

THE ART OF LIFE

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PREFACE

THERE is an Art of Life, into which God waits to introduce us. But we are slow and unwilling pupils. We live too much at haphazard, too little upon principle. We comfort ourselves with the assurance that some day we shall be able to give ourselves wholly to learning how to live ; but in the meanwhile life is slipping away so fast that we are in danger of not having time to practise the art we hope to acquire. Let us, then, set ourselves in good earnest to learn the Art of Life ; and perhaps these fugitive papers may help some of my readers in their quest. At least, I hope such will be the case.

F. B. MEYER.

“Not for these sad issues
Was man created ; but to obey the law
Of life, and hope, and action. And 'tis known
That when we stand upon our native soil,
Unelbowed by such objects as oppress
Our active powers, those powers themselves
become
Strong to subvert our noxious qualities.
They sweep distemper from the busy day,
And make the chalice of the big round year
Run o'er with gladness ; whence God's Being
moves
In beauty through the world ; and all who see
Bless Him, rejoicing in His neighbourhood.”

WORDSWORTH.

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I

THE SUPREMACY OF LAW

THAT is a remarkable expression which the apostle makes use of in Romans viii. 2. We should hardly have expected to find *law* predicated of the Holy Spirit. He is compared by our Lord to the wind, which bloweth where it listeth, so that you cannot say whence it cometh and whither it goeth. And to judge of the matter by the experience of godly people, we might suppose that the reception of the Holy Spirit in any special and marked degree was too uncertain, fitful, and spasmodic, too much the result of emotional and transcendental experiences, to be brought within the range of law.

When certain people describe their deepest experiences, they so often allude to all nights of prayer, to days of fastings, to months of special preparation. Their

emotional life is evidently strongly wrought upon. Their methods of regarding the service of God and ministry to man are apt to be coloured with the light of their special experiences. And many who are deficient in the emotional element, who regard life from another standpoint, are apt to suppose that the Pentecostal gift is mystical and transcendental, a matter of temperament, to be accounted for by the operation of no law or method within their reach.

This is a profound pity, and a great loss ensues to the more thoughtful and unemotional natures which love God with their mind, and will, and strength rather than their heart, using *that* as expressing the emotional rather than the volitional. But for all such there is great comfort in pondering these words of the apostle, "the *law* of the Spirit of life."

Among the great discoveries of the present age, none surpasses that which has opened to the gaze of man the universal reign and supremacy of law. Everywhere, in the highest heavens and in the lowest depths, in the orderly procession of the worlds, and in the submarine currents that slowly move the tresses of the seaweeds, God works on certain ascertainable and invariable laws.

Of course He is able to interfere at any moment to arrest the action of a lower law by the introduction of a higher. The miracles themselves are proofs of this. But, for the most part, and unless there are special reasons to the contrary, there is

“ . . . one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.”

Turning from nature to the inner life, we find there also the reign of law. The apostle in this context is perpetually alluding to law—the law of the mind, the law of the flesh, the law of sin, the law of God. There are reasons for the changes in our inner experience. These are not fitful and erratic, following their own wild will, but accounted for by our obedience to and violation of certain great laws and principles, which deserve, and indeed demand, attentive study on the part of all who desire a regular and progressive experience.

Amid these laws of the inner life is the law of the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God works on regular, precise, and ascertainable principles. There is no variableness or shadow of turning in His action. The spasmodic, the fitful,

the capricious, have no place in His mighty operations within the human heart. And if only we gave as much time to investigate the laws of His operation as an Edison gives to the investigation of the laws of the physical world, we should be able to secure His regular work within us, and His unintermittent operation with us in every effort we make for the glory of God.

Certainly our Lord compares Him to the wind. But then the wind itself obeys an unalterable law. What can be more definite and regular than the steady current of the trade-winds; which sailors have trusted with unerring accuracy from the earliest days of navigation. The weather forecast in the daily paper, prognosticating the direction of the wind establishes the same fact. Where the hot air of the Sahara is becoming light and rises, the cool winds of the north rush in to fill the void, and the hot air passes back on the upper layers of the atmosphere to the frozen north. What profound reason the Master had in comparing the Spirit to wind!

It is a well-known axiom in physics, that if we would procure the action or co-operation of a force, we must obey the law of the force. For instance, if man desires water to turn his water-wheels for

sawing up the beams of timber, he cannot expect the water to depart from its obedience to the primal laws impressed on it by the Creator. It will not flow up hill ; it will not accelerate or slacken its speed ; it will not move his wheels unless their clappers dip into its flow. In order, therefore, for water to do what man designs and wishes, he must carefully study the laws of its operation, and adapt his machinery to obey them. The more complete his obedience, the more perfect its ministry.

When I was in the United States I was greatly interested in the vigorous growth of a city about eighty miles from Niagara, because, on inquiry, I learnt that all the machinery was moved and propelled by water-power received from the Falls, and transmitted in the form of electricity. But how careful must have been the study of the law, first, of storing the water-force, and secondly, of transmitting it !

In his inaugural address, the other day, the President of the British Association referred to the same source of power, as supplying all the force needed for the manufacture of nitrogen from the atmosphere, for the replenishing of our stores of food. To such an extent has human

knowledge of the laws of nature, and reliance upon them, proceeded !

If, then, we carry out the analogy completely, does it not naturally arise, that if we desire to secure the mighty co-working of the force of the Divine Spirit, against the laws of sin within, and against the power of evil in other men, we must set ourselves to study and obey the laws of His operation ? The apostles received the Pentecostal power because they so carefully and literally obeyed the laws and conditions that Jesus laid down ; and similarly it will be in the experience of the Church to-day. They who obey most absolutely and completely, will receive most conspicuously and gloriously.

For when once these laws are obeyed, the Divine Spirit (if I may say it without irreverence) has no option than to obey. Not that we are to suppose that He would arbitrarily withhold His gracious help from any one. Nowhere has God spoken in secret, saying, Seek ye My face, in vain. But, even though a man had forfeited the Divine complacency, yet, if he should obey these conditions, the flow of the Spirit through his life would again become methodical and plenteous.

What, then, are the conditions on

obeying which we may count, with perfect certainty, on the Holy Spirit? They appear to be these:—

1. We must believe that there is for each of us, in the risen Jesus, an enduement and anointing of the Holy Spirit, which is the special gift of Pentecost. We are not likely to seek for that which we do not clearly apprehend as our rightful privilege. It is of the utmost value, therefore, to investigate those Scriptures which bear on our possessions in Christ. If we find, for instance, that He who was born of the Holy Spirit, needed to be anointed by that same Spirit—if we find that they who had been won by Jesus to believe in Him, were yet bidden to seek a special enduement of the Spirit, before beginning their public ministry—if we find that the anointing of the Spirit is clearly urged on the first churches as their bounden duty and privilege, does it not become us to ask ourselves, whether we have appreciated and apprehended what is rightfully within our reach? (Luke iii. 21; iv. 18; Acts x. 38; ii. 33, 39; 2 Cor. i. 21; 1 John ii. 20.)

2. We must seek only the glory of Jesus. The exclusive work of the Divine Spirit in the present age is to glorify

Christ. Himself unseen, because He so carefully withdraws Himself from notice, He is everywhere and always endeavouring to promote the glory of Jesus Christ, as He the Father's. It is not likely, therefore, that He will yield Himself to us unless we are devoted, absolutely and in all simplicity, to the same purpose. There is a sense in every one of us, in which the Spirit is not given, because Jesus is not glorified (John xvi. 14 ; vii. 39).

3. We must bring Him a cleansed and yielded life. This is only another way of affirming what we have already insisted upon. We must obey, if we would command. The centurion said that he was able to issue the commands, Go, come, do this, with the absolute certainty of being obeyed, only because he also was a man under authority. He obeyed Rome, and therefore the power of Rome wrought through him. There was good reason, therefore, for the apostles accentuating the fact that the fulness of the Holy Spirit is only given to those who obey. Become, as Isaiah puts it, as clay in the hands of the potter, and you will be able to command the Spirit of God for the works of His hands. But for this cleansing and obedience, the work of the

Spirit is absolutely necessary. Hence the Lord breathed on His disciples, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost, that the gracious Spirit might prepare them for further accessions of His Divine fulness (Acts v. 32 ; John xx. 22).

4. We must receive the power of the Spirit by receiving the Person. Too many desire the attribute of power apart from the indwelling. God knows, however, that this would induce irreparable disaster. To give a man God's power apart from the infinite resignation, humility, and meekness which His indwelling secures, would risk a repetition of the fall of Satan from heaven to hell. Hence our Lord promised that we should receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon us. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak" (Acts i. 8 ; ii. 4).

5. We must learn to receive by faith. One law prevails in all God's dealings with His people. They who *receive* the abundance of grace reign. Forgiveness, comfort, grace on grace, the fulness of the Holy Spirit, and the realisation of the Divine promises, are all determined by the exercise of faith. Not by emotional raptures, not by strange and wonderful manifestations, not by prolonged exercises

of soul, but by simple faith, we receive from the risen Lord the promise of the Father (Gal. iii. 14).

Let any one, however simple and humble, apply himself to the study of these five conditions ; and let him add to them the prayerful practice of the Presence of God, and the devout study of the Scriptures, and there is no bound or limit to the blessings which he will receive. There need be no doubt or hesitation in his anticipation of the result. As certainly as God is God, with the unerring precision of natural law, there will come into his nature, whether percolating a drop at a time, or in the mighty rush of a river, all the brimming fulness of the Pentecostal gift. And out of him, as the Scripture hath said, shall issue rivers of living water.

II

GETTING ON

IT is a favourite expression with us all. Most people think more of getting *on* than of getting *up*. Indeed it seems the universal opinion that those who are bent on getting on will have to abandon their hopes of getting up, and *vice versâ*, as though the two were incompatible. For my part I am not of that opinion. I think that we may get up and get on at the same time ; but, if ever we must choose between the two, there can be no doubt as to which to hold and which to forego. We must get up at all costs, whether we get on or not. It generally happens, however, that those who get up, get on ; whilst those who get on are as likely as not to stick fast in the best life, and go back to perdition.

SAD, BUT, ALAS ! TOO COMMON.

So often I see things like this. A young man comes up to the big city with but a pound or two to spare. When only a few shillings are left, he falls into a situation, goes to church, takes a class in a Sunday School, is regular at the Sunday and week-night services, and gives every symptom of becoming a useful member of the Christian denomination to which he has attached himself. After two or three years he begins to slacken. About the same time you meet his old father, who has come up for a few days' holiday to see his son, and say "How is your son doing?" "Ah," says the proud parent, his face rounded and lighted with the smile of exultant satisfaction, "he's getting on fine, sir; he's the head of his department; he's done well for himself, and no mistake." But what has become of our young friend? Too often when we inquire we find that he has given up his class, given up his Christian work, given up his attendance at a place of worship, and has become utterly careless and godless. He has got on so far as this world is concerned, but it has been at an awful cost, for he is drifting. What good is it to travel north to discover the

Pole at the rate of five miles a day over the hummocks of ice, if the floe on which you are travelling is drifting south at the rate of ten miles a day, and is melting away to boot?

But this need not be. There is no reason why, as in the case of Mr. Budgett, of Bristol, and of Sir George Williams, of London, and of thousands more, there should not be the building up of character side by side with the building up of a fortune; and the fabric of the fortune will be all the more stable because it is founded on whatsoever things are honest.

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY.

If you want to get on, don't take short cuts. They are the longest way round in the end. I have found that out again and again to my cost in threading the labyrinth of London streets; and as often in making my way through life. There is but one path to lasting success, it is the way which is entered by the strait gate, and is enclosed by narrow walls. Often the suggestion arises, I may be able to cut off that corner, to miss that long ascent, to save that long wait. If I lay money on that horse and win, it will be equal to six months' salary. (*But how if you lose?*) If I sell that inferior article

for the best price, I shall be able to double my profits. (*But how will you fare if your best customers find you out, and pass your door in future?*) If I can land that consignment of goods on my clients, it will save me a loss. (*But supposing they in turn can't sell them, and refuse to look at your samples when next you are on that round?*) Many a man has taken one step awry, meaning it to be the last, fully intending to get out of the by-path into the main road again, who has never reached that road at all, and has been condemned to go round and round in one constant maze of wrong-doing. Believe me, my friend, that the King's highway is the cleanest to walk on, and the nearest to follow!

THRIVE AND LET THRIVE.

Don't get on at the expense of another. You have seen boys rush for the best places at a show, pushing one another, thrusting the weaker back or against the wall in their eagerness to secure the front seat. Is that not like life? In the market-place and on the Stock Exchange the motto seems to be for the most part—"Every man for himself, and let the devil take the hindmost." Ah! it is a wretched business; and surely the ghosts of those who have been ruined by his successful

achievement of prosperity must sometimes glide in sad procession before the vision of the millionaire, or sit around his gilded feast, to the undoing of his peace. You have no right to stamp out those smaller shopkeepers, to undersell and ruin them, to take all the advantage that capital can give, without one thought of those whom you are driving to beggary and the grave. Live and let live. Thrive and let thrive. Let every man look, not on his own good only, but also on the good of others. There have to be advances in business methods, new and swifter processes of manufacture, increased facilities of transport, the honourable results of larger outlook and practical sagacity, but there are always opportunities of securing that those who suffer from the fresh developments shall be offered some position of equal value to the income which they are obliged to forego. See to it that your success shall become a boon and a blessing not only to yourself and those immediately dependent on you but even to those who might seem most likely to suffer by your getting on.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH.

You won't get on if you injure your health by physical excess. When one is possessed

of any amount of physical health, in the days of the young dawn of life, one is apt to become prodigal. It seems as though the inheritance were so vast and inexhaustible that it did not matter much though a few years were spent heedlessly. But in life's mid-passage how miserly one becomes of every heart-throb ! One is chary then of losing one night's rest, or diminishing the total working-force by lapsing into one bout of wild indulgence. One is not able to play ducks and drakes with one's capital.

For the most part those get on best who have the soundest and healthiest physique. The sound body has a great deal to do with the sound mind, and the sound mind is indispensable for navigating the frail craft of life amid jutting headlands and the sharp-edged teeth of the rocks.

Would you get on, take care of your health ! Breathe plenty of fresh air, sleep with your window open, fill your lungs till you bend out the diaphragm at their base ; get plenty of good sleep, and remember that what you get before twelve is worth twice as much as what you get after ; once a week, at least, go in for vigorous exercise which will make the perspiration start from every pore, and

then make for the hot bath ; eat plenty of wholemeal bread, porridge or Quaker oats, shredded wheat or grape-nuts ; bite each mouthful of cereal food between ten and twenty times ; don't smoke ; don't drink alcohol ; don't indulge in any unnatural habit of gratification ; and you will find that your body will keep in sound and vigorous health, and will play a not unimportant part in your getting on. However strong the muscles and eager the spirit of the bicycle-rider, he will not make headway in the racing match unless his machine is in good condition, and what the bicycle is to the race the body is in the business of getting on.

PUT YOUR SOUL INTO YOUR WORK.

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding, and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and the face thereof was covered with nettles, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I beheld and considered well ; I saw, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep ; so shall thy poverty come as a robber, and thy want as an armed man." In other words, leave a garden to itself for three months, and it

will become a wilderness : leave a house for a year, and Nature, with invisible hands, will begin to tear the slates off the roof, the whitening off the ceilings, and the stones off the garden walls. The policy *laissez faire* (leave alone) is ruinous to property, and not less so to all success. You must be always on the alert, always awake, always watching each incident that can affect your onward career. We never can tell when the king's horse will cast its shoe outside our smithy door, and it becomes us therefore to be always near the forge, with the anvil ready, and the flames leaping upward in their glee. Let your attention be on the alert, let your mind be well versed in the principles and history of your craft, so as to be furnished against every emergency ; let your heart be pure and sweet and quiet, cultivate your level-headedness and common sense, that when your chance comes, as, by the blessing of God, it will come, you may be prepared to make the best possible use of it.

FIRST THINGS FIRST.

You won't get on if you leave God out of your reckoning. Happy are they who put the first things first. Many put secondary things first, others put last things first ;

the number of those who put first things first is comparatively small. One of the most important matters for each of us who essays to build the house of our life is to find out which are the first things in God's universe and to square and shape the life with these in the right and first place. Now, of all the important first things of the world, the first and most important is God. Put God in His right place, and the house is builded on a rock and will withstand even the last great storm that shall sweep through the universe. Put God in the second place, or leave Him out altogether, and there can be no alternative but to see the structure, which has cost so much pains and seems so pretty and fair, crash heavily to the ground. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

If you put God where He should be, you will not undervalue the one rest-day which He has given ; and from keeping the day of rest you will be led on to setting apart at least a tenth of your income for His service ; and these are two of the most important factors in determining the rate and stableness of our getting on.

III

RECREATIONS AND AMUSEMENTS

WE all need relaxation. The bow must be unstrung. The mind and body which have long been on the strain must come back to their normal condition. There must be periods in which the whole nature shall approach the dynamo, to be recharged with energy for the fulfilment of the life tasks. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that we should know how to obtain relaxation of the most thorough description and in the shortest time.

One of the deepest principles of my own life has been that the irresistible energy of life will serve us much longer if we preserve a due variety in our occupations. The brain seems to be built like a ship, with water-tight compartments, and if the red blood has been directed towards one of these for a sufficiently long

time, and there is a sense of weariness, it is well to take up some other subject, that a like force may operate through new cells. When again a sense of weariness is induced, it is good to turn to yet some other subject, as far as possible removed from the one which has recently engaged us, that again the virtue and strength of our nature may exert itself through unwearied channels.

It seems to me on the whole that you will make more use of a morning of four hours by studying four subjects than by concentrating yourself wholly on one. Of course I am not now speaking of the necessity of concentrating oneself upon a sermon or article on a given subject, but generally of the best way of spending a stretch of time for morning or evening. Suppose, for instance, one has been reading hard at theology. If, directly a sense of weariness comes on, one turns to history, biography, or poetry, and if, after a while, one again tires, one turns to science or philosophy, the mind seems to be able to work for a longer period, and to retain more clear and definite impressions of the subjects which have engaged it. People have often asked me, if I may dare to intrude myself, how I have been able to do a considerable amount of work

in my life ; and next to the blessing of good health and the power of concentration on a given subject, which I suppose is partly a natural gift and partly the result of habit, I have always practised what I have advanced in this paragraph, of taking up subject after subject ; and I am thankful to have had many interests in my life which have enabled me to do so.

Every one should have a hobby, a knowledge of some natural object or science—a special acquaintance with birds, fossils, butterflies, flowers, ferns—some subject in which he excels his neighbours by his intimate and particular mastery ; some subject on which he can talk with the certainty of one who knows ; a subject which can engage him during Saturday afternoon rambles or during his summer excursions in collecting specimens, the sorting and arranging of which may occupy him during the winter nights. This enriches the life, gives an object to leisure hours, effectively diverts the mind from its long strain of application, and always presents a garden seat, embowered with roses, in which the tired soul rests amid its toils.

Each one of us should be an adept at some manly game which will throw us into a perspiration once a week at least.

The blood must be forced through the arteries by violent exertion, the pores of the skin must be compelled to act, the superfluous matter that gathers in the body must be dislodged by perspiration. There would be little talk about liver trouble if only we compelled ourselves, whether we be men or women, to strenuous exercise which would leave us completely tired at its close. Every Christian man ought to excel in football, cricket, golf, lawn tennis, riding, cycling, or some such recreation, and should devote with a sense of religious duty three or four hours of each week to its pursuit. For lack of these, alas ! some of us have to put up with the alternative of the Turkish bath, which does for us artificially and by heavy payment what Nature would gladly do for us free of cost. I am speaking here as much to women as to men, and I say to all that I believe the fight of life becomes greatly reduced for those who, if they have not to earn their bread by the sweat of the brow, at least by the sweat of the brow earn immunity from disease and buoyant health.

Surely it is also of supreme importance for Christian men and women to indulge in pastimes of this character, because it brings them as Christians in contact with

those who may not be followers of Jesus Christ, enforcing on such a genuine respect for Christianity. If a Christian man shall take the middle stump of an unbeliever in the cricket field on Saturday he will be much more likely to bowl him out in the open-air meeting on Sunday. If a Christian man is a thorough athlete, manly in his spirit, erect in his bearing, sinewy and strenuous in the putting forth of his strength, he will ensure respect, not for himself alone, but for the Christ he serves; and those who are watching him closely will reflect that Christianity at least does not make men backboneless, muscleless, and bloodless, but that it is consistent with everything that is strong, courageous, and vigorous.

Of course if it is clear that a man in the pursuit of some game is compelled to associate with those whose every other word is an oath or unclean, who talk lightly of women, or who lay bets on the result of the game, then, if after having endeavoured to lift the moral tone by his presence and behaviour, he finds that the current is too strong for him, there is no alternative than that he should come out of such an association. It is not worth our while to have our precious leisure hours defiled by contact with men

whose one aim is to foul the air they breathe. There is no option except to come out and be separate, to forego the football field and the cricket match, and to stand aloof from much-loved pastimes, if enjoyment of these can only be purchased by the sacrifice of self-respect and purity of heart. Firmly, deliberately, a man should say, "Fellows, I am bound to leave you. I cannot afford to listen to the stories you tell, or be a witness of the revels in which you take part when the games are done." But what a great thing it would be if after such an act the men came round the young Christian and said, "We are very sorry ! We respect you ! You are a good fellow, and we cannot do without you ! Come back and be our leader and captain, and there shall be nothing that you will need to complain about !" What a magnificent position such an appeal puts a man in !

And surely it is worth an effort to keep our great games from drifting into the hands of the devil and his agents. We ought to do our best to hold them for the sake of our country. The national fortunes owe more than any of us estimate to manly games : and when I was in India and saw the natives, Eurasians, and English joining together in lawn tennis

and in cricket, I realised what a marvellous uniting force there was in these great public games, which break down differences of caste and blend men for the time at least into one.

Let us see to it that our pastimes really recreate. It is a mistake to become so wearied by a bicycle ride as to be unfit for business on the following day. The evening's pleasure that gives you a headache on the following morning is surely to be avoided. The reaper must stop to whet his scythe, that it may do better and quicker work. And it is in this way that we should relax from the strenuous business of life, that we may be better fitted to do what our hands may find to do with our might. For after all, recreations and amusements are only means to an end—good work.

IV

GETTING UP

IT is easier to get on than to get up. The level road is easier than the hill, however easy the gradient may be. Still, we shall make a profound failure of life if we have been satisfied to get on without getting up.

It is impossible to write those words at the heading of this article without remembering the getting up which confronts us every morning ; and I am ashamed to say that though I have had years to practise the art, it does not become easier. It is the one thing that does not get easier by repetition. I justify the moments I spend in bed, after I awake, by the reflection that one is able to think out so many profound problems, as one hovers in the borderland between sleeping and waking (! !), or I quote to myself the rhyme, the latter line of which I cannot

apply to myself without serious question, and with a good deal of uncertainty as to whether it includes me—

“ He who would thrive
Must rise at five ;
He who has thriven
May lie in bed till seven.”

As far as my experience goes, the easiest places in which to get up are *St. Petersburg* in winter, because the rooms are kept at an equable temperature, which makes them warm and comfortable ; *India* in the cool season, because the glorious sunshine is constantly remonstrating with you, the exquisite morning air invites you, and the attractions of the cosy early breakfast are so bewitching ; and the *Alps*, when the sun is beginning to light up the highest peaks, and the cow-bells are tinkling outside your window, as the herd is making for the mountain pastures. I defy the laziest, sleepest, most drowsy-headed mortal to lie in bed when the Dawn is stepping lightly from Alpine peak to Alpine peak, scattering acres of ruddy light, like powder-dust on the white snows ; or is breathing with her ambrosial breath over the flowery pastures. The hardest place to get up in is the top-storey corridor of a second-class English

railway hotel in a country town, when there is no train to catch, and you know that you can have ham and eggs whenever you ask for them. Then you may be excused for lingering long ere you muster courage to light the candle that stands beside your bed.

QUIET FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.

But certainly *this* getting up has a great deal to do with the other getting up. I don't think that we can get up in the best sense unless we can leave our beds in time for quiet fellowship with God, before the world is awake, and the telephone bell begins to ring us up to answer the voices that call to us from the great world.

There are too many, even among professing Christians, who waste in slumber time which is sorely needed for girding on the armour for the day, for breathing deep draughts of the air of eternity, for consulting that chart which God has given to guide our course over the seas of time, and for entrusting themselves and those they love into the hands of their Faithful Creator. They hurry into the day without due preparation. It is as though the fireman should mount his engine and dash into the streets without adjusting his

helmet or completing the full arrangement of his apparatus. It is almost certain that he will not be able to do the one whilst the horses are dashing madly along the streets, or the other when face to face with the terror of the conflagration.

No, for playing our part well in life's great battle we must remember the examples of Earl Cairns, who would always rise for private prayer and the study of the Bible at 6.30, however late his duties may have kept him the night before ; of General Havelock, who always arose for two hours of fellowship with God before the tents were struck for the day's march ; and of Hudson Taylor, whose son told me the other day that when they were travelling in the uncomfortable Chinese inns, he would see his father arise in the early hours of the morning and light his little lamp, that he might have time for his Bible and God. These early hours of prayer are the sources of strength and blessing which would do as much for us as for those whom I have named, and are indispensable to those who would live such lives as will bless the world, and give them satisfaction from the retrospect of a dying bed.

Now there are certain rules for getting up which are inexorable.

(1) *All life must be of a piece.* There are too many who climb upwards and heavenwards on Sunday, but downwards all the rest of the week. When they are amongst God's people none are so fervent in prayer or praise, but when they return to business it seems as though the eyes which had been directed to the loftiest aims that can engage the heart and quicken the face of men are suddenly turned to the low aims and ambitions of the world. And to attain them methods are adopted that would not pass muster in the testing-room of the sanctuary.

Life goes on like this for a while, and then the earthly begins to gain steadily on the heavenly. The soul does not regain on the one day so easily as it used to do what it has lost during the other six. It has less desire after the unseen and eternal. Conscience remonstrates in vain, and presently becomes almost inoperative. And from that moment the course, which began with good promise, is steadily down.

This must not be ! Our one aim must be to please God. This must be our constant purpose, whether in the House of God or amid the engagements and recreations of life. There is nothing to which we put our hands that may not be

done with an eye towards the Lord Jesus ; and every moment so spent will be another step in the upward climb. We do not reach the mountain-top at a single bound or the impulsive rush, but by doing an infinite number of little things, "looking unto Jesus."

A great life results from doing all the trifles with a great motive.

(2) *We must rise on our dead selves as stepping-stones.* So Tennyson tells us, and he is surely right. Whilst we indulge ourselves, there is no chance of mountain-climbing. To obey the dictates of our flesh is to begin to descend to the bottomless pit. I fear I am rather a heretic in my tastes, but I have never admired Longfellow's "Excelsior." The youth who bore the banner with the strange device has never excited my enthusiasm. First, in my judgment, he ought not to have gone by himself. Had he taken with him some other inhabitants of his native valleys, I think he would have done better, and not have met with such an untimely fate. Secondly, the poem makes one suppose that this getting up is confined to a select few—to this or the other elect spirit. Thirdly, one is dissuaded from following the climber's steps by his tragic fate.

We must not make this getting up too strange, too unearthly, too transcendental, lest most will turn away from it, saying, "We have to earn our daily bread, to support our dear ones, to do life's prosaic tasks. We must leave this life for others."

Is it not better to say that those who say no to appetite, no to pride, no to self-aggrandisement, and live simple, humble, unselfish lives, though they may not think it, though they may count themselves among the lowliest and least, though they make no pretensions to saintliness, are really getting up? The sister who spends her evenings with her brothers to keep them from drifting into bad company; the young man who denies himself the intellectual education he covets that he may give his younger brothers and sisters his help to start well in life; the girl who will remain in service to some family whom she knows she can really help, instead of taking another and better situation at higher wages—all these are getting up from the lowlands to the uplands, where the air is purer and the horizon more far-reaching.

(3) *We get up quickest when we are set on helping others up.* It is a mistake to say to oneself, "Now I am going to get up, come what may to the others." This is

the idea of the hermit or monk. The holy men of India are possessed with the one thought of obtaining so much holiness that they at least may escape some thousands of years of misery and get soonest to absorption in "the All." The early days of the Church produced thousands of solitaires, who dwelt by themselves, intent on climbing that hill which Dante describes in "*Il Paradiso*." But such getting up never gets much further than the top of the high pillar, where St. Simon Stylites sat, to be wondered at by the people.

In earthly life no doubt a man climbs best when he is unencumbered and shakes himself loose of women that need his arm and children that would clasp his hand. To get away from the weak and weary, to disentangle oneself from hangers-on, to reserve all one's strength to help oneself—this is the best policy. But it is most important to remember that it is not so in the heavenly life. There Greatheart, with his convoy of pilgrims, gets on better and quicker than Christian does. There each time we wait for another we make progress; each time we slacken our pace to walk beside a feebler one we fly upward on the wings of eagles; we gain by our losses, we make speed by our delays.

(4) *The getting up which we care for is often a going down in the sight of men, and their getting up is to us a going down.* A notable example of this is the case of my friend Prince Bernadotte of Sweden. That he might marry a truly Christian lady, and with her pursue a life of Christian service, he gave up his rights to the crown of Sweden, and is content to live only to serve and bless others. On two occasions, for a week at a time, I have stayed in his home, which is fragrant with the most beautiful religious life. He has wealth and taste, culture and refinement, but he lives for others. He said to me on one occasion, "I live to serve."

Many of those in high estate in his native country cannot understand him. His life is a problem for which they have no solution. And without doubt plenty of untrue things have been said and unkind misrepresentations have been circulated. I have not heard such, but I should suppose that they would be inevitable in such a world as this.

But whilst those who look merely at the outward show of things would say that he has gone down, surely in the sight of God and His angels he has gone up. Earth's thrones stand three feet *above* earth's level, but Heaven's are three feet

below. You *ascend* to the one, you *descend* to the other. "He that would be greatest," said our Lord, "must be last of all, and servant of all."

It is certainly so with Prince Bernadotte. He has the peace of God ; his home is beautiful in its Christian joyousness ; every day is spent for the good of his fellows ; and, as I have seen him in after meetings dealing with the anxious and pointing them to Christ, I have felt that his was the royalty that the Lord exemplified. And he is honoured and loved by masses of people with an enthusiasm which no army of soldiers or glitter of royal pageant could secure.

V

THE EVERLASTING STRENGTH

EXETER Cathedral is rendered impressive by the aspect of venerable age, presented in the west front, with its crumbled effigies of saints and kings, but still further by the two Norman towers, which rise in their massive strength—in magnitude and details the unique and independent creations of the Norman architect who reared them. There is nothing like them in any other part of the building. There is nothing like them in any other English cathedral. They resemble castles, and it is more than possible that some idea of defence animated the mind of their builders.

Some sixty-two years before their erection, as we learn in the ancient charter of Edward the Confessor,—one of the treasurers of the library—the see had been moved from Crediton to Exeter

because "a safer defence could be had there." In point of fact the Danes had so often swept the country that a panic lingered in men's minds, and they were always on the outlook for *a safe defence*. It is not unreasonable to think that as defence was a motive for removing the see to Exeter, so a haunting sense of danger may have given to the cathedral the strong towers which flank it north and south, symbolising the refuge and strength that men had come thither to find.

What the Danes were to England the Assyrians were to Judah when Isaiah prophesied, and it was this which prompted him to compose this song to be sung in the land of Judah :—

"We have a strong city ;
Salvation will He appoint for walls and bulwarks.

Open ye the gates that the righteous nation,
Which keepeth truth, may enter in.

Trust ye in the Lord for ever,
For in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

This was not a material city of which the prophet sang. These walls were not built of stone or brick and cemented by mortar. These bulwarks were designed by no mortal strategist. It is certainly contrasted in the following verses with an

actual city—the lofty city of Babylon, which was soon to be laid low, and trodden beneath the feet of the poor and the steps of the needy, but it was not patent to the eye of man. No trenches had been scored in the earth for its foundations : there had been no sound of its construction. Like the new Jerusalem, it came down from God out of heaven, and it stood amid the cities of the world as God's refuge-city for weary, oppressed, and sinful men. In other words, this city of salvation was God Himself. And the sons of men are exhorted to trust in Him for ever, because in Him is rock-like stability, His unimpaired and everlasting strength. Men may for ever trust, because He is for ever a stronghold of protection and defence. Let us go to Him for “safer defence.”

Everlasting strength ! What music there is in the words ! We are apt to become weak and weary ! Our heart and flesh fail amid the greatness of our way ! Our hands hang down, and our knees become feeble ! The long dusty road, exposed to the glaring sunshine, or the steep climb, tries our strength to the uttermost, and shows that we are not as we were. Sickness and pain have sapped our vitality, or the stress of a hard life has

left its mark in our sense of growing weakness and strengthlessness. What music, then, there is in the assurance that in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength ! We can hide in Him as our strong fortress against our foes, and the frowning battlements of impenetrable fortifications are as certain a security for the weakest as the strongest. We can cling to Him as a limpet to the massive rock that rears its weather-beaten front against the assault of the breakers. We can absorb something of His everlasting strength into our weak and enfeebled natures, and become strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.

The world is full of evidences of God's everlasting strength. See how no one of the stars faileth, because He is strong in power ; how the arch of heaven remains steadfast amid the perpetual fret and change of the universe ; how the mighty mountains rear themselves in unimpaired might and glory ; how the youth and freshness of Nature are perpetually renewed ! Every young generation, teeming forth with song and glee, as though it were the first and earliest ; every morning, baptized in dew as fresh as when the sun first sipped the dews of Eden ; every

spring, when Mother Earth arrays herself in hues as lustrous as though an infinite number of spring dresses had not already been donned and laid aside ; every renewal of the sun, which goes forth as a strong man to run a race, whose power is put forth to-day as when first he left his chamber, to carry through space his attendant train of planets and satellites—all these prove beyond doubt God's everlasting strength.

What is true in the natural is no less so in the spiritual sphere. That the life of the Church has been maintained amid persecution and opposition which must have quenched anything less than a Divine vigour ; that successive generations of strong and noble souls have been poured out on the world like battalions, arrayed in plates of shining armour, proof against every weapon ; that the life of our own hearts has not perished in the chilling atmosphere which has threatened the tiny spark—what are all these things but proofs of the everlasting strength of our God ! Yes, in God there is the everlasting strength. He is the Rock of Ages.

On Him may beat the storms that sweep the universe, storms of sin and pain and sorrow ; against Him may break billows of Satanic hate and opposition ; around

Him may surge the successive ages of Time, that have been, are, and will be—but there is no kind of change or decay in His Almighty strength. Renewing all, but needing no renewal ; maintaining all, but needing no support ; recreating all things, but unexhausted in the power of His inventiveness or executive might ; giving life to all, but requiring no replenishment of His Divine vitality. God is ; God is the same ; God is the same Infinite ; God is the same Infinitely Strong One ; and all that strength is pledged to help us, because it is at the prompting and bidding of love. It is said that a man's heart is the size of his clenched fist. Whether that be true or not I know not ; but this I know, that God's love and power are equal ; nay, that He *is* Love, and *has* power. His everlasting strength is at the disposal of His everlasting love.

Think, now, for a moment, weary and weak one ; carry back your thoughts to the earliest days of life ; in the dear home-life, which now lies behind the mist of years, was not the strength of the strong used for your comfort and help ? You were a cripple-child, but your father's strong arms made a cradle and chariot for you. You were a weak girl, unable to press your way through the crowd, but

your brother's strong athletic frame swinging forward made a narrow lane through which you could follow. Your subsequent life recalls the same, for when you were most enfeebled by illness and accident you were most environed and enveloped with tender care, and by line on line of fortification, as though protected against assault by some strong city-walls. Ah, where there is love, there is such a putting forth of strength on behalf of the weak and helpless, that it is worth while to be thus, that one may experience that. It is good to be brought down to the uttermost of weakness to learn the blessedness of defence and comfort which strength can impart.

But what is true of human strength is much more so of Divine. God's everlasting strength is pledged to the weakest of His children. The weaker they are, the gladder He is, because He can be more to them. Cannot you sympathise with Him in this? Cannot you realise how He feels? Are you not glad when some dearly-loved one is compelled to lean harder on you than usual? Then you realise the luxury of being strong, because all you can be or do is at the free disposal of the helpless, clinging soul beside you.

God is glad of His everlasting strength,

not for His own sake, but for the help He is able to supply to all who need. He is glad to be strong that He may cast out the strong man armed, that He may drive back the enemy from the gate, that He may lead His flock like a shepherd, shielding it from its ravening foes, that He may lay His hand on a Gideon, and bid him go in a God-communicated might, that He may cause love to conquer hate, and light to vanish darkness, that He may carry the lambs in His arms, and be able to wait for those who loiter through faintness.

Trust in Him, soul of man or woman. Lean hard on Him. Shelter behind the strong arms of the breakwater, when strength is spent in wrestling with the breakers in their pride. Drink in His everlasting strength, and let the strong Son of God, who is immortal love, be the strength of thy heart and thy portion for ever.

VI

REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS

I VERY seldom meet Christian people who really seem to come within a hundred miles of the exuberant gladness of the Bible. The sacred writers are not oblivious to the stern and sorrowful realities of human life. They have their hand on the fluttering pulse of humanity ; they are keenly alive to the hopes and fears, the yearnings and disappointments, the *crescendo* and *diminuendo* passages, which climb to ecstasy and descend to despair. No æolian harp is so sensitive to the breath of the air, as the Bible to the infinite pathos and dread of men's innermost thoughts. And yet to open it at hazard is to come, almost certainly, on some passage which is as joy-making as Milton's " L'Allegro," and more.

No lover of our great English speech can afford to be ignorant of the con-

trasted beauties of the "Il Penseroso" and "L'Allegro." For the young student of the language in which Addison wrote, Burke harangued, and Milton sang, there is no better exercise than to contrast these two poems, comparing them line by line, and noticing how the same natural or architectural objects produce different emotional effects, according to the standpoint from which they are viewed. The morning light and the evening glow will make all the difference between gaiety and pensiveness, the light heart or the sad one. And surely this is the secret of rejoicing always. The main features of our life may be dark and sombre, its daily round monotonous, its upward clamber difficult, its progress a hand-to-hand fight—it may be difficult, nay, impossible, to rejoice in any one of these, when considered in itself. But the aspect of everything is altered when we bring "the Lord" into it. We cannot always rejoice in our circumstances, but we can always rejoice in Him, and we can rejoice in our circumstances when we consider them in the light of His permission, of His tender care, and of the results for His glory, which they are being caused to subserve. We can always rejoice in the Lord, that He is near us—strong, sweet, true—just

as the tenant of the almshouse may toddle forth to sun his rheumatic limbs in the genial warmth of early summer, forgetting for a moment the trials and twinges of his lot.

The Psalmists are always calling to joy ; and they must have been in accord with the main trend and spirit of the national life of their time. Poets interpret and reflect the spirit of the age in which they live. In the music of the Temple, which resounded with the melody of harp and psalter and instruments of ten strings, the inner heart of Israel found its appropriate expression. Perhaps it was the influence of the sunny air ; perhaps of the simple, innocent, natural life of the people ; perhaps of the freedom from great wealth on the one hand, or grinding poverty on the other. But certain it is that the Hebrew people must have reached a high standard of religious and natural gleefulness, judging from the exuberance of the Psalter and certain passages of the Prophets. At the end of the Psalter the organist pulls out all the stops in the organ of Nature, and pours forth a perfect torrent of praise, from the piping melody of a thrush to the roar of the ocean bass.

"Sing unto the Lord a new song,
And His praise in the assembly of the saints,
Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him,
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
Let them praise His name in the dance ;
Let them sing praises unto Him with the tim-
brel and harp."

"Round your faces!" said an old-fashioned Methodist local preacher. I often think of it when I look on the faces of some religious gatherings. The countenances are so expressionless and heavy. Some one in my hearing, the other day, called them "lumpish." The word is not classical, and I am not enamoured with it, but it is very expressive. Christian people, when they come together in their places of religious meeting, often present an appearance of insufferable gloom or depression. Why is it? Perhaps it is considered respectable, or God-honouring, or more consistent with religion. Years ago, in my home-circle my elders referred to *conversion* as "becoming *serious*." They would say, "So-and-so has become serious." And I notice that in some hymn-books, in the version of the Hundredth Psalm, they have altered the line, originally written—

"Him serve with *mirth*, His praise forth tell,"

into—

“Him serve with *fear*, His praise forth tell.”

Surely we need, then, to heed the message of the Methodist preacher, and *round our faces*, so that the sparkling eye and the happy expression may tell the peace and joy in God which reign within. Well might Miss Havergal utter as her dying message, “The world needs *bright Christians*.”

Rejoice in the Lord, for joy is strength. Nehemiah showed an accurate knowledge of human nature when he stayed the weeping of the people, as they stood condemned and conscience stricken beneath the reading of the law. The walls of Jerusalem were hardly finished, the natural defences as yet incomplete, the enemies of the newly-returned exiles on the alert—it would have been suicidal on the part of the leaders to have allowed the people to be overwhelmed in grief. “Go home,” they said, “eat the fat and drink the sweet, neither be ye grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” We heard, only the other day, of the scion of a noble house escaping from captivity at Pretoria, who was able to live for four days on some sticks of chocolate, because he had begun to taste again the

inexpressible joy of liberty. What cannot men do when their hearts are glad and free? Joy gives wings to the feet, sinews to the legs, muscles to the arms, elasticity to every motion. Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice in the Lord and always. There will be ever so much more to show for your life-work when you reach the evening hour.

Rejoice in the Lord, for joy is attractive. The first thing that led me to seek the secret of God was the exuberant joy which I discerned beaming forth from the noble nature of a young man who had recently yielded himself entirely to God. What he said was probably not remarkable. At least, it has long ago faded from my mind. But I said to myself: "Here is one who is happy in his religious life. Not condemned for the past, not conscious of a cloud between himself and God, not dreading the future. His religion is a light on his inner heart, and the glow of it is on his face." To see it was to hunger for it, and to desire was to obtain. Yes, there is a spring that rises up in the soul, and flows over in musical ripples on the face and in the speech, which is infinitely attractive to those who have just religion enough to make them miserable. If only we were happy in our religious life, with the

sparkle, the light, the song that Christ gives, many would come around to ask for our secret, whose joy has been like the brief crackling of thorns under a pot.

Rejoice in the Lord, for joy is proof against temptation. The evil one is foiled by song as much as by prayer, and perhaps more. What can Sennacherib do when the virgin daughter of Zion laughs him to scorn? What could Ammon and Seir do against Jehoshaphat, who inaugurated the battle by appointing certain to sing unto the Lord, and praise the beauty of holiness! As the microbes of disease cannot exist in the sunlight, neither can temptation succeed against a joyous, singing heart. Song is an anti-septic environment—a bank of sunbeams—which is utterly impregnable to all the assaults of the adversary.

Rejoice in the Lord, for joy is very much the matter of the will. You can choose whether to look on the dark or the bright side of things; on the possibilities of failure or the probabilities of success; on the bank of clouds that stand like Alps on the horizon, or the blue skies that canopy overhead. Say to yourself sometimes, "I am going to be happier; I refuse to give way to these depressed and saddening thoughts; I am resolved to

turn from my circumstances to my Saviour." Do as David did, when he took himself to pieces and spoke to his soul, as though it were some other self : "Why art thou cast down, oh my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him." Be glad, that some day you will have reason to be glad ; rejoice, because the sun is shining down the valley, in the direction you are going ; rejoice, because weeping can only endure for the night, whilst joy is eternal and everlasting ; rejoice that you have such a God, in whom are beauty and strength. Say with Habakkuk, "Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock be cut off from the fold, and no herd be in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

There is always a patch of blue in the darkest sky—look at that ; it will grow. Count your mercies : God always leaves us more than He takes. If you don't feel like singing, be sure to start a song ; the singing voice will often stir the weary, songless heart, and it will catch the contagion. Hide yourself in God, put Him

between yourself and your anxieties or your foes—even when your feet are fast in the stocks begin to chant some old Psalm, till the prison rocks and the chains fall from off your wrists.

“Some time, when all life's lessons have been
learned ;
And sun and stars for evermore have set,
The things, which our weak judgments here
have spurned,
The things, o'er which we grieved with
lashes wet,
Will flash before us, out of life's dark night,
As stars shine most, in deepest tints of blue ;
And we shall see how all God's plans are
right,
And how what seemed reproof was love
most true.”

VII

REST IN THE LORD

SOME days are more full of suffering and pain than others. The moments go wearily and slowly. In the silent house, the hours are chimed by the old clock, familiar from childhood, with painful tardiness and precision. We begin to think that life can hardly be borne, unless some alleviation offer—yet what alleviation ! Listen to these stifled sobs—

“He has been so unkind to me of late ! Can it be that he is disappointed in me ? Is it possible that his love is straying to another ? ”

“I have lost my dearest friend, and have only myself to blame. What a fool I was not to control myself. But she will never be what she was. You may cement a broken vase, but never hide the line of fracture.”

"They told me yesterday that I must give up my work. Ah, they little know that my soul is so wrapped up in it, that to renounce it is to tear my heart out. There is not a brick or stone which I didn't see put into its place, and as year after year I watched the growth of my ideal, it gave meaning and zest to life. Am I never to enter the place again? What is there to live for?"

"The surgeon says the child is doomed to be blind. He has done his best for her, but her sight is gone. 'Oh, baby mine, and wilt thou never see thy mother's face, and the flowers, and stars?'"

"My husband died last night. He sent his love to you as he was passing away. We were so happy, and I don't know how I can go on living without him. It seems like a cruel dream. Surely he cannot be really gone, never to come back again."

"Yesterday I heard that my only son was wounded badly. Nothing more, but oh, do pray that God may raise up friends to care for him. Every minute I'm thinking about him. If I drop off to sleep, I seem to see him, and wake with a start, because I think he's calling."

Such are some of the troubles which

are confided to those of us who show ourselves accessible to the weary and heavy-laden. Alas ! I quote from very recent experiences ; and there are days when for a moment one's brain reels, and one's heart turns sick. What a world is this ! To the superficial gaze it might seem filled with those that shout and laugh, and make money, and carry the enemy's position by assault, and on whom the sun ever shines ; but for every one such, there are three or four whose life is ground small between the heavy millstones of fear and toil.

And what refuge is there for broken hearts, for those whose life is one long strain of anxiety and suspense, for those in whom hope is dead ? There is but one answer : *"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him ; commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him."*

" Is this the Peace of God, this strange sweet calm ?

The weary day is at its zenith still,

Yet 'tis as if beside some cool, clear rill,

Through shadowy stillness rose an evening psalm,

And all the noise of life were hushed away,

And tranquil gladness reigned with gently soothing sway.

It was not so just now. I turned aside
With aching head, and heart most sorely bowed ;
Around me cares and griefs in crushing crowd,
While icily rose the sense, in swelling tide,

Of weakness, insufficiency, and sin,
And fear, and gloom, and doubt, in mighty flood
 rolled in.

That rushing flood I had no strength to meet,
Nor power to flee ; my present, future, past,
My self, my sorrow, and my sin I cast
In utter helplessness at Jesu's feet.
Then bend me to the storm, if such His will,
He saw the winds and waves, and whispered
 'Peace be still.' "

There is no help for us like this. Go into the presence of the Great High Priest, whose heart was riven with fiercer storms, whose soul has been put to more agonising grief. Fall down at His feet. He needs no words of explanation or entreaty, does he not well understand the eloquence of sighs and tears ? Be silent unto Him, or tell in the simplest words the entire story of wrong, and sin, and sorrow. Exaggerate nothing, extenuate nothing, hurry over nothing. Dare to look up into His face, knowing that the cross must have been permitted to come of His all-wise and loving Providence. Refuse to see Judas or Shimei in it, but look only and steadfastly into the face of Christ. Obliterate the consideration of the hand that places the cup to your lips, continue to assert that it is the Lord, and to assert your will and intention to leave

the whole choice to Him. If you don't *feel* resigned, or acquiescent, or satisfied, live in your will.

So there will be peace and calm. The cross will not be removed, the cup not be taken away, the pressure of the gale on the barometer will not be seriously lessened, but amid it all there will be a sense of God, a vision through the rent veil of time and sense into the unseen and eternal, whither every throb of life is bearing us, and where, on the bosom of God, we shall be rested and satisfied. The sense of God's presence, and helpfulness, is a very blessed and real source of comfort and strength to those who have learnt to be silent to Him, and rest.

Rest in the Lord, for He is love. Such perfect love, that the tenderest heart that ever beat to His is but as a taper to sunlight. He cannot love you less than infinitely. His love cannot be deficient in all those qualities of insight, appreciation of temperament and circumstances, of courtesy and delicacy, with which human love makes us so familiar. If He has let the sorrow come, there is a reason which is so absolutely compelling that love itself must yield to it, lest it should miss its highest mark. Because He loves

you so, He had no alternative than to do as He has done. You would have done it for yourself, if you had seen all that He sees. Your dearest friend would have done it also, if he could have seen and known all too. Dare to believe this. Dare to trust God for His reasons. But never dare to impeach or question His love. Even though your only child has lost her reason, dare to believe that the love of God permitted it, in view of the infinitely preponderating weight of joy over sorrow that lies in the distant years.

And in the meanwhile God will come near to you. Philip Gosse, the naturalist, tells of pushing his way through a dense and tangled thicket in a lone and lofty mountain region of Jamaica, when he came on a magnificent, full-blooming orchid. For ages, he thought that noble plant, crowned with lily-like flowers, had stood there, season after season, filling the air with beauty; and probably never before seen by a single human eye. But God must have been there, for our Lord told us to believe that God clothes the grass of the fields, and will He take so much care of a flower that fades within a month, and not come near you in your loneliness and sorrow, to solace, to

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nourish and cherish, to love with a Divine pity ?

Rest in the Lord, for He is wisdom. How wise it was of Joseph to rest in God through his sad and bitter sorrows ! When in the dark pit he lay like a young forest thing trapped, his cries coming back on himself, and his efforts proving ineffectual to climb the precipitous sides of the great rock-cistern, do you not think that he lay quite still, and centred his restless thoughts, till in the stillness the face of Jacob's God looked down on him, and a voice, which was only beginning to be familiar, soothed him with its soft cadence " Fear not." And when in Potiphar's house he was falsely accused, what could have kept his lips so sealed, that not one word escaped them against the honour of his mistress, and what could have made him so willing to serve in the prison-house, and so courteous to his fellow-prisoners, except the perfect rest of his soul in his father's God, and a fixed belief that He knew the way which his feet were following, and had planned it from all eternity as the nearest to his goal ? And how necessary it all was. Joseph had to learn that by strength no one can prevail, and that it is only when we have come to the end of ourselves

that we come into a position in which God can use us for His highest purposes.

Wisdom like this is at work on your life and mine. Be still, and know that He is God. He will vindicate your trust. He will fill you with unceasing admiration at the skill with which He shall achieve His own purposes, and perfect that which concerneth you. His judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out.

Rest in the Lord, for He is strength. Your worrying will do you no good. To fret and fume will only exhaust your nervous energy, without adding one pulse of strength to your working force. You may as well give it up, and lie back on the strong arms of God. Rest there. As a child will rest in the strong arms of the father; as a woman, frightened and breathless, will make for the man she loves, and rest within his chivalrous protection; as a scout stealing through the lines of the enemy without food or sleep, concealing himself by day, and stealing watchfully through the darkness, will not relax one sense or sinew, till he is safe back, within pickets of his own side, then he breathes freely, and rests without fear—so let us make for the strong arms of God, which reach down towards men, as

the long walls of Dover harbour stretch out into the sea, as though beckoning storm-tost voyagers into their embrace. And what a slackening of ropes, and letting down of sails takes place when the harbour-mouth is passed !

Wait ! Be silent ! Be patient ! Quiet those thoughts that traverse the past, and dread the future, and fix your thoughts on the presence and love of God. Have you never felt like this in the night ? You have been lying awake, listening to the slow revolution of the hours. Something has tried you during the day, and you seem unable to dismiss the thought of it. Back and back you return on it. Your sin, folly, mistake, misfortune, awful loss ; the tidings that flashed from the battle-field ; the warning which could not be disregarded. You said to yourself—"if this goes on I shall be good for nothing in the morning." You make a great effort, and shut the door against the return of the tumult. You refuse to go round the weary treadmill-path again, or tread the burning ashes. You will turn your thoughts away, or make your mind a blank. You turn over on your pillow, and, with closed eyes, wait for sleep. It comes with velvet tread, and you wake in four or five hours, astonished at the late-

ness of the morning, but feeling ineffably recruited.

In some such way as this, make a resolve that you will forget the past, with all its sad and disgraceful memories, that you will not envy the rich, nor be discouraged by the harsh judgments or bitter hate of those that hate you, but that you will let the peace of God rule in your heart, committing your way to Him, and trusting always and for all.

VIII

KEPT IN PERFECT PEACE

PEACE seems to have fled from the earth! As though she could not find a place of rest, she has withdrawn herself and is gone. Let us take the wings of the west wind and float towards the sunrise, looking down on the scenes of human life and activity beneath us. Here in Europe we detect the dint of preparation for horrid war. While great hammering rivets are being driven into the iron-plated ships, factories are working day and night to turn out the most destructive explosives, the flower of the youth are being trained for war, and everywhere there is the echoing word of command and the flash of steel. It appears as though Europe were one great battlefield.

We pass beyond its confines, and Asia lies outspread as a map beneath us, and as

we pass slowly across it, there is Asia Minor with its hordes of Kurds and Turks harrying the peaceful Armenians, India with the famine and plague scars on its breast, China filled with massacre and rapine. What shall we say of the isles of the Southern Archipelago, where the savage still lingers ; or South Africa, with veldt and kopje dyed with blood ; or the interior desolated by the slaves ; or the west, only just redeemed from native savagery ? Alas ! for the poor world, it resembles the waters of the Deluge, over which the white-winged dove flitted restlessly, finding no abiding-place for the sole of her foot.

The cities are not favourable for the abode of Peace, with their noise and clatter, their turbid, frothing, rushing streams of human life, their shouts of the successful, their agonised moans of the downtrodden. Our great cities make me think of forest glades which resound with the roar of the beast of prey, and the frightened cry of the antelope, the gazelle, or the timid deer. Why else do we hear of the "bears" of the Stock Exchange ? Even the country hamlet, lying so still in the light of the summer afternoon, its calm unbroken save for the shouts and prattle of the children as they stream

from the village school, or by the lazy chiming of the clock in the old belfry, furnishes no home for Peace ; whilst the letters which come from Africa or China tell the story of country lads lying wounded in hospitals, or exposed to imminent peril from infuriated mobs. That noble mansion, standing in its rich park lands, where the deer roam and the cattle browse contentedly, is filled with anxiety and distress, whilst within the walls of that lordly castle there is the bitterest loneliness and heart-sorrow. Ah ! Peace, it seems as though there is no spot, however sequestered, where the war and storm of the world do not make it impossible for thee to find a home. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain." The fish leaps from pursuit above the limpid waters of the pool, the lamb is caught away in the talons of the eagle from the wild highland glen.

The heart of man, by nature, is full of din and strife. Deceitful lusts war within the soul. Jealousy, envy, hatred, raise their horrid cries, and go stamping and shouting through the long corridors of the soul. Anxiety and disappointed love keep up a perpetual fret, like the waves chafing against the shore through the murky winter's night. Ambition, like Jehu, drives

furiously through the streets of the inner life. Haste to be famous or rich adds to all other causes of disquietude. The restlessness of man's heart is thus of a piece with the restlessness of nature. From each Peace has fled and left a weary sense of vacancy.

But there is a deeper source of unrest than any mentioned yet—the sense of guilt. When the soul has seen itself in the light of God's law, when it realises that all its previous experience has been one long heaping up of sin, when it understands that it is as utterly abhorrent to God as disease to health, when its misspent years arise to condemn it as the spectres of his victims gathered at the banquet table of Richard II. on the eve of Bosworth, when it discovers that neither regrets nor promises of amendment nor religious observances afford any respite—then indeed Peace is impossible. By day and night God's hand is heavy upon it, and its moisture is turned into the drought of summer.

There is one, however, who has trodden our world, whose name, spoken long centuries before He came by aged, dying lips—Shiloh—means (like Frederick in the German) the Peace-giver. Amid all the troubled and tempestuous storms that

swept across His life, Peace never left His bosom. She had found at last a nest, a home, which she could not, would not quit. In His altercations with the Pharisees, amid the pressure of teeming multitudes, with no place to lay His head, and not leisure enough to eat, the Peace of God, which passed all understanding, kept His heart and mind. His Peace flowed as a river. Like an arbitrator or umpire, it ruled in His heart. And therefore there was special emphasis in his assurance when He said, "Peace I leave with you, My Peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." In some great thoroughfares double windows are employed to keep out the noise of the traffic, and surely Jesus of Nazareth lived always inside the double windows of Isaiah xxvi. 3, 4 (marg.), kept in perfect Peace, in *Peace*, PEACE, as though one pane of Peace was not sufficient and a second needed to be added.

There is, first, Peace from the sense of guilt. If any one is pressed to the ground with the heavy burden that Christian bore in the old allegory, dreading to die, dreading the thought of meeting God, dreading to sleep at night lest the waking might be in the regions of despair, there

is but one cure known in this world. If such an one looks to Him, who died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification ; if, forsaking all other help and hope, there is repentance towards God and simple trust in the Lord Jesus Christ ; if, by one intense, fixed look the entire responsibility of the eternal issue is transferred from the conscience-stricken soul to the Substitute and Saviour, immediately a sense of Peace ensues, which spreads its healing balm throughout the soul, like the thrill of returning health through the system of the convalescent. Christ has made Peace by the Blood of His Cross, and offers it to all who open their hearts to Him in the simplicity of a faith which refuses to doubt that Jesus has done, and will do, all that is necessary to secure deliverance from the curse and guilt and penalty of the past.

There is, next, Peace for the inner life. Where there is a multiplicity of elements apart from one controlling force there cannot be Peace. Was there Peace in Israel when every man did what was right in his own eyes and there was no king ? Is there Peace in an orchestra when every man is tuning his own instrument ? Is there Peace in the soul rent by conflicting interests and passions ? How could there

be Peace in England or on the Rhine in those far-away days when from every castle issued forth the barons and their armed bands to carry fire and sword into neighbouring domains? Unity is utterly essential to Peace. There may be great diversity, but this is quite consistent with, nay, is the condition of Peace, Perfect Peace. For the true conception of Peace there is necessity for variety—diversity of operation, temperament, disposition, and occupation. You can hardly speak of the monotony of the desert, with its vast expanses of sand, its red sandstone rocks, its leaden horizon as being a type of Peace. In its dull monotony you lack the elements of unity. But you find a true type of Peace in the homestead, where the differing temperaments of a large family are controlled by the rule of perfect love combined with justice and prudence.

So in man's soul, with its wealth of faculty and emotion, there must be fret, and jar, and war till Emmanuel comes by His rights and takes the throne. When He is supreme, when Lord Will-be-will gives him the keys and becomes His liege, when all proud thoughts which exalt themselves against His authority are subjugated, then Peace enters the inner realm and breathes her benediction, which

falls with music from a height, and distils like the fragrant dew of the morning. As long as Christ is King, Peace is supreme and sentinel the believing obedient heart.

There is, finally, Peace amid troubled circumstances. I heard a short time ago from some friends whose house was surrounded for hours by a Chinese mob that they were kept in the most perfect tranquillity of mind. It seemed as though a great rampart of Peace was built up around them, like that drift of deep snow which during one of Napoleon's campaigns hid a widow's home from the marauding soldiery. What the soft sands, on which the mighty breakers dash with vehement fury, are to the meadows and pasture lands which lie green and smiling in the interior, that God's gentle Peace is as interposed between the fret of life's storms and the tender shrinking soul which it surrounds.

When you come to believe that God's will is in everything, both in what He permits and what He appoints; that every delay, interruption, and loss is allowed for wise purposes; that He is making all things work together for good; that the neutral tints are essential for the beauty and balance of the picture; that nothing is allowed to come greater than we can bear, but that with the day comes its

strength, and with the thorn the sufficient grace—then Peace comes. There is One who rules, in whom Love and Wisdom blend in perfect harmony, and in His will and choice is our Peace.

How a little fretful child, who has been passed from hand to hand of strangers, falls to sleep when it reaches the arms of its own mother! It is safe and happy there against that breast and in that dear cradle of the arms. Ah, soul, get thee to God, let Him cradle thee; the everlasting arms can sustain thee from falling, the everlasting love will shelter thee, the everlasting resources of the Infinite will suffice thee.

IX

AT THE MARRIAGE FEAST OF CANA

IN the first chapter of John's Gospel (ver. 14) the Evangelist tells us that he and his fellow-disciples beheld Christ's glory, "glory as of the only-begotten of the Father," and we naturally expect him to tell us when and where this wondrous spectacle was unveiled. When Moses beheld the glory of God, there was a procession down the mountain gorge, and the voice of the Divine herald proclaimed His name ; but when the beloved apostle would tell of the glory of his Master, he leads us to a simple village feast, where a few peasants gathered to celebrate the marriage of a young man and woman, and there he tells us that Jesus manifested His glory, and His disciples believed on Him.

The Jews made much of their wedding feasts. They were held in the house of the bridegroom's father ; all friends and

neighbours were invited; great mirth went round. The bridegroom wore a crown of flowers with which his mother had crowned him on the day of his espousals, in the day of the gladness of his heart. The bride sat apart, among the women, adorned with her jewels. Singing, music, dancing, merry riddles, and the play of wit, amused the guests. To some such scene of innocent gaiety our Lord was invited, and went with His newly-found disciples, and the modest rejoicings were in no wise clouded by His presence—His face, like those around Him, would brighten with the general joy.

His advent with His friends seems to have threatened the whole family with a disgrace which to the hospitable mind of the Jew was simply irremediable—the wine ran short. “They wanted wine.”

Mary, who appears to have had considerable influence in the house, in some way became aware of this fact, and guessed that its cause was not insufficient preparation on the part of the bridegroom, but the unexpected advent of Jesus and His party. She could not endure the thought that, however innocently, they should bring disgrace on that kindly circle, and she suddenly conceived the hope that

her Son, of whose marvellous nature she had some inkling, might interpose to save their hosts from mortification and disgrace, and at the same time assume His true position as the Messiah. She had not forgotten the mysterious incidents of His birth ; she had waited for thirty long years in vain to see Him vindicate His Messianic claims, but so far in vain. Now, however, recent events of which she had heard encouraged the hope that the moment might be near when He would assume His great power and reign, and so she said, " They have no wine."

But it was necessary for her to learn that the human relation in which He had stood to her was now being merged and lost in another, where the spirit must claim kinship with spirit, and all with God. And therefore the Master made use of an expression which, while setting aside a suggestion and waiving discussion, was perfectly consistent with the most delicate courtesy and most tender consideration: " Woman, what have I to do with thee ?" The answer had no harshness in it, or if it had, it was mellowed by the tender accent with which it was spoken.

The dread of ceremonial uncleanness among the Jews made it necessary to have large supplies of water always ready.

On the present occasion six great stone jars stood in the entrance hall ready for use, but under the special circumstances they had been used so much that they were somewhat empty. "Fill them up," said Jesus ; and when they had been filled to the brim He said, "Draw out and take to the governor of the feast." But the water was now wine.

Of course the light wines of those hills, in which the least possible fermentation was present, were altogether different from the brandied intoxicants which go under that name amongst ourselves, and there was no such conflict on foot then as now against the consumption of strong drink. It is noticeable, also, that the historian does not say that the whole contents of those waterpots, computed to contain 120 to 130 gallons, were changed to wine ; he only tells us that as the water was drawn from the waterpots it became so. And therefore, when the feast was over, and the servants had ceased to draw, nothing remained in those waterpots but water.

Now, supposing the miracles of our Lord were laid before some stranger to the Gospel narrative, and he were asked to select one to stand first, which, do you suppose, would he select? Perhaps the

raising of Lazarus from his death-sleep, or the calming of the storm, or the feeding of the five thousand. He would be unlikely, I suppose, to select this incident. But for the inaugural scene of His holy ministry we are led to a little hamlet, lying among the hills of Galilee, at the distance of an afternoon's walk from Nazareth, where He sits at a marriage festival among His friends, and changes water into wine to supply their thirst.

Surely it was Christ's Glory to show that the loftiest religion is consistent with the routine of daily life? His presence at the wedding feast inaugurated a new era in the history of our world. It was the sign of a new spirit that was to pervade mankind. With all of us there is a strong tendency to associate lofty morality with rigorous sternness. Men suppose that he whose thoughts commune with the Eternal must be a stern and silent man.

This feature was specially exemplified in the old prophets. They dwelt friendless and alone amid the solitudes of unfrequented hills and the desolations of unknown deserts, only emerging now and again to pour on awe-struck crowds the

burning words of the living God. They seemed so separate, and so sternly removed from ordinary existence, that the people shrank back from their awful holiness. Of this type had been John the Baptist. He came neither eating nor drinking. The lonely deserts his only home ; the dish of locusts and water from the river, his only fare ; the leathern girdle and hairskin cloak his only dress.

Men might have expected the Son of God, whose life was to set a model for all after generations, would have been still more rigorous—dwelling apart from human love and friendship, and human homes. But no ! His early life was spent, not as John's, in the wilderness, but amid the domesticities of home ; He came eating and drinking ; His first miracle was at a marriage feast, where, no doubt, He entered sincerely into the simple mirth ; and in His subsequent ministry He moved freely amongst men as one of themselves.

Compare these two types of the religious man, and you must admit that the latter is by far the *harder*. It is easier to live like an anchorite outside the city than like Christ to be in it, but not affected by its social standards. It is easier to refuse the things that minister to sense, than to

use them without abuse. It is easier to decline an invitation to Simon's house than to accept it, and conduct oneself as the Son of God. It is easier to maintain a life of prayer in some lonely solitude, whither the murmur of the market does not intrude, than to maintain unbroken fellowship with God amid the chaffering crowds.

But this type of life is *more natural*. The idea of the ascetic life is that every human feeling is a weakness and every natural instinct a sin. But this is surely wrong. Did not God make us? Did He not say, "Be thankful and multiply and replenish the earth?" Did He create our nature only to torment us by desires and instincts which we were never wholesomely and restrainedly to gratify? Is not the Author of Christianity the Creator of our being?—is it likely that He will stultify His own workmanship? Surely all that God desires to do in Christianity is to remove the evil blight and bias which have corrupted our nature at its source, that the streams, being purged from taint, may flow clear again. It may be the boast of some inferior systems of religion that they make men like the angels, who neither marry nor are given in marriage, but it is the glory of Christ to take our

natures as they are, and make us perfect men, not doing violence to any of our natural endowments, but freeing every faculty from the aberration introduced into it by the powerful evil attraction of selfishness and sin.

Surely, also, this is the type which most of all *blesses the world*. The holiness, which builds three tabernacles and lingers on the mountain brow is of little benefit to a world where there are breaking hearts and devil-possessed men. Of what use is the salt that is collected in one spot and does not come into contact with the corruptness of the putrefaction around? "Go," says our Lord, "Go, as I went, into the streets and lanes of the towns, into the highways and hedges of the villages. Live amongst men. Have the dear circle of intimate friends, as I had at Bethany. Call mother and children to your side. Do not forbid publicans and sinners to draw nigh. Go to the funerals and the marriage feasts. I do not lay down rules for your behaviour: be natural, because you are Divine."

It was also Christ's Glory to ennoble the Common and Ordinary. The juice of the grape is a richer and higher product than water: it is water en-

riched by flowing through the veins of the vine, where, as in a laboratory, it is treated with the influences of air and sky and earth. It is water highly wrought into something much more complex—a liquid that has been invested with sacred and sacramental associations ever since the Lord used it as a symbol of His death. To change water into wine is to ennoble what is common and ordinary ; and to do this at a marriage feast surely indicates that Christ has come to elevate all common joys, all home ties, and even those social episodes which break in upon the ordinary routine of existence.

How many innocent joys there are in all lives, however sad and dark !—the morning flush, the evening glow ; the tender green and laughing flowers of spring ; the many sounds of nature from the roll of the breaker to the hum of insect life ; the unexpected gleams of sunshine, which now from this side and now from that send a thrill through the heart and a light over the countenance. Into all these inmost joys (and no one knows the number and brightness like him who is looking out for them) a Christian may enter more blithely than any, no laughter so ringing, no step so elastic, no eye so sparkling as his, because he takes them all straight

from the hand of Christ. It is this fact which turns the water into wine. Go to no merry-makings where you cannot take the Christ of God with you, but remember wherever He goes He will do as He did in Cana—not diminishing, but adding to the joys.

We need not stay to eulogise our English Homes, they are under God the secret of our national greatness. They are glad, beautiful, and pure, and that they are so, from the palace to the cottage, is largely due to the fact that Christ graced with His presence the formation of a peasant's home amid the hills of Galilee. Before His time there were, comparatively speaking, no Home life, no Home ties, no Home love. The State and not the Home filled men's thoughts. But when Christ came, He lifted the Home life to another level, gave it the highest sanction, made it a type of His own relations to His Church, and pervaded it with religious obligations. Only take Christ with you into the common incidents of life, and there will be in them all a wealth, a meaning, and a blessedness, which will remind you of the way in which "the modest water saw her God and blushed."

It was Christ's glory, also, to show the

Divine which is always present, but often unnoticed. Men are always surrounded by workings as real and Divine as any miracles that Christ wrought, but the processes are so gradual and quiet that they do not realise their true importance, but a miracle compresses into a sudden flash the slow work of months or years. The compression of so much power into so small a space startles us, but when we come to investigate it, we see that there was precisely the same amount of power in operation before, though it had escaped our notice, because spread over a wider surface.

The superficial man looks at this miracle and cries, "Oh, wondrous times that beheld so great a deed!" The thoughtful man witnesses it, and says, "This is only the compression into a flash of the power which is ever working in our vineyards, changing the spring rains and dew into the sweet juices that fill the swelling grape and crimson in the drooping cluster;" and as he walks the vineyards in spring or autumn he realises as much of the Divine presence as would have been possible in Cana itself. The Lord's miracles reveal the Divine energies in ordinary and regular processes.

Nor can we forget that He keeps the

best till last ; and we remember Browning's words, in which Christ seems to say—

“Grow old along with Me,
The Best is yet to be ; the Last
For which the First was made.”

Let us be optimists. God has not exhausted all the marvels of His mind or hand. We are journeying towards the full radiance of the Day. And when all tears are wiped, all questions answered, and life's long battle ended, at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, we shall say with the richest meaning, “Thou hast kept the best till now.”

X

THE MESSAGE OF THE INCARNATION FOR DAILY LIFE

A BODY Thou hast prepared for me!" Thus the Word of God spoke as He entered our world. It was necessary that He should be incarnated in a human body that He might express, in a manner which we could understand, the life of the Eternal God. Of what use had it been to describe the life of the highest heavens? No one could have credited its self-sacrifice and suffering on the behalf of man. However true in itself, all description must have seemed mere allegory and rhetoric. It was only when men saw the life of the Son of God, set forth in the living characters of daily action and suffering, that they knew its full significance, and were touched, inspired, and ennobled. The life of Jesus in human flesh was the translation into

terms which men of all languages and tongues could appreciate, of things which had been hidden in the heart of God from before the foundation of the world. The humanity of Jesus was the dial-plate of the unseen, the eternal, and the Divine.

Amid the early heresies there was one which taught that the human body of Christ was a semblance only. But the Spirit of God has seen to it that this has dropped as a false conception into the gulf of time's oblivions, and we know, with no hesitancy or questioning, that our Lord's was a truly human body. As a babe He lay on the bosom of Mary ; gradually learnt to speak the rich Aramaic tongue ; played as a child with the chips of shavings that littered the floor of Joseph's shop ; sat with others of His age in the village school and the humble synagogue ; and finally learned to handle the tools of His father's craft. "Is not this the carpenter?" asked the neighbours, who had known Him from the earliest, and their question indicated that up to that moment there had been no perceptible difference between Him and the other children of the village.

Here was the hiding of His power ! Thus He emptied Himself. By a volun-

tary act He laid aside His stores of Divine knowledge and power, and sat in the lowest forms of our world. At any moment He might have broken through the voluntary abnegation which He had imposed on Himself ; but He would not, that He might know what human life was like in its smallest particulars, so as to become "a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God and to man also."

But our special point is to notice that the common details of daily life are not too mean for God, and are capable of expressing the deepest thoughts which are in the Divine mind and heart. We should have supposed that God would have had to create some marvellous expression of his care for men. He must have used mountains that towered to heaven, oceans that fell miles of perpendicular depths, the scroll of heaven's canopy, with the lightning flash as His pencil, and the rainbow as His palette. But, no ; He finds in the ordinary avocations of a village carpenter the sufficient language to tell out His profoundest nature.

But after all, is not this what love is always doing ? There are occasions when she makes a great sacrifice, and in

some stupendous act pours out her heart. But it is not at times like these that she produces her profoundest impression, but when she selects some trivial act, and deepens its significance by making it the vehicle of the tenderest and rarest thought. How much a flower, a book, a trivial act may mean in some supreme crisis ! We are reminded of Jonathan, " the arrows are beyond thee "—a remark so trivial that the lad's suspicions were not aroused ; and of the pitcher of water which the three mighties fetched for their king from the well of Bethlehem ; and of the common, menial act of the Master washing the feet of the disciples, on bended knee, with girded loin.

How often do young disciples desire to perform vast feats of endurance and self-sacrifice to show their love for God ! They want to be missionaries in far-off lands ; to pour out their lives, if needs be, for the Gospel ; to perform heroic acts of self-denial and courage. But circumstances forbid. The door will not open. They have no alternative than to go back to the avocations of daily life—to the shop, the warehouse, the situation of the governess, or the desk of the shorthand clerk. It is as though God said : " Child, you will find in the most

trivial and insignificant act the opportunity to express the profoundest emotions. It is not what you do, but how you do what you do, that is all-important. Dwell deep! Put into every act of your present life, however ordinary and simple, the most intense and passionate emotions of which you are capable. 'My Son' expressed the love of the Trinity in thirty years of quiet and obscure existence, and what He did, in a measure you may do, so that of you also I may say: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" We can infer from the life of the Man Christ Jesus how those early years were spent. He loved the early flush of dawn and the evening after-glow. The light of day was associated with His Father—it was *His* sun; and the rain was His gift also. He would watch the growth of the lilies, the nest-building of the birds of the air, and the stealthy creeping of the foxes to their holes, with the exquisite delight of a pure and child-like nature. The free, careless life of nature would awaken sympathetic chords in His heart. He loved to contrast the whirr of Mary's spinning-wheel with the silent weaving of the garments of the flowers, and the laborious storage of the barns with the absolute refusal of the

birds to trouble about to-morrow's food. The hen's call to her brood, the deep roots of the sycamine trees, the culture of fig and vine, the processes of agriculture, were eagerly noticed and hidden in His receptive heart, to be recalled in after years, as the medium of conveying lessons which have delighted, instructed, and inspired the universal human heart. And among the lessons of the Incarnation to us all, what can be more absolutely insisted on than that there should be an openness of heart to God's great natural picture-book, that we may absorb the lessons which He has embodied in suns and stars, in birds and flowers, in the course of nature, as well as in the varied scenes of human life? But perhaps the most important lesson of all is that we should accept and subject ourselves to those limitations and restrictions which God's providence has assigned to us. They may seem altogether too narrow. The village home may seem too tiny; the familiar circle of well-known faces, into which a stranger rarely comes, too small; the opportunities of doing good too infrequent. You may feel yearnings within you that reach beyond the circle of the containing hills to the great world. The brook may hear the call of the mighty ocean, the young soldier of the fray.

But remember to abide the Lord's leisure. He put you where you are, because of the invaluable lessons you are to learn in the village life, and that you may become fit for all that awaits you when the door opens—as it will open—into the life for which God has from the earliest intended you. Only live in His will, give Him pleasure, be content to be obscure and unknown, though well-known to Him, set yourself to learn the lessons of the home, street, and field; above all, let the Word of God dwell in you as richly as in the home of Nazareth. So shall you be equipped for the eager ministry that awaits you.

XI

ARE THERE BLANK DAYS IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE?

NOT really ! It *seems* sometimes, at the end of the day, as we review it, that we have learnt nothing, done nothing, and been nothing in particular. We have had an innings without scoring ; we have been beating up against the wind, without making a single knot. I admit it is an unsatisfactory condition of things. A tradesman who has been looking after business all day, counts it hard to be no better off at night than when he started in the morning.

But it may be, that to have held our own is to have done greatly. The current was running so many knots an hour against us, that to have kept our place is equivalent to having made many miles of advance under happier circumstances. To have held the wicket against such

bowling has at least enabled our companion at the other wicket to score, though not one run has fallen to our bat. Probably this is what Paul meant when he said, "Having done all, to stand"—as though that were sometimes the greatest achievement possible.

Times of conscious growth and progress are generally succeeded by periods of stationariness (if we may coin such a word). It is as though Nature demanded a pause, in which to garner up and store the results which she has gained. The nation which has had a successful war, by which vast new territories have been brought within the national limits, must have leisure to extend a whole network of governmental and social agencies throughout the newly-acquired area—only so can the new be closely pieced with the old. Nature herself, after the glory of the blossom and the wealth of the autumn fruit, demands months of rest, when it seems as though she were idling time away and doing nothing; but in reality it is not so. In the depths of her heart she is preparing for a fresh flow of energy, which shall presently carry each wooded fibre to a further length than ever before. So is it in the life of the soul. We must have time by our practice to put into

execution, and so make our own, what we have learnt. By patent continuance in well-doing, we must weave into the texture of character the raw material imported from the realms of the spiritual world. It is not enough to sight the land of promise from afar, we must go up and possess it, and we can only possess when we put down our foot in obscure and daily obedience to what we have learnt.

Sometimes at the end of the day one says drearily, "I have added nothing to-day to the fabric of my character"—and one says it because there has been no *conscious* advance. But foundation work is quite as necessary as the erection of the finial in the sunny air. The experiment of the laboratory is essential to the demonstration of the theatre. In the sub-conscious region of the soul, processes of thought, judgment, and resolution are being elaborated, which will astonish the world by their strength and brilliance. A busy man might count sleep a blank in life's business, but, so far from it being so, I am increasingly sure that during the hours of apparent unconsciousness, we are thinking out our problems and forming conclusions, of which we shall presently become aware, which we shall promulgate as oracles of

wisdom, and adopt for the practical regulation of life.

Such periods of pause and apparent standstill are also necessary to our true blessedness, for they deprive us of that self-complacency and retroversion of thought on ourselves, which is fatal to growth in the knowledge and love of God. How often have I met people flushed with the joy of some new truth. "We have got it all down here," they cry, holding up their neatly and closely-written notebooks. And they rush off to some new teacher, whose words are yet more thrilling and whose views more novel and startling. Some spend their lives in travelling from convention to convention, always learning but never coming to any sound knowledge of the truth, because they confound the intellectual vision with the practical appropriation, which can only come through patient and plodding transformation of truth into character, by obedience. This is the reason why the Apostle James says that men are blessed in their doing (James i. 25). *We* think that blessing comes in hearing. At the end of a meeting we overhear this or that person saying, "I have got such a blessing." No, they haven't. They may have come to apprehend the conditions of

blessing ; they may have beheld the blessing from afar ; they may have felt the warm beams of its dawn striking on their hearts. But they possess the blessing only when they have begun to fulfil the conditions, and follow the gleam. It is only by obedience, often prosaic and unemotional, that we really make the deepest and truest advances in the knowledge and love of God. Live up to what has been made known to you. Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Never mind whether the days seem blank or not, they may be blank so far as emotion is concerned, and so far as new views of truth are concerned, but they are not blank, if you are living up to the limit of your life, practising it, and allowing patience to have her perfect work.

Is it not possible to be so taken up with the new views of truth that dazzle our fancy, that we may miss the truth, which can only be seen by each man for himself, and which is shy of noise and bustle and great meetings ? May we not be so taken up with our thoughts, or other men's thoughts, about Christ, that we fail to sit at His feet ? Is there not a danger, that by looking at the progress we are making, we divert our gaze from Him

who is the Author and Finisher of our Faith, and to behold whom is the one secret of growth and progress in the Divine Life? We are too apt to try to discover some new symptom of our growth in grace, forgetting that we grow best, when we are absolutely unconscious of the successive stages of our growth. To feel our pulse is most likely to disturb the regular rhythm of the heart. To be self-centred and self-conscious is the worst possible condition of soul-health.

Is it not enough, also, to believe that God is working in us both to will and to work? It will be time enough for us to work out what He has wrought in, when His work has come up to the surface, like the coral island from the ocean depths—it must emerge above the waves before Nature can bless it with a crown of fronded palms. Let God work in you, in silence and darkness, elaborating the secret processes of His Divine purpose,—He is working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, and conforming you to the image of His Son. Dare to believe that it is so. Here is an opportunity for you to exercise your perfect faith in Him. This is faith, to believe where you cannot see or feel, and to commit the keeping, the training, and the nurture of your soul

to His loving care. Mary supposed Him to be the gardener—but her surmise was nearer the truth than it seemed.

In the meanwhile, let the attitude of the soul be constantly towards the Lord. Still yourself like a weaned child ; wait His time ; keep His way ; be silent unto Him ; rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Live, not in your experience, but in your standing in the Risen Christ, —*that* is unaltered and unalterable by your changing experiences. Let your will be set on doing the will of God, come sun or shower, come joy or depression. Let the clay await the Potter's touch, and be content that the responsibility should be on Him.

XII

THE DUTY OF BEING JOYFUL

YES, one may as well make the best of life ! There are rough pieces of road for each of us, steep climbs, and drenchings to the skin. Sometimes the seas are calm, blue, and every wavelet sparkles and dances ; but the next day, and perhaps for several days, the skies are leaden, and the swell slowly rocks the great vessel from side to side, like a big cradle. Now one has a companion, it may be brother Faithful or Hopeful, or little Kim ; and again one has to travel in search of the River alone. Still, it is of no use to go puling and crying through life, like a discontented child. Anoint your head, and wash your face, that all traces of the first rush of uncontrollable grief may be removed, and out of the Valley of Baca make a place of springs.

Those old pilgrims to the City of God

set us a grand example. If all accounts be true, that valley was not the pleasantest travelling. It was known as the Vale of Misery. It was dry, arid, and waterless for nine months in the year. The swift winter floods were soon gone, and they left only heaps of stones behind, with perhaps a few brackish pools under the biggest boulders ; but, notwithstanding all, the pilgrims actually used this valley of all places as a well. They sang their Songs of Degrees as they crossed the burning marl ; and as they sang, it seemed as though the air was filled with the murmur of softly falling waterfalls, and the ripple of pellucid streams between mossy banks.

SINGING IN A DUNGEON.

Why should not we do as much as they ? When Paul and Silas found themselves in the inner dungeon of the Philipian gaol, they sang hymns, though the flesh on their backs had been ripped to ribbons by many strokes of the lictors' rods, and the stocks sorely strained them. Their song changed the Valley of Baca into a well of sweet water, and made the prison cell a very Temple. It was by their singing that ultimately they got free. Perhaps we should be emancipated from

many similar dungeons if we were to sing more and make melody in our hearts.

Not that we are to get callous and careless. Not that we are to try to forget. Not that we are to steel ourselves against loving much, lest we suffer much. Fie on us for such a thought! No, let us cultivate tender and responsive hearts; let us remember, till we die, the friendships which have made our lives rich; let us keep the shrines in our hearts freshly decked with flowers, though none enter them but God and we—all this because life's wealth is in its affections, its memories, and its far-penetrating glances into the blessed past. But it is not well to show all the world what we feel. Let us not wear our hearts on our sleeves, as a girl the last new bracelet her lover has given. Let us round our faces into smiles, and take our harps from the willows.

"Be still, sad heart, and cease repining.
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining."

JOY IN THE WORK OF LIFE.

It is our duty to be joyful, for the sad heart tires in a mile, as the proverb says. Set your children singing as they come tired along the road, laden with flowers, worn out with the excitement of the long

summer day in the woods ; that is the only way I know of for getting them home, except to tell them a story, long drawn out, with interminable incident and excitement.

To expend life in regrets, and sighs, and tears is to make the moments totter slowly by with burdens they can hardly carry. It is too bad to lade them thus and slacken their pace. Give them songs, wreaths of flowers, and baskets of fruit, and they will chase each other with fairy feet across the lawns. Ask the kindergarten teacher if the morning hours seem irksome to her little scholars ! Do they look to the slow-moving hands of the clock as wearily and as often as we used to do in the first sad days of school-life ? I question if they trouble to think of time at all. The morning passes like a happy dream. Yes, to be joyful is the best way to pass the time and to do a good life's work.

BE JOYFUL FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS.

It is our duty to be joyful for the sake of others. For them the world is sad enough ; shall we make it sadder ? That wife has already trouble enough, for she fears that she may have made a mistake in her choice of a husband, and that they are not well

mated. The husband has sorrow, because of the awful dread of his competitors finally succeeding in bringing him down to ruin. That girl is disappointed in love, and her life-blood is being spilt by drops. Those children are broken-spirited, scared, and preternaturally solemn. Life for those poor people is drab in colour and monotonous in level. Privation, disappointment, toil, the sweat of the man's brow, the travail of the woman's heart—these things make earth to many, as it has been called, "a Vale of Tears." It is a sin to add one feather-weight of trouble to any one. It is a sin not to do all that can be done to lighten the burdens and gladden the faces of those who come within our reach. Why should we not begin to help God to wipe away tears from off all faces and to wreath them with smiles? How good it was that Jesus began His public life by warding off the disgrace and anxiety which must have befallen that home in Cana if the wine had given out before He interposed! Smiles and songs may yet turn water into wine. Does not the sun do that with his kisses every autumn on the vine-clad hills, when he transforms dew and raindrops into the juice that ripens in the ruddy clusters?

BE JOYFUL FOR THE GLORY OF
CHRISTIANITY.

It is our duty to be joyful, for the glory of our Master, Christ. Nothing so absolutely astonishes the man of the world as joy. He knows what high spirits are when the morning air intoxicates. He knows what hilarity is when the intoxicating glass is placed again and again to the lips. He knows what the boisterous mirth of boon companions is when joke and crank and merry jest go round the gay-hearted throng. But to find joy in ill-health and old age—to discover it when the morning light has faded, when the summer is quenched in storms, when the autumn is blasted by blight, when the fig-tree does not bear and there is no fruit on the vine, when the flock is cut off from the folds and there is no herd in the stalls—this is an inexplicable problem.

The man of the world comes into the counting-house of a Christian business man with whom he has repeatedly had great deals. He hears that he has been hard hit, and has lost a fortune, the result of years of work. He expects to find him crushed in spirit and absolutely despondent. But, instead, there is the old calm look, the untroubled but pale

face, the kindly greeting, and the cheery smile. It is as when Nature smiles after a night of storm, and the sunbeams laugh on the bay, the shores of which are littered by wreckage. Astonished and confused, dumfounded before what seems to him to be an inexplicable phenomenon, the man of the world goes back to his own office, revolving thoughts which he would not breathe to his closest intimate, but which shape themselves into such reveries as these : " Well, I always knew he was a religious man, but I never dreamt that religion could make any one act like that. Well, it almost makes me wish to be a religious man myself. It would be worth anything for a fellow to bear trouble as he does."

Therefore, one may well re-echo the Apostle's words : " Finally, my brethren, Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice."

THE COMPENSATIONS OF LIFE.

BUT HOW ? A very pertinent question this ! How, when the heart-strings are cracking ? How, when the light is fading into a night without stars ? How, when the twin-soul is being called from one's side ?

I know what men say. For every down, there will be an up; for every nay, a yea. If you are below to-day on the see-saw, you will be above to-morrow. The tide may be running out far and fast; wait long enough—it will return. If this speculation fails, next week you may strike oil and make a fortune. Lie still under the bank; the clouds will presently exhaust themselves, and the sun shine again; then you may go on your way. Weeping may tarry for the night, but as soon as the night draws to an end she will steal away down into the valley, and joy will come to the door. With the first stray beam of the rosy dawn, his voice will ring merrily over the garden gate, and presently he will hang his hat in the entrance-hall and fill the house of life with laughter. And even, so they say, if the clouds do not lift till life is done, there will be compensations in the Father's home, where shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be pain nor death, and the separating sea will be no more. Though sorrow and sighing may attend the soul to the very threshold of the Home of the Blessed, they will turn back and flee away, abashed and blinded at the sheen of the gate of pearl. So the heart sings to itself in great hope :—

"Green pastures are before me
Which yet I have not seen ;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me
Where the dark clouds have been.
My hope I cannot measure ;
My path of life is free."

HOW SORROW MAY BE TURNED INTO
JOY.

But there is something better than this. It is good to count on these *Compensations* that await us in the future, but is it not better to learn the art of *Transformations* for the present, so that sorrow may be turned into joy ; so that tears may be transformed to rainbows, and pain become the raw material for pæans of exultation ?

In the old Hebrew march, you remember that the hosts came to waters of so salt and brackish a taste that they turned from them in bitter disappointment and could not drink. Then God showed Moses a tree which, when it was cast into the waters, made them sweet. Surely this happened to them for our instruction, on whom the ends of the world have come. We, too, have our bitter waters ; for us, too, there is the tree—the tree of the Cross, the tree of God's will, the tree of daring to believe that all the events of life are under the control of One who loves us utterly, whose whole wisdom is

placed at our service, and who is doing for us things so good and sweet that we would be in ecstasy did we only know. Those stones are rare jewels. Those heavy clods contain nuggets of gold. Those heaps of sand are rich with diamonds. Those dull acres of moorland hide coal-mines. Those heavy, iron-clasped boxes contain the gold-bespangled robes of kings' wardrobes. Judge not by appearances, but dare to believe that He is doing His very best for the child of His love. With Job, dare to say: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "Accept, choose, will, His will."

THE GREAT BURDEN-BEARER IS WITH
Us.

Beside which, in every dark hour you have *Him*. Have you not noticed how, in Psalm xxiii., whilst the soul is reclining in green pastures, walking beside the purling brooks, and travelling along the straight and open paths, it speaks of the shepherd as *He*; but when the night darkens, or the track lies through the valley, where the frowning rocks meet overhead and the black fir-trees hide the light, it addresses the shepherd as *Thou*? Yes, in darkness and sorrow *He* comes nearer. He is always near, but He gives

more touching and conclusive signs of His nearness. He speaks in whispers that thrill. He puts out His hand to steady and uphold. We whisper back : "Thou art with me." And is not the Bride joyous when the Bridegroom is with her, even though she may have lost a pearl or two? "Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance." "Whom have I in Heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."

Take these three renderings of one text : "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits" ; "*Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burdens*" ; "BLESSED BE THE LORD, WHO DAILY BEARETH US AS A BURDEN." Each of them is daily and hourly true. Look at the bright side of things, for in everything there is the dark and the bright side ; but above all, look up into His face who is with thee, and cannot fail thee, till He has brought thee to thy Home and His, where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

XIII

THOU SHALT CATCH MEN

THE world is full of fish. They lie in deep holes, they flash in the torrents of great cities, they roam through the paths of the seas of human life. The ocean steamers, the railway trains, the trams and public conveyances, the streets and lanes, the hedges and byways, churches and chapels, drawing-rooms and kitchens, country houses and attics, wharves, stores and warehouses, colleges and schools, teem with them. And we are summoned to go a-fishing, to launch out into the deep, and let down our nets for a draught.

All the arts employed in the fisherman's craft have their counterpart here. The patience, courage, nerve, strength of sinew, swiftness of decision, which make the fisherman successful, are called in requisition as we sail the sea of life, with

its calms and storms, its dimpling smiles and sudden squalls, its shoals, eddies, and sunken rocks.

We are inclined to shrink from so high a task. We say, "It cannot be. I am a sinful man. I have no power to attract men from sin to God! Like Simon, sometime hot and eager, at others cowardly and lagging in the shadow, fluctuating, wayward, impulsive, strong where I should be weak, weak where I would be strong, driven by the wind and tossed, how can I win souls? Turn Thy call to those more able to serve Thee, to my brother Andrew here, or to my partners, James and John, but leave me to this lake which I know and love so well. Am I not acquainted with its every mood, its currents and treacherous storms, its creeks and islets and landing-places?—here, at least, I can be happy and successful?"

But, oh, timid heart, is not Christ sufficient to empower thee for all the work to which He may be calling thee? Out of the most unlikely materials He can fashion the most efficient instruments. Indeed, that is the triumph of His art. His power is made perfect in weakness. If thou shalt follow Him, *He* will make thee to become a fisher of men. Art thou willing to endure the discipline, to drink

of His cup and be baptized with His baptism ; to share in His long patience for the souls of men ; to face the shame, the taunts, the enmities, the strifes, and to suffer even to the death of the cross, all of which may be involved ? This is all He requires. The choice to be fishers of men is for us, the realisation of that choice is for Him.

Let us be willing first to be made fit and meet for His use, and then to be used in any way the Master chooses. To be a sickle, or the sun-browned hand that wields it ; a net, or the arm that casts it ; a sword, or its scabbard ; a basin for the washing of the disciples' feet, or a cup for the paschal wine—what matters it so long as we can fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power, that His Name may be glorified, and that men may be translated from darkness to light, and from the kingdom of Satan to that of the Son of God's love ? ”

1. *The nets must be clean.* There can be no take of fish where the nets are heavy with entangling weed and grit. Though the fishers have been toiling all the night they must not take much-needed rest till they have washed their nets. It is certain that the cleansed motive of the heart

and the clean habit of the life are all-important in soul-winning. Only the holy, as a rule, can become the medium through which the Spirit of God can effect His purposes. The desert floor must be carpeted with dew before angels' bread can be strewn there ; the vessel must be rinsed before being dipped into the well for the water of household use ; the net must be cleansed ere it can gather the treasures of the sea.

All this is Christ's gift to the soul. He will sprinkle clean water, and we shall be clean. From all filthiness and from all idols He can cleanse. He gives new hearts and puts new spirits within, and saves from all uncleanness.

2. *We must give implicit obedience.* At first Christ bids us lend our boats, or thrust out a little from the land. These orders are to test us, and then he passes to more difficult ones, speaking as though He were indeed the owner and commander of all. It is not easy at first to abdicate and allow Him to take one's place on "the bridge" ; not easy to take the second place ; not easy to obey in opposition to the habits of a life or the conclusions of experience.

Yet such absolute consecration to the great captain Christ is the secret of

success. The ways of the soul, its needs, its peculiarities, the time and methods where it can be best approached, are known only to the Heart-searcher. He always knows where to find the individual or the crowd, the isolated Cornelius or the multitudes of the day of Pentecost ; and when we listen to His directing voice He leads us gently forward to richer and fuller opportunities of gathering the harvest of the sea. Yield Him the boat for an hour, and He will give it back laden to the water's edge with fish. Thrust out a little, and you will be led insensibly to launch out into the deep. Be faithful in that which is least, and one day the rare aloe-flower, which blooms once in a hundred years, shall be thine.

3. *We must launch out into the deep.* This is what Peter shrank from doing in the house of Cornelius. When bidden to eat of the contents of the great sheet he remonstrated. God must teach him that none are common or unclean, since Christ, by His death, hath cleansed all, at least in potentiality and possibility. We must not have our preferences, our likes and dislikes, our caprice to choose or reject. We must go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature ; must enter the house of the uncircumcised and eat

with them ; must make no difference between Jew and Gentile, since the same Lord over all is rich in mercy to *all* that call upon him.

4. *We must be willing to co-operate with others.* There will be many boats besides our own floating over the ocean, and busily engaged in similar work. We must never be jealous of their success, or envious of the fishermen. For, after all, they are our fellow-servants, and we should be as glad for their success as for our own, because it makes for the Master's wealth.

There are plenty of fish for all, and when our nets are full we must not keep their contents for ourselves exclusively, but beckon to our partners in the other ships, whether they be sailing under the Baptist, the Congregationalist, or the Methodist flag ; for they will come gladly to our help, and their boats will be filled equally with our own. We could not have more ourselves, and we shall thus have the great joy of ministering to their pleasure. Those who share with others have a superabundance ; they who are niggard and miserly see their carefully hidden hoards dwindle away.

5. *We must follow the Christ.* It will involve leaving a good deal. His way

lies through Gabbatha with its shame, and Gethsemane with its bloody sweat, the cross with its passion, and the grave with its death-sleep. And we must follow Him, not afar off as they did once, not in the energy of our self-life, not in the thoughtless vaunting of our own strength, but resolutely, quietly, calmly, not talking much, not boasting, but just following on to apprehend what we have been apprehended for. None of us can know our destiny, but as we follow Him it opens up a step at a time, till suddenly He leads us out to face the multitude on the day of Pentecost, and lo ! three thousand fill the air with their tears and prayers.

"Follow the chase ? Follow the Christ, the King ?
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the
King !
Else wherefore born ?"

XIV

WHY ARE YOU NOT A CHRISTIAN?

I.—BECAUSE OF SOME INNER SNARL

THERE was a time when none were fairer and more hopeful than you. It seemed likely that you would spring from crystal step to crystal step, till you stood on the topmost rounds of purity and godliness. Your soul-life promised to be ever upward ; if weakly at first, yet ever more strongly and steadily, till it became like the majestic and irresistible flight of an eagle. Ah ! what a life that would have been if it had fulfilled its early promise, if the plant had gone on building its woody fibre, twining its strong roots, pumping up its tumultuous sap until the deep red or snowy-white flower had bloomed on the stem. Your father was a godly man, your mother's prayers with you are even now fresh in your ears,

the circumstances of your home favoured a bright and beautiful life. You were so screened, so taught, so urged, and there were hours of resolve, glimpses of ideals, months and years of prayer said and Scripture study. Why has it all come to nothing? What is the meaning of this failure of promise, this handful of black dust, where the flower and fruit should have been?

I turn for answer to a confession of one of the most brilliant men of letters in this generation. "I remember," he says, "the time I first took sin consciously by the hand and turned my back on duty. It was a very small matter, merely a petulant refusal to tell what had happened at school that morning. There were circumstances about it which awed and saddened me. I stole away, and the first battle of my life was lost. What remorse followed I need not tell. It was my first unequivocal act of wrong. Time has led me to look on my offence more leniently—yet, oh! if I had won that battle." How many of us could make a similar confession?

Away back in our lives there was one fatal yielding, and then another, and another, and as we yielded remorse grew less keen, the anguish of failure less agon-

ising. We began to excuse ourselves. What would be wrong in others was not so wrong for us. Our circumstances seemed like an inevitable current to drift us. We were the creatures of an adverse fate. We had inherited strong hereditary predispositions and tendencies against which it was useless and impossible to struggle. We were thankful that no one knew of our failure, and we would take care that it should always be a hidden, secret thing. But we could not help it. And so it befel, with fearful rapidity, that one sin generated another, all that was bad in us became confirmed as iron and adamant, whilst all that had been good and beautiful vanished like the morning cloud or the early dew.

At first we are beset by many temptations and yield to many sins of one kind and another, but after a while it happens to the soul as to the physical life. As the germs of many diseases are absorbed in the virulence of one, so the minor vices get merged in one master-passion, such as falsehood, drunkenness, iniquity, or some similar sin.

One of the saddest illustrations of these remarks is given in the history of Saul, the first king of Israel ; and Dean Farrar, with masterly hand, has traced how the

sin of envy, like a canker-worm, ate out his heart. It was his delineation suggested to me this paper of remonstrance and appeal.

In the dayspring of his life the great seer pours the anointing oil upon his head, and the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him ; Saul is among the prophets, and utters from his inmost heart noble thoughts in glowing words. But he is neither exalted nor proud. He conceals himself among the baggage, and has to be dragged out by force to fill the proud position that awaits him. His reign opens like a splendid dawn. The men of Jabesh-Gilead are delivered, the enemies of his people are smitten, the maidens of Israel are clothed with garments of scarlet and ornaments of gold. He is lovely and pleasant, tall and grand. As Browning puts it :—

“All gifts which the world offers singly on one
head combine ;
High ambition, and deeds that surpass it, fame
crowning them all ;
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—
King Saul.”

But there was one unguarded gate of his heart—the gateway of Jealousy and Envy—through which the enemy of his purity and peace stole to tear down the

inner fabric of his nature and consign it to consuming fires. It was this that ruined him. Let it be always borne in mind that characters are ruined, not by one sudden burst of passion, but by the insidious, corroding, slowly, corrupting action of some master passion, which is permitted through long years, and at last slowly burns into the blood, to come out in some deed, some word, some crime, which stamps and seals our destiny, which shows that we have been becoming, which reveals the men that we really are beneath the outward show and appearance of what we seem. Alas ! alas ! God help us when it comes to that. We may be forgiven, but we are ever afterwards birds of a broken wing.

One day Saul heard the song of the women of Israel declaring that whilst Saul had slain his thousands, David had slain his ten thousands. From that moment the poison entered his soul and began to penetrate it like the venom of a snake. "Is David better than I? Is he going to excel me? Do the people think more of him than of me, their king?" Such questions chased each other through his soul, and instead of resisting them, of closing the door against them, of calling for a garrison of holy, loving thoughts,

like a squadron of angels, to repel and neutralise them, he yielded more and more, until his soul became filled with one raging, incarnate envy. The fire of madness was in his eyes, the merest provocation flung him into a furious rage—now he would fling his javelin at David, who came to charm his spirit into rest, and again at Jonathan, his noble and amiable son.

The process of deterioration was rapid. There were gleams of his better nature, like blue chinks in an overcast sky. He could appreciate David's magnanimity, and for a moment he was pacified, but the tide of evil which had ebbed flowed in again to fill up all the creeks and bays of his soul to the brim of high tide, and through the desert of Judæa and the rocks of Engedi his fierce passion, like a fiend, drove him. He was utterly mastered by it. He carried a prairie fire enclosed within him that burnt consumingly, and in the fire of which all the homestead of his soul was scorched and at last shrivelled to ashes. The invasion of the Philistines, the visit to the witch of Endor, the lost field of Gilboa and the suicide's death, his beheading by his pursuers, and the exposure of his body in the Temple of Dagon followed in orderly and terrible

and inexorable succession. The Lord had departed from him and become his enemy because he had admitted into his soul one evil thing which had opened the door to a whole crew or gang of sympathisers, and they entering in had made so great a rout in his soul that the gentle Holy Spirit of God's peace could abide no more, and was perforce driven forth.

Has that not been your experience, not as yet, thank God ! to the full extent, but to some ; not to full measure, but in degree ? Years ago you admitted sin, which seemed insignificant enough, but has been gaining on you all the time, like the waters of the Wash, or a galloping steed. But bad is always becoming worse, and worse tends to the worst, and the river which started pure from its mountain tarn is becoming lost in the stagnant marshes, and the day which dawned in cloudless blue threatens to set gloomily amid chill winds and drizzling rain.

There is but one thing to do—this sin of yours must be extirpated from its roots. Just as you have sometimes laid yourself down in a woodland glade, resolved to follow the radicles of some weed or plant to their furthest ramifications, breaking nothing, leaving nothing in the earth, but being patient and careful, so you must

deal with this sin. You must abandon it. It is impossible to confine it in certain limits. You cannot keep a tiger-cub which has once tasted human blood as a plaything. It is impossible to stand steady on a slope which winter has paved with ice. To use the apostle's words, you must die to your sin. You must reckon that you are dead to it by virtue of your union with the risen Christ.

Turn to Christ in your utter helplessness. He will forgive the past by a sweep of His pierced hand. Not one of all your innumerable failures shall ever be mentioned against you for ever. And within your soul a work shall be done which shall astonish you. If you truly place your will on the side of Christ He will take away your love for the evil thing that has so long dominated you. Its spell and fascination will be broken. Delilah shall no longer keep you her willing captive. You will turn with disgust on what was once your natural daily food. The temptation will come back on you. As long as you live you will be susceptible to it. The arm which has been broken is always weaker than the other and inclined to rheumatism. But you will know when temptation is in the air. The fall of the inward barometer will tell you when a

storm is on its way, and you will hide yourself in your stronghold. You will disassociate yourself from things and scenes and people which are harmful and provocative. You will turn to the Saviour that He may give the opposite grace to the vice which is eating out your soul. This is best of all, when He, in answer to your appeal, gives purity in exchange for impurity, sweetness for irritability, self-restraint for passion, love for hate, generosity for jealousy.

Dare to believe that Jesus Christ can not only deliver you from besetting sin, but make you strongest where you have been weakest. He did so for His foremost Apostle, and Simon Bar-Jonas became Peter the Rockman. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the briar the myrtle-tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a name."

XV

WHY ARE YOU NOT A CHRISTIAN ?

II.—“BECAUSE OF MY PAST”

THERE are many people in the world whose conduct is absolutely incomprehensible to those who look on their life from the outside, and even to those who love them dearly. It would seem that their birth, training, education, and whole environment conspire to make them earnest servants of the Lord Jesus, and yet they remain outside the Church, in a position of indifference, if not of antagonism to Christianity. Why is this? Their conduct is an absolute enigma? What is the clue?

For that it would be necessary to go back into a dark and rather forbidding history, which in all its details is probably known to God alone, but there are a few suggestive hints which we may weave

together into a sufficient explanation of the attitude they have assumed.

They did something once that they cannot forget ; it stands out in the landscape of memory like some chimney-stack in a Derbyshire valley belching out coal-dust. It may not have been a lapse from the paths of virtue and integrity, such as might cause open scandal and bring them into disgrace ; but it was at least sufficient in their own eyes to exclude them from the Christian profession and the Christian name.

They are now leading reputable lives. The memory of the past acts on them like a curb on a careless horse. But they dare not aspire to more than a reputable exterior. If ever Divine and Heavensent wishes swell up within them, and they are on the point of stepping out into a better life, a voice from out of their past cries to them to halt, and lays a spell on them which they dare not ignore. There are many such men in all our colonies. In *Burmah* and *India* I was told of English and Scotch men, of gentle birth, who, as young men, became involved in a snare with native girls, and have retired from the society of their own people because they desired as far as possible to retrieve the wrong, and did

not care to obtrude the results of their mistake or sin on the notice of an unkindly world.

To quote the words of Rev. R. E. Welsh, they cut themselves adrift from all religious moorings, and go away sorrowful, exiled by the sense of sullied honour. Perhaps they cover up their irreligion with the pretence of scepticism, and try to justify their attitude by flinging charges of hollowness against professing Christians, as *Donovan* did, or as *Gerald* in "The Cloister and the Hearth." But all the time, deep down in their heart, they know that there is an old wound which is festering and corrupting. At sane and luminous moments they could wish that they were religious, but they will not be hypocrites, the sweet Eden life is not for them; at its gate two flaming swords turn every way to keep it from the invasion of feet that would tarnish its purity. They are expelled and must take their alien way. Ah, it is an awful thing to pawn your soul to the devil, and give him the right to step in at any moment of holy resolution to lay an embargo on your plans. It is like a man attempting to sell a house which is heavily mortgaged to another. The mortgagee steps in and forecloses.

Now, it may be that you, my reader, are caught in a snare like this, and the question for you is, what you should do. Is this one sin and mistake to ruin your whole career, and effectually shut you out of the kingdom of God ; or is there a way by which it can be dealt with, and its spell broken, so that you may cry with the Psalmist, " My soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, the snare is broken and I am escaped " ?

A great novelist has proposed a cure for such a condition of mind. Acting on the hypothesis that each of the million nerve cells of the brain records its own special train of thought, he recommends that the cell which contains some haunting memory should be destroyed, and so relief be afforded. In his story, a battery is provided, the action of which is to dissolve any condemning fibre of morbid recollection. Ah, but such a process is not possible, and even if it were it would not touch the root of our trouble. After all memory is not conscience. You might destroy memory, and still conscience would be filled with remorse, a sense of unrightness, a deep-down dread of God, of the future, of the judgment-seat. The drunkard may not always remember what he did in his drunken madness, in the ill-

treatment of a wife and child, and yet in the morning, when he awakens, there is dull, heavy sense of some desperate act which has left its mark on his soul for ever.

The same objection applies to the suggestion of another great writer of fiction, who imagines an island where a sleep-stuff might be procured which produced unconsciousness—the cheaper forms a dreamful, troubled sleep, the more expensive profound and dreamless. And how many are even trying to obtain in society, in pleasure, in travel a drug which will give them momentary relief. It is curious how some men hate to be alone. They find themselves the worst company possible. They must be in company, or flying from pleasure to pleasure, or engaged in scenes of war, or adventure. But there must come an end to this invasion of our real selves. Either in the sick-chamber, or in some awful trouble, in loneliness and isolation, in this world or the next, a man has to face himself, to look at his face in the mirror, to count every line and wrinkle and crow'sfoot which tells of something in the past, of which it is the indelible record.

Probably this is what is meant in that

dread word, "Son, Remember," which is addressed to each unforgiven soul as it steps over the threshold of the other world. In the words of a great preacher, the work of an unforgiven sinner is done when he dies, the time for that is past, for him there is henceforth only a monotonous continuance of idleness, shutting him up to his own contemplations, to the memories of the past, to which no sleep-mixture can be the sufficient anodyne, and to the agonies of the dread future. There will be no distractions for that in another world.

There is an old castle in the Highlands where a foul murder was committed in a vaulted chamber with a narrow window, one stormy night, and they say that the streaks and stains of blood are still visible on the black oak floor; and they have planed and scrubbed, and planed again, and thought they were gone—but there they always are, and continually up comes the dull reddish-black stain, as if oozing itself out through the boards to witness to the bloody crime again. This fable is a type of the way in which a foul thing, a sinful and bitter memory, gets engrained into a man's heart. He tries to banish it, and gets rid of it for a while. He goes back again

and the spots are there, and will be there for ever, unless God's way of peace is learnt and followed.

I remember once suffering agonies from a decayed and inflamed tooth. On the dentist asking if I would like to have it extracted whilst under the influence of "gas" I gladly assented. But, somehow, either the gas was not strong enough for the purpose, or he had not gauged the liveliness of my temperament, and I awoke before the tooth was gone, or in the very moment of its extraction. I shudder to remember it yet. But it seems to me an apt illustration of how our sin will refuse to be silenced, and how it will break through all the soporifics by which we have endeavoured to evade it. There are presences that will not be put by. Like the leprosy in the Israelite's house, the foul spot works its way out through all the plaster and paint, and the trace of it cannot be obliterated so long as the house stands. Lady Macbeth may wash her hands as she will, but "the damned spot" is there still.

Nathaniel Hawthorne carries a stage nearer the eternal truth in his masterly story of "*The Scarlet Letter*." The young and eloquent minister, Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale summons Hester Prynne to

declare the partner of her sin. He presumes on the generosity of her woman's heart, knowing he can trust her, for she will not speak. She retires to the cottage near the forest, with her little Pearl, and lives there alone for years, avoided by all self-respecting people. The minister pursues his career, honoured, admired, and loved. People wonder at his knowledge of the human heart, and tremble before his denunciations of sin. But his soul is consumed within him. Conscience scourges him, as no slave was ever scourged and cut by the lash of a cruel Legree.

At last he can bear it no longer, but on a village holiday, taking Hester and Pearl with him, he stands up in the market-place, and tells the whole story, not flinching from accusing himself as the main offender, and taking to his own soul the shame and sorrow of the tragedy of Hester's life.

"People of New England!" he cried, with a voice that rose above them, high, solemn, and majestic—"Ye that have loved me!—ye that have deemed me holy!—behold me here, the one sinner of the world. At last!—at last!—I stand upon the spot where, seven years since, I should have stood, here, with this

woman, whose arm sustains me at this dreadful moment from grovelling down upon my face ! Lo, the scarlet letter which Hester wears ! Ye have all shuddered at it ! Wherever her walk hath been it hath cast a lurid kind of gleam of awe and repugnance round her. But there stood one in the midst of you, at whose brand of sin and infamy ye have not shuddered. But he hid it cunningly from men, and walked among you with the mien of a spirit, mournful, because so pure in a sinful world, and sad because he missed his heavenly kindred. See, here, her brand is on my breast."

Yes, this is the secret—confession. It is not necessary like Arthur Dimmesdale to make the confession in the cold, pitiless gaze of the world. But it must be made in the ear of the great High Priest, and made also to the one who has been wronged. The secret must be told, the evil thing dragged from the cell in which it has found refuge, and exposed to the light of day, before which it cannot live. "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy."

Have you ever really confessed your sin to God, uncovering it in all its deformity ? One dreads to unwrap some sore on which

the proud flesh has begun to form to the practised eye of doctor or nurse, yet it is the only hope of it being healed. So let us not hide nor clothe our sins before the face of Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, but confess them with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, through His infinite goodness and mercy, and for His sake who is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.

It is necessary also to make reparation and restitution so far as we can—even though our entire after life be spent in the endeavour. Better get this done in this world than leave it for the next. It will have to be done, somehow, somewhen, somewhere. But be sure that directly the will is set on this, and turns lovingly and penitently to Jesus Christ, that very moment He bends over the bowed head and whispers "Forgiven," and the sin which had hung as a millstone around the neck is unloosed to fall into the depths of the sea, from which it shall never be recovered.

XVI

WHY ARE YOU NOT A CHRISTIAN ?

III.—“ BECAUSE OF WHAT I HAVE SEEN OF CHRISTIANS ”

ON one occasion Mr. Spurgeon said in my hearing that when you go into a fish shop where there are hundreds of fresh fish, if there is one bad one you think more of the ill-odour it causes than of all the others put together. And so, no doubt, in our experience of life the one or two unsavoury professors that we have encountered have made a deeper impression upon us than has been produced by the consistent lives of hundreds and thousands of earnest believers. It is the inconsistent Christian who arrests our notice ; but is not this a proof of the high standard of excellence associated

with Christianity, by reason of which we are accustomed to expect in those who profess the name of Christ whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are gracious? If it were not for the universally high standard of Christianity, you would not be so startled by finding inconsistent and unworthy Christians, and thus your very antagonism to such people is a high testimony to the general excellence and beauty of the religion of Christ.

It is surely undeniable that whatever may be said of individual Christians, the general influence of Christianity in the world has been as salt and light. No intelligent reader of history can refuse to believe that Jesus Christ introduced into our world a higher conscience, a nobler ideal, a new spirit of love and purity, before which the gladiatorial games were abolished, by which the lot of woman was lifted from one of degradation and slavery to that of equality with man, and through which all those beneficent agencies have been set on foot by which the world is becoming every day more deeply affected. John Stuart Mill himself was accustomed to say that he could conceive no higher

standard of life than to consider it in the light of Christ's teaching and example and to ask, "What would Jesus of Nazareth do if He were in my circumstances?" It is clear, therefore, that those people whose inconsistencies have been your stumbling-block are as they are, not because of Christianity, but for lack of it; not because they have imbibed its spirit to the detriment of their character, but because they have refused to obey the teaching of its great Master for their perfecting.

Do you not see that the very sensitiveness of your own nature to the inconsistencies of others is due to the high standard of Jesus Christ? You may not accept Him as your Saviour or own Him as your Master, and yet insensibly His influence has permeated your soul, and it is because, directly or indirectly, you have come into contact with the ethical teaching and the moral ideas which He published to the world that you are so quick to see sin and to detect the difference between the Christian ideal and the sad travesty which has been presented in the inconsistent professor's life. Our civilisation is so permeated with the thermal warmth of the spirit of Christ that our hearts are often softened and sweetened when we do not admit the

Divine origin of the influences that have made us what we are.

It should be borne in mind also that Christ does not perfect any man with the first touch of His healing hand. Salvation is a gradual process. There is so much evil in the soul that our Saviour cannot deal with it on all sides. He begins, as we unpack a box, by taking out the heavier things first, before He turns His attention to the minor ones. In the first moment of faith the soul is placed in His hand for purification and sanctification. Instantly the work of grace begins, but its consummation and final touches will not come all at once. There must be the blade before the ear, and the ear before the full corn. There must be the faint ray of dawn before the heaven is flooded with meridian glory. There must be the evening and morning of the first day before man steps out upon the finished platform of God's handiwork and the Creator pronounces that it is very good. It is unfair to judge the plant by the imperfect bud which is struggling towards the full splendour of the flower, and it is premature to pronounce upon Christianity when as yet it is in conflict with the poison of sin, and when the angel is wrestling with Jacob, the counter-

feit and cheat, but has not yet prevailed.

Do you find fault with the gradual work of God in the soul? Then find fault with the growing beauty of the spring, with the slow development of the child, with the deliberation of God's operations in the history of man. The soul is too great and wonderful a fabric for God to mature in an hour. It takes years before the angel steps forth in perfect beauty from the block of marble, and months ere the facets of a diamond emerge from the dull, opaque stone in which they were enshrined. That which will last for an hour may be the work of a moment; that which shall endure for ages is the work of years. It would bewilder and overpower the individual character if the entire work that needs to be done in it were disclosed. God is too good to show us all that awaits Him and us, hence it is step by step, lesson upon lesson, form after form, line upon line, precept upon precept. In a single moment the soul takes up an attitude towards God of entire surrender, but the full accomplishment of the Divine purpose is not to-day or to-morrow. You therefore make the mistake of judging the artist by an incomplete and inefficient plan when you reject Christianity because

you have come upon some imperfect specimens of the Divine workmanship.

Perhaps the imperfections over which you stumble are as great a trial to the subject of them as they are an annoyance and disappointment to yourself. Quicker than you he realises that he has said what ought not to have been said, and done what he ought to have refrained from. Whilst you are discussing his conduct and passing your strictures upon it in the midst of your associates, he not improbably is prostrate upon his face before God, crying out in the agony of his soul, wondering if he is a Christian at all, and lamenting with bitter tears his terrible declension. Whilst the apostles were discussing Peter, and wondering that he should have fallen into so gross an act of denial, Peter was weeping bitterly.

You would not think of rejecting all coins because there are a few bad ones in circulation, or of refusing to break an egg open because once or twice in your life you have come across a bad one. You nail the false coin to the counter; you reject the bad egg; but your rejection does not hinder you taking advantage of every opportunity of making money or eating eggs. You may have met one or two persons in your life who were no

better than they should be ; but has it not occurred to you that probably the reason why they profess Christianity is because, on the whole, Christians are such good people, and in their endeavour to obtain good repute they availed themselves of a name which stands, generally speaking, for integrity, purity, and virtue. These people call themselves Christians, but Christ would not. No one was stricter than He was in the indication of those who professed but did not possess. Repeatedly He spoke of men who should say, Lord, Lord, but who would not enter into the kingdom of heaven ; of tares that were mingled with the wheat ; of virgins who would be rejected at the door of the marriage feast ; of bad fish which would be cast back into the sea ; of those who should come up to the very door of heaven, but to whom the Lord should say, "I know you not." You cannot blame Him, therefore, with harbouring hypocrites, and His blessed Gospel at least is free from all complicity with the words and deeds which have caused you surprise. You and Christ stand together in your hatred of hypocrisy, but are you sure that you hate it for the same reason as He did ? Are you sure that you are not making it a cloak for your own

irreligion? Underneath your quick perception of other people's sins, is there not a desire to evade the demands of God upon your own conscience and life? Your reasons for not professing Christianity may sound well, but are your motives clear and noble?

There is this further thought, that Christianity must be based in truth and must be maintained by a living Spirit, else long ere now it would have fallen before the inconsistencies of some of its foremost professors. Age after age there have been Judases who have betrayed, Demases who have gone back, apostates who have denied, and yet the banner of Christ still floats in the breeze and the Church of Christ is not discredited. Is it not clear that there is something Divine in the temper of a shield upon which all blades are blunted?

As to what you allege about your inability to detect the truth in the varying creeds and shibboleths of Christendom, remember that among all evangelical Christians there is an essential agreement upon all vital truths. Gather in one spot the representatives of the various evangelical sects of Christendom, and you would find that they could all use the same hymn-book, would repeat the same

creed, and sit together at the same Lord's Supper. Just as in a watchmaker's shop some clocks may strike a minute sooner and some a minute later, but the great average of the time of day is maintained, so in Christian life the great average truth of Christ is witnessed by the one voice of the one Church, which, if you would only listen to it, would proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of man.

How trenchant are those words of Christ, "I am come to bear witness of the Truth. . . . He that is of the truth heareth My voice." There is no doubt that if you were to strip your inner life of all exaggeration and duplicity, if you were to become perfectly honest and transparent, you would recognise the voice of Christ, as a sheep that of the shepherd; and would fall at His feet, crying, "My Lord and my God!"

XVII

WHY ARE YOU NOT A CHRISTIAN?

IV.—BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULTY OF KNOWING IF THE BIBLE IS TRUE

BUT do you not think that you are making too much of this difficulty? Every year the evidences are multiplying, which put the truth of the Bible beyond dispute, and perhaps you are not keeping abreast of them? It is possible to go on reading the objections which were raised against the Bible some fifty, twenty, or even ten years ago, without an acquaintance with modern research, that has made them as antiquated as the old blunderbuss would be in modern warfare.

May I give you three illustrations which came under my own observation during a recent tour of five weeks to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean?

As we left Constantinople a missionary (Mr. White) came on board, who is a Professor in the American College at Anatolia, on the shores of the Black Sea. He told me that at two days' journey from the College there are the vast remnants of the ancient metropolis of the Hittite kings, which must have been reared far before the days of Abraham. They are covered with great inscriptions, and give traces of profuse luxury and splendour. Yet it is not long ago since Bible students questioned the truth of 2 Kings vii. 6, because they said there was no trace of any kingdoms answering to that description which were available and strong enough.

Again, Abraham was supposed to be mythical, because it seemed as though there were no civilisation of such an advanced kind in the Euphrates valley to account for him. But Dr. Merrill, the U.S.A. Consul at Jerusalem, told me that in the course of excavations, in which he was personally interested, not far from the head of the Persian Gulf, they had lately come across vast cities, in which, among other traces of advanced civilisation, there were enormous lending libraries, so that it was possible for the student to get out any special treatise he desired to study.

Just think of there being a Mudie long before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees!

Once more, when I was in Cairo, I saw the very faces of Seti I., who oppressed the Hebrews in Exodus i., and of Rameses II., who was Moses' foster-brother, and who still further tyrannised over the chosen people. I visited On, where Joseph's father-in-law officiated, where Moses studied, and which was founded hundreds of years before either was born.

It was said to me, again and again, that archæology, the study of ancient ruins and the deciphering of inscriptions, is answering step by step the incredulities of the Higher Critics, and substantiating, item by item, the Word of God. Why, there was a time when it was questioned how the Pentateuch could have been written, because it was supposed that the art of writing was not far enough advanced for the purpose! And now an inscription has been deciphered which tells us that a few years before Moses entered College at On a library consisting of 20,000 books was presented for the use of students. As you walk through the precious stores of the Cairo Museum and look at the statues, the jewellery, the household equipment, the processes of agriculture which were in vogue, perhaps two or

three thousand years before the Exodus, you realise that the civilisation of that time must have been very little inferior to that of which we make so much boast, and that the Bible statements are not beyond but within the truth.

Take, for instance, that remarkable chapter, Genesis x. The progress of research into the structure of language, of the origin of myths, and of the laws which governed the early distribution of the world's populations is tending to confirm every line of that marvellous specification. I understand, also, that the position of Eden has been made out and found to tally exactly with the specification of Genesis ii. 11.

They used to say that Luke ii. 2 was incorrect, because Cyrenius was not Governor of Cyrene at that time, but previously. But lo, a coin has turned up which shows that he was Governor of Syria on two separate occasions. And so one might go on indefinitely, showing how the truth of the Bible, in the most minute points, is being vindicated ; and the probability is that as excavations are prosecuted and inscriptions deciphered so great a flood of light will be thrown on the past that in every particular the accuracy of Scripture will be attested.

It may be, my friend, that you are holding to old objections against the Bible which would be removed if you read a little more of the immense amount of evidence which has been produced in recent years.

You say that there are things in the Bible that you cannot accept. Will you mention some? *That the world was created in six days.* But the word *day* is evidently used of an *epoch* (Gen. ii. 4). *That the earth was covered by the waters of the Deluge.* But Gen. vii. 19 must be rendered as you render Luke ii. 1. *That the sun stood still.* But it would be possible for light to be made to linger on the landscape without arresting the rotation of the planet. To speak of the sun standing still may be as hyperbolical as to speak of it rising and setting. *That Jonah was swallowed by a whale.* But it is well known that the word translated *whale* may equally mean a large fish, and might refer to a shark; and we are told that during the Crusades the body of a man in armour was found in the belly of a shark drawn from the waters of the Mediterranean. Besides, though I do not share that opinion, many good men hold that the Book of Jonah is a form of parable, and that our Lord only adopted a well-known form of speech when he quoted it.

There is nothing in any of these to justify your rejection of the Bible, and probably other objections could be as easily disposed of. And if you go further and challenge certain commands or laws given in the Old Testament and attributed to Jehovah, and which seem to conflict with your highest notions of morality, remember, please, that the Bible is the Record and History of a Progressive Revelation, that some things were expressly permitted for the hardness of the hearts of the Hebrews, who were only slowly emerging from the gross practices of surrounding peoples, and that in Jesus Christ is the only perfect revelation of God, by which He must be judged.

For myself, my method of proof is this. I have read the life and words of Jesus Christ, and compared them with the workings of my own inner life, till I am convinced that He is Truth. That makes me sure that He cannot have been mistaken when He makes such vast assertions about the Deity of His own nature and His oneness with God. I find also that these claims have been sustained by His power over nature, by the unusual manner of His entrance into, and departure from, our world, and by His influence over men since. All these considerations compel me to believe in Him as the Christ of God.

I am prepared to accept the Epistles, because they contain the outworking of His doctrine by those who knew Him best, and were specially qualified for their work ; and I accept the Old Testament because He so constantly quoted it, saying that He had come, not to destroy, but to fulfil its jots and tittles. To our Lord, the Old Testament was of supreme authority. He quoted it with the veneration which a Divine Oracle demanded. It was the Judge that ended all the strife.

Of the Gospels, Phillips Brooks says : "They are the centre and core of the Bible, and there is no necessity for supposing them to be other than the natural records of the events of the life of Jesus, which they appear on their face to be. The critical discussion of them has, in the larger part, confirmed their genuineness and authenticity." These words, coming from such a man, have great weight, and crystallise the verdict of all modern Christian scholarship.

That there may be apparent discrepancies we are willing to grant, but it should be borne in mind : (1) that they may have crept in during the process of transmission and were not in the original documents ; (2) that they would possibly be in perfect accord with one another and the facts, if we knew the whole ; and (3) that they do

not affect the integrity of the whole structure, more than the dropping of a flake from a cornice disturbs the foundation on which a house rests.

There is no reason, then, why you should neglect Christianity because the Bible is untrustworthy. And so full of proof is the Book of its Divine authority that if a man will thoughtfully read it, it will certainly lead him into the truth of God. "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them," was the ancient answer to Dives' request that Lazarus should be sent to warn his brethren: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

There is one more word to utter. Supposing that your assertions were worthy of consideration, and that the Bible was untrustworthy, even that would not justify you in being irreligious, for remember that Enoch walked with God, and Noah prayed, long before there was a Bible. Even though some things in the Bible should be erroneous, nothing can disturb the unique and transcendent beauty of Christ, who towers amid the wreckage of all others, the meeting-place of God and man, in whom Deity and Humanity blend perfectly, claiming the homage of the world.