), sped on before the elder women. Were they not afraid—amongst the crowd of sleepers in the open air; in the intense darkness; coming to a grave; one guarded by rough men? Love gives woman often more courage than strength gives man. It "*casts out fear*." If they had stopped to consider what was prudent, they would have stayed at home; for they would have concluded they could not roll away the stone—they had better wait for the company of the men. But love is always wiser than prudence. And they go forth to carry out their purposed anointing.

THE UNEXPECTED EVENTS.

2-4. **A great earthquake.** Heaven does not leave earth alone in honouring the great Christ. The feeble women find they have allies great beyond all thought—angels; omnipotence of nature; God. Already that grave has the eyes and hearts of the universe on it.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

For the King of glory, who sweetened death by entering the grave, "*abolished death*" (2 Tim. 1 : 10) by leaving it. There was an earthquake as He entered the grave (ch. 27 : 51); there is an earthquake on His leaving it. The Angel seems to roll away the stone rather for the women's comfort, and for the demonstration of the fact of the Saviour's rising, than for the sake of Jesus, who could go into or out of chambers when "*the doors were shut.*" Against earthquake, the tape and sealing-wax of the chief priests does not avail; and before the angel the soldiers did shake, and became as dead men. Note : (1) All nature and Providence will be found co-operant with grace. (2) He who seeks Jesus finds angels as well, and sees the whole heaven above full of friendly spirits. (3) No plan of wickedness ever thrives; in the very hour of triumph it breaks down. (4) The good find unexpected help from unexpected quarters; and meet with angels where others find only ghosts.

THE ANGEL'S GREETING.

5-7. Possibly an interval elapsed between their seeing the stone removed and seeing the angel on it, during which Mary ran and told Peter and John. To the other women the angel speaks. **Fear not ye** seems the constant salutation to the saintly. He who sends them seems to bid them salute each house and heart with peace. He utters the approval as well as the benediction of Heaven. **Ye seek Jesus, which was crucified;** as those true-hearted and faithful. He then utters the great consolation of the ages, **He is not here: for He is risen, as He said.** What a supreme moment was that! How it changed the look of all things; their views of Calvary, of Christ, of Evil, of Life, of Death! It takes away from Calvary every look of failure or mistake; from Christ, all attributes of weakness; from Evil, that apparent sovereignty under which man had groaned; from Life, its worthlessness; from Death, its terror. The whole universe of God joins the angel in saying, "*He is risen;*" conscience witnesses for Him; guilt shrinks from Him; the Holy Ghost at Pentecost convinces the multitude of His glory. Our hearts, with all their hopes and fears, say, "*He is risen.*" History turns over a new leaf, and earth moves forward because "*He is risen.*" Of no other leader of men, however great, has it ever been said, "*He is risen.*" The body of Gaudama, the founder of Buddhism, was duly burnt after his death; that of

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 ¶ And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Mahomet was buried in Mecca, that of Confucius, in his family village;—without thought of resurrection being associated with any one of these three great founders of great religions. But what entered no heart to conceive with regard to others, all hearts accept as the alone worthy finish of the Saviour's career. *Believe this record, and lose the fear of death by doing so.* Come, see the place where the Lord lay. Angels call Him Lord: bow down in reverence. Look where He lay; for it is a prophetic tomb, and tells that others will be emptied. How much rose from the grave when He rose! Faith rose from its grave and resumed its trust in God; and Hope rose from its grave, and Consolation. Everything good seemed to die with Christ, and everything good seems to rise with Him. The vitality by which He rose seems to overflow the grave: all the disciples, and since them a multitude that none can number, have been strong in the power of His resurrection.

THE CHARGE.

7. Go . . . and tell His disciples. A little later Jesus bids Mary, and a little later still the other women also: Go and tell. Forty days later, the great commission is in the same key: "Go and preach." There must be no private or selfish joy. Dost thou know the glad tidings? "Go and tell." "*His disciples,*" Mark reports, "*and Peter.*" How thoughtful is Christ of those who forsook and denied Him! Into Galilee. Some would have liked a more dramatic self-presentation, and wish He had gone into the temple and the judgment-hall, confronting those who slew Him. If petty triumph had been in Christ's heart, He might have done so. But, in His greatness, He would not "*strive, nor cry, nor lift up His voice in the streets.*"

8. With fear and great joy. *The highest form of ecstasy.*

THE MEETING.

9, 10. Gradually God opens their hearts to admit the mighty fact. First the earthquake; next the removed stone; then the angel; then the angel's message; then the Lord Himself. So comfort grows; and facts, beneath which the mind might have reeled, approve themselves

11 ¶ Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,

13 Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.

14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

to our understanding and the heart. Hail! A common greeting of love and gladness. Wishing them joy. How simple! How sublime! His salutation is creative, conveying the joy which it bespeaks. **They . . . worshipped Him**, instinctively; as mankind ever since has been doing. **Tell My brethren.** Not *tell the backsliders*, but "*brethren.*" That word healed their backslidings. What a message! The women are apostles to the apostles! The whole place of woman in the world rises as her heart age after age has expanded with love to the Redeemer. They who love Him find comfort for themselves and carry it to others.

POOR MAKESHIFTS.

11-15. Neither are some persuaded, even though Christ rise from the dead! *Angels cannot convince the alienated heart.* So the soldiers "go and tell," and the chief priests have to plot again to cover their failure and their shame. (1) How hopeless is the path of wrong, ever needing fresh sin to cover former sin! (2) How sin destroys the power of repenting, and waywardness, the power of believing! (3) Policy should be left to knaves and fools. (4) **They gave large money** (ver. 12) **unto the soldiers, and they took the money—both cursed by the bribe.** (5) However indubitable God's truth, man's falsehood always has some reply (ver. 15). Never expect to silence the objections of the wayward and the distrustful. (6) How strangely sad the way in which some make of Christ's resurrection morning a day of further sin and of self-destruction!

St. Matthew passes over much that the other Gospels notice—the walk to Emmaus; the meeting with the disciples in the upper room on the evening of the day He rose, and on the next Lord's day evening; His appearance to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, when He questioned and restored Peter; an appearance to James; and the final appearance, when He led them forth to Olivet, and rose to heaven in the act of blessing them. Instead of these, Matthew gives only the one great appearance, in which He gave His Church her great commission.

16 ¶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him : but some doubted.

THE GATHERING IN GALILEE.

16. Before His death He named Galilee as the meeting-place (ch. 26 : 32) ; the angels bade the women meet Him in Galilee (ver. 7) ; the Saviour sends the same message to the disciples through the women (ver. 10). **The eleven.** But evidently along with others ; e.g. the women who carried the message, and probably the five hundred brethren at once whom Paul speaks of (1 Cor. 15 : 6). The private interviews on successive Lord's day evenings with the eleven had taken place. He is about to give His charge to the Church at large. It would be a strange gathering ; with disciples by the score, doubtful what to believe, *when it was so easy to believe in the ghost of Christ having appeared, and so hard to believe His body risen.* Still they gather, obedient to the message ; presenting their hearts to be convinced by any proof He may afford. *We ought to wish to believe the Saviour risen.* A cold indifference is not candour. The need of the world for a Saviour who would abolish death is so intense, that all loving hearts hope the gospel will prove true. If you have doubts go with your fellow-disciples to the appointed meeting, and you may find a presence there which will end them. It is a strange gathering—the Seventy ; the multitude of unknown disciples ; many recipients of Christ's mercy—most of them in the momentous conflict of the great hope with the great fear.

THE WELCOME.

17. How Jesus appeared, or in what form, we cannot tell ; whether suddenly, with some radiance in His aspect, or as of old. But, appearing, He is greeted by (1) adoring homage, and (2) by slow-dying doubt. The honest evangelist does not suppress, and we should not ignore, the latter fact, for both are significant. (1) *Adoring homage* rises to the Saviour. No voice bade them render such homage, but their hearts prompt it. *Instinctively mankind have worshipped Christ.* Wherever the story of Christ has been taken, men have worshipped Him as a God.] (2) Honest doubt will rise in devoutest minds. There were alternative and easier explanations of the mystery. That it was not Jesus, but His ghost, was probably the feeling of many, until they realized the impossibility of such an One being a victim of death, and remembered His intimations that He would rise again, and perceived the fitness of such a finish to His life. There are doubts that grow from indolence and from suspicion ; these are sinful, and tend to

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 ¶ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost :

harden into disbelief. There are doubts that grow from earnestness and candour ; these melt away, and make the faith more strong afterwards. Those doubtfully disposed should be glad that some doubting brethren were on the spot, so that it is a narrative of what was severely tested at the time that we have here.

THE GREAT CONSOLATION.

18. All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Our grudge at death is that it seems to strip our loved ones of all power of either action or enjoyment. The enemies of Christ rejoiced because they thought that death had stripped Him of all the power He had. But, even in ordinary cases, death is honest, and gives something for what it takes. In Christ's case, to die was gain in the richest measure in which soul ever experienced it. He resumed all He had left when He came to earth. But He found Himself rewarded by new powers and enlarged dominion. He has new *Power to forgive* ; greater fulness of the Spirit to impart ; a new title to the love of the human heart ; a new sceptre to which the human heart delights to bend. He is Master of Providence, Lord of life and death and heaven. So that submission to death has given Him the empire of the heart of mankind, the sovereignty of all things. Note here especially two things : (1) Like their Lord, His disciples can after death say, "*Power is given me.*" Do not pity the holy dead. (2) We ought to realize that in all things Christ is Master. Sin says, "*All power is given unto me ;*" and Sorrow says, "*All power is given unto me.*" But their words are false. Christ is Master, and His plans will all be realized. Rejoice that not *some*, but **All Power** in earth as well as in heaven is His. All that grieves, hurts, oppresses, alarms us, is under His control.

THE GREAT COMMISSION,

19, grows out of this consolation. If He had less than all power, we might well shrink from a work which needs omnipotence. Alike in depth and extent the charge is boundless ; for it is really to convert mankind ; to effect, not a slight change on a small community, but the greatest of all changes on all mankind. But, grounding our hope on this, both expectation and purpose may take their highest range. And converting mankind to Christ is not too great a task to undertake. Teach means in the original, "*make disciples of,*" i.e. "*make them My disciples.*" Our work is not to make them our disciples, but co-

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

disciples with ourselves of the great Master; to link them to Him. Nothing effectual is done, and no fitness for Christian fellowship is produced, until the soul begins to listen to, learn from, and obey the great Master. **Baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.** The disciples must not be *secret disciples*—for secrecy destroys both faithfulness and usefulness—but *open disciples*. “*If any man will serve Me, let him follow Me.*” Baptism is fitted to be the rite of discipleship. (1) It is an individual act; not, like the joining in the Lord’s Supper, a conjoint profession. (2) It suits us in the hour of conversion, because then our deepest feeling is that of our pollution, and our deepest desire that our redeeming God will cleanse our sin away. (3) The formula of baptism is important. We have in our discipleship to face the Triune God—to ask “*The Father*” to accept us as His children; “*The Son*” to forgive us, as trusting on His atonement; “*The Holy Spirit*” to cleanse us by His regenerating influence. A true disciple thus submits himself to the Divinest energies of the Infinite God. Many think baptism should be administered to children. When it is so the parents confess their children’s need of Divine cleansing, and commit them to the Saviour’s grace and care. Besides the value of the rite as an act of discipleship, its formula has been of great doctrinal value. It assumes the doctrine of the Trinity, viz. that God is in one sense THREE, and in another sense ONE: that Jesus is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. No one can solve the mystery of such a doctrine, because God, the highest of all beings, is necessarily too high and complex for our understanding. But we can and must believe it.

20. When discipleship has accepted baptism, all is not done; for conversion begins the work only, it does not end it. Hence, there follows—**Teaching them to observe . . . whatsoever I have commanded you:** all duties, truths, hopes, of the Christian life. **Teaching.** Mark has, “*Preach the gospel to every creature.*” It may seem singular that, having “*all power*” from which to make selection, He should choose what seems the weakest of all powers—*teaching and preaching*. Let the teacher and the preacher magnify their office. He chose this lowly power because it was the fittest of all. Because, in teaching; men get the Divine facts put in a light not too glorious, and commended by sympathies at once engaging and inspiring. Let us do this great work nobly. He adds another encouragement: **Lo, I am with you alway.** The first great encouragement is that He is on the throne, invested with all power; the second is, that He is at

our side, full of all sympathy and love. Mark, the statement is not "I *will* be with you," but I **am with you**; though you neither see nor feel Me, I **am with you**. Blessed be His name, He has been and is with every true disciple; so that of all given Him in the centuries that have passed since He spake these words, *He has lost none*; but having called, has justified, and having justified, has glorified them. He has been with His Church, keeping her from fainting, from decay, declension, so that she has gone on conquering and to conquer; so that the hundred and twenty became three thousand at Pentecost; and before the end of the century the three thousand had become probably (Lange) half a million; by the eighth century the half-million had become thirty millions; by the Reformation one hundred millions. And, to-day, four hundred and forty millions of men give Jesus the Name which is above every name; multitudes that none can number doing so, not with the lips only, but from the heart. *He is with us still*. A hundred years ago Carey reckoned up the population of the world with great accuracy, and found Christendom was only one-fifth of the whole; now it is nearly one-third. What another century of missions may make it will probably exceed the hope and prayers of the most daring believer. We must remember He is most richly with us when we are "*going into the world to preach the gospel*," i.e. *when we are on the move of mercy*. Let us, for our personal consolation, remember He will be with us to the end of life and work and need. Let us remember that, in all work done for Him, He still is with us, and is ever making the foolishness of preaching and teaching omnipotent to bring men into His fold.

THE END.